

**Different Paths to the Same Place:
Late Modern Narrative Identities in a
South African Business School**

Doctor of Philosophy

Research Report

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Abstract

Late modernity and globalisation have re-oriented group dynamics and situated the self in new relational settings. With these changes, identity-oriented political movements and more personal identity processes have become the focus of much theorising. A key strand of this theorising has focused on the role of narrative in organising personal identity.

This study applied key strands of this narrative theorising to interpret the intergenerational life-stories of a group of 55 adult learners returning to formal studies in a South African Executive Master of Business Administration programme. Under late modernity, navigating the life-course has been theorised as increasingly complex. The study context can be seen as a holding environment for the reflexive identity work associated with the risks and opportunities of contemporary adult life.

These stories highlighted the salience of religion, family loyalty, educational aspirations, gender dynamics and boundary negotiation. By taking a narrative approach, I defined the intergenerational upward and downward paths, interesting script elements, and agency and structure dynamics. A set of six archetypal storylines were identified. In order to connect the study to a broader context, the findings were made more nuanced by an analysis of five recently published autobiographical books from publicly engaged South Africans of the same age.

This study makes three important theoretical contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the scholarship of self and society under late modern conditions, by bringing a transitioning society and African perspective to these debates. In the study context, I demonstrate a number of coherent themes and show that modern themes act as a centripetal force against late modern fragmentation. I show the expansive and challenging demands of cross-boundary encounters. I argue that shifting stories that 'have us' to stories 'we have' can potentially enable collective autonomy.

Secondly, the study shows the value of the narrative approach in this context. I propose two new codes to account for the local realities: *Family-based agency* and *God and faith*. Without this vocabulary, existing frameworks were found to be inadequate. Shifts in place and space acted as chapters in the stories present. More research is needed in the African context on 'far ancestral' and 'royalty-linked' script elements.

Business schools are one of the fastest growing and most influential locations for late modern adult learning. Yet, business school scholarship has yet to substantively consider self and identity processes associated with narrative identities – especially in their social context. The third contribution of this study is to show how narrative identity can matter for business school teaching and learning – especially in leadership and career development.

Key Words: Late Modern, South Africa, Narrative Identity, Narrative Analysis, MBA, Business School

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1. Introduction

1.1. Study background

The social world is always evolving. But there are periods of more substantive discontinuity (Gersick, 1991). In times of more rapid change, sense making is more difficult (Weick, 1988). But it is even more essential because meaning-making can serve as a 'springboard into action' (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). The period that we are living through has been theorised as one such discontinuity. This era has been labelled and theorised as post-modernity (Agger, 1991), second modernity (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003), liquid modernity (Bauman, 2007) and late modernity (Archer, 2007; Giddens, 1991). There have been ongoing global debates about what is changing, but a growing consensus that there has been a shift in the nature of society. Parallel to that, there has been debate about how these global shifts are placing new demands on the self. There are critical questions centred around whether selves across the world are subject to similar or different pressures.

These global changes have raised new questions around identity, understood here as situated subjectivity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). These questions have built on established lines of inquiry (Erikson, 1950/1993). Since identity is such an important dimension of the self, and shapes individual and collective action, there are critical questions about what kinds of identities are evolving and how these could differ around the world. The late modern scholarship of Giddens (1991) has especially focused on identity concerns. Under late modern conditions, identity development and maintenance have become more challenging but also more essential (Côté & Levine, 2002). Identities have been theorised in many Western contexts as increasingly fragmented. But there is insufficient scholarship on late modern identities in the African context, and the fast-transitioning South and Southern African context represents an ideal location. South Africa remains a site of substantive change (Mbembe, 2008) as indicated by important youth-led social movements (Habib, 2019).

Alongside the concern for global discontinuity and its impact on the self, there has been a parallel conversation on narrative and its increasing importance for contemporary sociological theorising. Narrative is now understood as one of the fundamental ways that the human experience is organised (Bruner, 1991) and sociology has been subject to a 'narrative turn' (Maines, 1993). One of the focus areas of this narrative oriented research has been on narrative identity. Narrative identity has been found to be a crucial term for understanding the self, especially in its social context (McAdams, 1996; Ricoeur, 1991; Somers, 1994). There is now a need to better understand how narrative identity theorising applies to a variety of groups, especially outside Western contexts. In specific terms, the potential limits of narrative concepts need to be explored and theory extended to account for potential global differences.

The shifting demands being placed on the self and the narrating of one's identity come together in time and space in institutions of adult learning. Adult-learning journeys are now ongoing and adult-learning institutions serve as sites where adults return, not just to learn new skills, but to evolve themselves in the context of social change (Alheit, 1994). Such locations can be understood as identity workspaces where students don't just 'learn about' but 'learn to be' (Khurana & Snook, 2011). One of the shifts observed in the economic landscape in the late modern era is that individual companies and organisations are no longer life-long institutions to which people are bound. Careers are increasingly fluid, and people will most probably work for multiple organisations during their lifetime. With this shift, trust in the timelessness and value of one's current workplace community is reduced. The implications of this are that specific adult-learning institutions, such as business schools, are now acting as more timeless partners in individuals' identity development journeys (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). Mid-career focused business schools are especially important identity workspaces within which adults evolve themselves. These schools are well theorised in the business school scholarship but are understudied contexts in sociological terms even as these institutions can offer many new insights into the nature of identity under late modern conditions.

1.2. Specific study objectives

This study applied elements of narrative theorising to understand the intergenerational life-stories of a cohort of 55 people whose identities developed through the transition from Apartheid to a democratic South Africa.). The students wrote their life-stories in an MBA course I taught at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) during 2016 and 2017. There is a proximity that I have to the students and the stories examined, which is discussed in the methodology section. The students were required to write about certain themes – and this shapes what was salient here.

The main themes of these stories were made more generalisable through an analysis of five recently published autobiographical books. These life-stories and the books were explored with the intention of making three primary contributions.

Firstly, as I have made clear, I have oriented this study towards the scholarship associated with late modernity. My first objective was to add a fresh angle and a South and Southern African¹ perspective (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015; Mbembe, 2002) to late modern theorising (Giddens, 1991; Lee, 2006). It has been argued, for example, that post-colonial societies will carve different non-European routes to and through this period of modernity (Beck et al., 2003). Research is needed to understand any differing patterns. I was aware of a number of post-colonial complexities centred around reflexivity and dominant discursive practices. There is a need for local stories to stand on their own terms and for the support of African self-authorship (Mbembe, 2002). Following Mbembe's (2002) call for a thickening of African self-storytelling, I hoped to illustrate identity-oriented storytelling beyond the two main historic dimensions of African identity scholarship: the revolutionary and the traditionalist. African selfhood and Black selfhood are important areas for ongoing theorising (Mbembe, 2017).

Secondly, this study drew from scholarship that has been labelled the 'narrative turn' in sociology (Maines, 1993). In this tradition, narrative is understood as one of the fundamental ways that the human experience is organised (Bruner, 1991). In this sense, all the stories and autobiographies examined were interpreted as being more than historical accounts. They were interpreted as integral to the authors' sense of themselves. The stories are part of the authors' 'narrative identities' (McAdams, 1996), understood as situated subjectivity and self-understanding (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). By deploying narrative analysis, this study aims to build localised, nuanced understandings of

¹ There are different approaches to capitalisation. Here I prefer the capitalised form of Southern to indicate not only a geographic region, but a specific place. In other cases, I have followed the approach of the relevant scholarship. But when ambiguous, I have generally preferred the capital letter throughout the text.

the self through the narrative tradition and to build on and add more vocabulary to the growing body of work on narrative theorising.

My third objective was aimed at making suggestions for the identity work of business schools and similar adult-learning institutional contexts. The authors' initial 55 stories were written in a mid-career Master of Business Administration (MBA) course. Business schools are an important location to study adult identity. Many business schools cater specifically to the mid-career professional middle class. In doing so, they have been theorised as institutions where adults return, not just to learn new skills, but to evolve themselves in the context of social change (Alheit, 1994). In this regard, the business school can be seen today as an identity workspace where students do not just 'learn about' but 'learn to be' (Khurana & Snook, 2011). Identity transitions are needed when making life and career transitions (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). A closing question was explored: What life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools consider their students' family histories and narrative identities more deeply?

1.3. Methodology

I took a wide-ranging approach to understanding these life-stories, drawing on relevant branches of key sociological and psychological disciplines. In doing this, one of the strengths is in interdisciplinary boundary-crossing. I also carried the desire to bear witness and have at times discussed the findings, less analytically. I have lived with the people in these stories for the last few years and they have helped me to connect to people with more empathy. For this I am extremely grateful. I hope some of this occasionally more poetic or empathic tone strengthens the study².

The lives of all the people I write about in this PhD have been subject to a substantive societal transition – a transition associated with newly democratic freedoms, economic liberalisation, rapid urbanisation and the coming together of previously separated diverse racial groups. Analytically, it is a valuable context within which to elaborate and add to theorising on identity. Over the late Apartheid and early democratic period, South and Southern Africa is a specific example of broader global processes in Africa. It has been suggested that substance of African identities and the processes of development may differ somewhat from ‘Euro-Western’ experiences. We are, of course, all the same, all human, but this humanity can express itself differently due to a variety of historic, cultural, economic and political dynamics. The general lack of contextually rich data from the continent makes this study of particular importance.

The first and major part of this study involved the thematic and structural narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005) of intergenerational life-stories from a group of mid-career MBA students. The main themes of these stories were then made more generalisable through a secondary analysis of five recently published autobiographical books from similarly-aged South African writers.

The initial 55 intergenerational life-stories were drawn from an archive of over 2 000 stories that these mid-career students had previously written for a core course on Organisational Behaviour in the MBA programme of the University of Pretoria’s Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). I was a lecturer on this course. Although attempts at generalisation are made cautiously, the identities of these authors were seen as potentially illustrative of identities of a key segment of South African society.

The stories broadly describe the family history and personal life-journeys of the students and the events that shaped them and their families. In order to develop theory from a coherent set of

² *Humans of New York* (Stanton, 2013) comes closest to an example of how to present and share the stories of people in a way that is intimate and emotional – while also capturing some poetic essence of diverse living in a richly interesting world. While I do not attempt this kind of representation in an explicit way, my hope was certainly to maintain across this study some kind of respectful awe I felt at the depth and breadth of life-paths told of the people who opened their stories to me.

observational data, only life-stories from students born between 1982 and 1987 were considered. The intention behind these selection criteria was to examine the stories of students who lived through the Apartheid era as a child (pre-1994), but who experienced their growth into adulthood in the democratic era (post-1994). This was a period of substantive societal change and transition.

I faced an initial dilemma during the selection process – whether to use visible demographic dimensions in selecting the stories. Race and gender were the most visible criteria on which to select them, even if they are far from the only differences that shape the stories. Since the study deliberately aimed at exploring the transition period, it made sense to include a deliberate mix of Black, Indian, White and Coloured stories. Since gender was also such a potentially important dimension, I selected a more or less 50:50 split between men and women. In addition, since South Africa is, and has always been, integrated regionally³, I included ten stories from students who were born in neighbouring states to South Africa but whose lives overlapped with South Africa's transition period. This was to ensure that I captured some of their experiences in a study of a highly integrated Southern region of the African continent.

As mentioned, thematic and structural narrative analysis was employed to examine the elements of these stories. The coding methodology was oriented within key strands of the narrative research tradition (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013; Riessman, 1993). My coding approach drew specifically from scholarship on agency and communion (McAdams, 2001; Saldaña, 2009), incorporating elements of both inductive and deductive coding approaches.

The study identified common themes, agency and structure dynamics, intergenerational upward and downward paths, and interesting script elements. In terms of a more specifically narrative approach, I have identified a set of six integrative archetypal storylines present across the stories towards the end of the analysis. These were: 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain', 'Breaking free from chains', 'Leaving the village for the city', 'Living on the border', 'Knife to the heart' and 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea'.

In this study, I often refer to the story writers as the authors, which is also a coherent term with storytelling and narrative. These authors currently occupy, and will occupy in the future, important positions in key institutions in the private and public sector. They can be considered part of the middle and upper-middle class. In order to increase the potential for broader generalisation beyond the MBA group, I have also analysed five recently published autobiographical books. These books

³ I think here of the migrations of people into Southern Africa over an ongoing period up to 1 000 years ago, the continental impact of the Mfecane in the 1800s, the regional migrant labour system throughout the 1900s, the regional support of neighbouring states for the freedom struggle in the mid-late 1900s and the millions of new economic migrants drawn to South Africa since 1994.

covered the lives of Kabelo Mabalane (Mabalane & Brodie, 2015), Landa Mabenge (Mabenge, 2018), Tumi Morake (Morake, 2018), Sisonke Msimang (Msimang, 2017) and Trevor Noah (Noah, 2016).

I selected these books based on authors whose ages were similar to the MBA group studied. I looked for a diverse set of authors who deliberately set their life-stories against the democratic transition in the country. The five books were purposively selected (taking race, gender, age and middle-class positions into account) by reviewing the catalogue of a leading bookstore and multiple online sources. In this part of the study, I focused explicitly on whether the key findings from these intergenerational life-stories could be used to understand the stories in the five autobiographies. I examined whether these books confirmed, disconfirmed or added nuance to the findings from the students' life-stories.

Reading the books, I was especially interested in confirming and making more nuanced key findings, including the educational focus of families, religiosity and cross-boundary encounters. The educational family-oriented focus was present in the books, and the role of religion was somewhat softened and made more complex. The books revealed further evidence for both expansive and challenging encounters across race, and they also revealed that gender relations remain brutally violent.

I was also interested in how structure and agency interact. Gender was more starkly illustrated as a violent structural reality for women and for Mabenga as a transgender man. Family-based agency and God and faith remained key coding concepts. The six archetypal storylines proved useful as an organising framework for the books. 'Living on the border' and 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' were common. A new story of 'The internal hero's journey' emerged.

Overall, I show through the analysis of the books that these life-stories of the students are more than an idiosyncratic presentation of selves in the context of a unique context. These stories have substantive nuanced alignment with books in the public domain and this expands the potential for generalisation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In the following six focus areas of the literature review, I highlight a number of key issues and demonstrate the need for this study to fill an important gap in current scholarship. This is an extensive literature review covering a wide terrain, which was necessary because of the breadth of the study. This is a strength and weakness. The strength is in the comprehensiveness. But the risk is that the most important theoretical connections might be less visible in all of the scholarship summarised. I mitigate these concerns with this introduction (Section 2.1) and a substantive summary section (Section 2.8) that reveals the main scholarship that I build on later when discussing the findings. These shorter ‘book-end’ sections will help scholars who want a more precise entry into the findings. Every section of the literature review also has its own brief summary that highlights the critical issues.

The first two focus areas of the full literature review, labelled ‘outside-in’, summarise the key theorising from the perspective of sociology. I start wide and then go narrow. When concerned with the individual, sociology generally looks at the implications of myriad societal pressures on individuals and the self. To put it another way, adapting the words of Nielson (2013), people can be seen as spiders amid a web of changing social pressures, structures and meanings that they themselves have created but which come to shape them. Sociology is generally concerned with a theory of the web. Working ‘outside-in’ focuses on *the web* and how it influences *the spider*.

In the first focus area, I document the evolving nature of broader modern society and the changing demands being placed on the self. In doing this, I draw from global and often Euro-American perspectives (Archer, 2007; Bauman, 2007; Beck et al., 2003; Bornman, 2003; Giddens, 1991). Concepts of the self and identity have moved into the heart of debates in the social sciences as late modernity and globalisation have exposed the self to new processes (Callero, 2003).

In the second focus area, I highlight key issues from the perspective of the ‘South’ and especially South African and African perspectives on modernity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015; Lee, 2006; Mbembe, 2002). I show how social change has heightened the importance of identity and reflexivity. I show that there is a gap in the understanding of the influence of contemporary social change on the self in diverse local and especially ‘Southern’ contexts – Mbembe (2002), for example, calls for a thickening of African self-writing.

However, understanding the reality of *the spider* and *the web* also requires a *theory of the spider* – the person at the *centre of the web*. Therefore, in the third focus area of the literature review,

operating ‘inside-out’, I look at the way the self is organised in its own right. I summarise the perspective of those positioned closer to *the spider*. Psychological theorising on the self and identity, by definition, has this narrower focus. Psychology is often concerned primarily with intrapsychic dynamics. Recently, within identity scholarship, there has been a call to integrate the micro focus of psychology with broader societal forces and concerns (Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Hammack, 2008). I ignore strictly intrapsychic theorising, instead focusing on those concerned with linking the micro-level psychology with the social context. I illustrate the breadth that the term ‘identity’ is expected to cover and its importance in contemporary scholarship (Calhoun, 1994). I especially focus on identity and identity-development models within the broad tradition of identity and developmental psychology (Erikson, 1950/1993; Kegan, 2009; McAdams, 1994) and personality traditions (McAdams, 1996). Then I highlight criticisms of the use of identity as a reified analytical tool and describe a more specific and useful vocabulary that has been proposed. I draw from this vocabulary and from Brubaker and Cooper (2000) who suggest that one dimension of the way identity is deployed, is to see it as self-understanding and situated subjectivity.

In these first three areas of the literature review, I do not sufficiently engage with the ‘narrative turn’ in the social sciences (Maines, 1993). In the fourth focus area, I correct for this and summarise the key ways in which narrative has been employed in the social sciences. This section examines both *the spider* **and** *the web* from this narrative perspective, showing the ways in which narrative can be used to show both *how the web influences the spider* and *how the spider navigates the web*. Narrative is one of the fundamental ways that the human experience and identity is organised (Bruner, 1991; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams, 1996). I especially focus in this section on ‘narrative identity’ (Ricoeur, 1991; Somers, 1994). A wide range of substantive literature has been written on narrative, autobiography, memory and identity, especially of contexts of social change and transition. I draw on this scholarship to show the specific conceptual reach that the concept of narrative identity has and why it is useful in the context of this study. I also identify a clear gap in the lack of African examples of the application of these approaches.

In the fifth focus area, I focus on showing that an adult-learning oriented business school is an important site within which to examine identity issues. Adult learning is an ongoing, important process in late modernity (Alheit, 1994). Business schools are increasingly seen as sites for important identity work. They act as adult identity workspaces in times of economic and social change (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). I highlight the relevant literature on adult development and identity in adult learning. I show a third key gap in terms of how broader identity processes have been linked to the business school context.

In the sixth and final focus area of the literature review, I situate the study in its country and regional context. I emphasise why this context matters and why a South and Southern African study is needed. This region has many issues that have been observed elsewhere in localised African form. I argue that African perspectives may differ from 'Euro-Western' experiences due to specific historical, cultural, and economic and political processes on the continent. Some of this was mentioned briefly in the introduction so I will not repeat it here. For now, and focusing on the country at the heart of this study, it is important to state that South Africa has undergone, and continues to undergo, a substantive transition associated with newly democratic freedoms, economic liberalisation, rapid urbanisation and the coming together of previously separated diverse racial groups. This is not to claim that 'things have changed', which in the South African context is a defence of progress (used to defend Government or to defend the new status quo). South Africa is a country undergoing a contested transition to democracy (Diamond, 1994; Lipton, 2014). It is a fluid context where the "fragile stability of the 2000s appears to have morphed into a new heightened period of uncertainty" (Robinson, Steinberg & Simon, 2016, p. 3).

2.2. 'Outside-in' – society shaping the self

2.2.1. Evolving late modernity

There have been contrasting accounts for societal changes experienced globally over the last centuries - especially the development of modern industrial society or simply - modernity. Core to many understandings of modernity have been links to the emergence of capitalism and industrialisation. One debate has been around the respective role of ideas and belief systems versus the economic structures of class (Sayer, 2002). Another debate has centred on whether modernity is a Western or a global phenomenon, as part of a world system (Wallerstein, 1976/1993), or a locally emergent diverse experience (Lee, 2006). A further debate has centred around how theorising on modernity has been highly gendered – while the modern era may have led to certain freedoms, these freedoms were skewed heavily in favour of men (Sayer, 2002).

I draw substantively on Giddens (1991) to describe evolving thinking about modernity. I especially focus on his writing on self and identity. For Giddens, modernity has been the contrast with tradition. Modernity involved the decline of traditional communities and the decline of solidarity, meaning and purpose found in these communities. Giddens identified three fundamental mechanisms of modernity. Firstly, modernity shifted the relationship between time and space. Whereas in traditional contexts, time and space were tightly bound up with 'place', under modern conditions universal time and geographically specific and universal maps delink space–time from place.

Secondly, institutions that were previously intimately tied to a local context and community were disembedded from those contexts. Money, for example, became a more universal and interchangeable mechanism of economic exchange. The entire process was built on trust as people had to put their faith in abstract institutions and expert systems.

Thirdly, a further characteristic of modernity has been reflexivity defined as “the regularised use of knowledge about circumstances and social life as a constative element in its organisation and transformation” (p. 20). Reflexivity has been understood as the product of what is often labelled as 'enlightenment' thought. Enlightenment promised a firm and reasoned foundation upon which humanity could thrive. It has been premised on the scientific method and on doubt and openness to continuing better proofs and an updated truth. Reflexivity, in this line of thinking, has been seen as the process through which humans, individually and collectively, act on and contest these truths in an ongoing process that sustains and transforms society. As these processes spread, there has been a 'dialectic of the global and the local' where “no-one can 'opt out' of the transformations brought about by modernity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 22).

There is much to consider here in how this process of modern transformation may now be unfolding in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A major line of discussion has been concerned with the dramatic shift in the cultural disciplines, especially architecture and the humanities from around the 1960s. This shift was *observed in* Western society itself and in the *theorising about* Western society. This shift has been labelled by some as a shift from the modern to the post-modern era. This is contested terrain. Just to orient the reader, in discussing modernity's evolution and the shifts taking place, my preference is to avoid excessive claims. I rather seek to identify the relevant broadly agreed points being made from different perspectives. In doing so, I try to follow slightly firmer ground rather than broad, more extravagant positions. My intention is to keep the focus on the findings of the study, rather than getting distracted by important, but in this context, secondary broader debates.

It has been argued that the observed shifts in the character of modern society emerged in architecture (Agger, 1991) and in art (Jameson, 1985). Artists, rebelling against the high modern canon, adopted and embraced popular and commercial art. What might previously have been seen as 'below art' (such as the Las Vegas Strip and commercial advertising) came to be embraced as art itself (Jameson, 1985). Lemert (1976/1993) argued that this shift was strongly linked with the disruptive freedoms sought by African Americans, LGBTQ communities and women in the United States. It has also been associated with the de-centring of the United States as a singular dominant world power following a number of events, including the disaster of the Vietnam War.

While these late twentieth-century shifts in the character of economically advanced societies have been conceptualised differently, there has been a general agreement that something substantively different has been going on when compared to the mid-1900s (and earlier). A shift in individual values, for example, has been empirically observed across wealthier societies and societies where there has been an absence of material poverty for at least a generation (Inglehart, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the *observed shifts in society*, there have also been new movements in the *theorising about society*. Many of these new theories pointed to gaps in the adequacy of positivist scientific 'modern' methods in social science. Post-structuralist strands of this movement were associated with the challenge of knowing beyond the foundation-less symbols of language. New theorising around the role of power and discourse has also become important (Foucault, 2019). These perspectives broadly constituted a critique of the idea of the completely autonomous independent individual. In this, they contradicted 'enlightenment' assumptions. It was proposed by some that individualism and individual autonomy of thought and action no longer existed. In a strong strand of this thinking, the idea of the individual was perhaps even a myth

(Jameson, 1985). Theorising along these lines emphasised the need for multiple plural perspectives rather than grand narratives and all-encompassing theories.

These (often labelled) post-modern approaches to investigating the world have provided a whole set of new and valuable tools for understanding the social world (Agger, 1991). But there has also emerged a pendulum swing back against some extreme views. A middle-ground set of nuanced theories of social science and political action have more recently emerged. These have sought to include many of the observations of a dramatic shift in modern life while holding onto prior values of modernity, including the potential for human agency (Lee, 2006). I highlight three theorists that I would place in this more recent middle-ground – Giddens, Beck and Bauman (although Bauman is perhaps the more dramatic of the three). These theorists generally agreed that there have been substantive shifts in the society from the historic modern condition but preferred to see the times we are living through as part of a continuation of modernity – with substantive amendments. Giddens has preferred to call the period we are living through ‘late modernity’ or ‘reflexive modernity’. Beck used the term ‘reflexive modernity’, as well as ‘second modernity’ and ‘risk society’. Bauman labelled these times as ‘liquid modernity’. These perspectives are summarised below. I follow them up with a summary of a number of key arguments that are associated with theories of ‘globalisation’, which is further approach to understanding contemporary social change.

2.2.2. Giddens's late modernity

Giddens (1991), in *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, affirmed that the modern condition reappeared as one of the central problems of the late twentieth century. This was due to the emerging complexity and substantive changes observed in the configuration and impact of evolving modern institutions. He incorporated the insights of the earlier discussed of labelled post-modern theorists. Along similar lines to them, he too focused on the ways in which people, selves and identities are entangled in global processes. Like them, for Giddens (1991), modernity impacted the most micro-dynamics of human interaction. It involved the interconnection of global forces with personal dispositions. For Giddens, modernity up-ended tradition, but built new tradition as it discarded the old. For example, constructs like ‘the family’ and the norm of heterosexual relations remained intact. These changes were global in nature. There was not a single part of the world that was not impacted by this. Just focusing on economic production, for example, shows how interrelated the world has become.

But Giddens has called this new period one of late or reflexive modernity. Like the modern era, late modernity was seen as a post-tradition society. But in the shift from the modern to the late modern, even the routines, repetition, rituals, guardians and orientations of early modernity were no longer a

guide to living. Under modernity, entire worlds of options were 'out of play', and under late modern conditions they were 'in play'. As a result, in the late modern era people have had to make even more choices (Giddens, 1991). Giddens has argued for the term 'decision making' rather than 'choice', since all action is constrained by institutional context, routine and psychological processes. While decision making has always been at the heart of the post-traditional order, options for decision making were further expanded in late modernity.

In this late modern era, people began to reflect back on themselves as they sought to create unity from the fragmentation around them. Reflexivity was now introduced into the very basis of system reproduction. In this sense it was seen as a reflexive modernity. What was meant by this? The self became a circular project, "where mastery of the self and body provides the certainty needed for everyday living ... the goal of the reflexive project is to create unity from fragmentation, certainty from uncertainty, and empowerment from powerlessness" (Lackey, 1992, p. 181). Where previously (under modern conditions) experts provided the answers, people now sought their own answers through a circular process of reflection, identity formation and further reflection.

People began to reflect on everything, even on reflection itself. This changed the relationship of society with truth. Much of the disconnection with truth arose because knowledge was unevenly distributed among power holders and because value orientations have proved to be deeply embedded and not directly impacted by more knowledge. In addition, the complexity of the social system was too large to really understand rationally. This shifted in the relationship between society and truth and contributed to greater system instability (Giddens, 1991).

In this late modern world of multiple authorities and no final arbitration, people had to select which experts to consult and whose authority to take as binding. This task was not to be underestimated. It introduced new risks in the choices and new questions of who and what to trust. For example, which diet was best to invest time and money in? Science seemed to generate multiple and competing answers to so many questions. What is worse, science brought two world wars and humanity is close to environmental catastrophe! Therefore, science was now sceptically engaged. This could be argued as fair – since scepticism is at the heart of science itself. But then, with what evidence and security could people proceed in life? How did one live with doubt? How did one navigate the risks of living with uncertainty? (Giddens, 1991).

2.2.3. Identity in late modernity

Giddens (1991) wrote specifically about identity in late modernity. I use considerable space here summarising an extensive range of important issues that Giddens highlighted. Giddens argued that as self and society became interrelated in a global context, politics moved from the national and

global to the personal with a shift in focus to the rights of individuals. This led to debates around abortion, gay marriage, etc. Giddens labelled these issues as life-political issues, which late modern human beings have to now inevitably confront. Confronting them has created dilemmas during identity formation. People have become even more concerned with questions of 'who to be', 'how to act' and 'what to do'. Giddens differed from the post-structuralist position where humans were seen as passively being tossed about by the forces of society, denuding life of meaning. Rather for Giddens, modern meaning remerged through the lifestyle choices and identity work that individuals do.

In late modernity, the influence of distant happenings now influenced the self through their rapid communication and through the central role of the media. With the growth of more advanced media, lives became ever more shaped by this exposure and immersion in a mediated context. The world became more unified, yet, also at the same time there were new forms of fragmentation (Giddens, 1991). Giddens stated that "in the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised autobiographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life⁴, the notion of lifestyle takes on particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options ... Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity" (p 5). As is outlined above, the late modern milieu required that the self now had to be created. This became the heart of the therapeutic process in which the problems of late modernity and its potential were explored reflexively.

Responding personally, in any kind of functional way, to the world around us requires a deep trust – since chaos lurks on the other side of everyday interactions. We try to forget this chaos and associated 'dread'. But this is not only a cognitive process, but also an emotionally laden one. Echoing Erikson (1950/1993), trust, hope and faith are core to everyday interaction and are forged at an early age. Routine is a hugely important part of this trust developing and 'protective cocoon' building process. Children must gain trust and master routines, especially those associated with

⁴ Giddens sometimes uses the term 'modern', for example, in 'modern social life' when he means 'late modern social life'.

parental presence, absence and return. This allows a basic trust in the nature of an external world to emerge. It is a foundational element of the entire experience of later living.

But in the late modern era this trust became harder and harder to sustain. Giddens has differentiated between anxiety and fear. Fear is the response to a specific threat. Anxiety is more existential and generalisable mistrust. It disregards the specific realities and can drift and be attached to multiple objects and situations. Anxiety is experienced broadly. It attacks the core of the self. For Giddens, broad existential anxiety has now been heightened. Major questions of ontological security have arisen around 'being' in the world, subjective death, knowing and trusting 'others', and the identity of the self (Giddens, 1991).

Turning to the 'identity of the self', Giddens defined identity as "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (Giddens, 1991, p. 53)⁵. Giddens has drawn heavily on narrative and storytelling. The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of biography, which the individual supplies to his or herself. This biography cannot be only fiction. It must integrate events from the outside world into a story of the self. This story must be solid enough to ensure a range of shocks and transitions.

Storytelling and biography-making are emotional. Guilt and shame are crucial emotions. Shame has become especially important in late modernity. Guilt arises around discrete behaviours and transgressions of societal norms. Shame bears directly on the self-identity. It occurs when there is a sense of inadequacy of the self and about the inadequacy of the narrative of the self. It occurs in the late modern era when the narrative of self cannot withstand the engulfing pressures of coherence and social acceptability. Shame eats at the roots of trust. Giddens draws on Erikson (1950/1993) in stating that the therapeutic patient of early modernity suffered from the burden of not being who they knew they were. The patient of late modernity suffered from the problem of what he/she should believe in and who he/she might become. A multitude of bewildering choices have stretched and challenged the self in developing a coherent narrative (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens wrote about the 'trajectory of the self' – this is the reflection on time and the potential encounters that life may bring. He argued that humans now live upon a late modern existential terrain. And he proposed that this terrain is part of a post-traditional universe which is "reflexively organised, permeated by abstract systems, and in which the reordering of time and space realigns the local with the global" (Giddens, 1991, p. 80). Under these conditions, the self underwent massive

⁵ The self-identity issue is rooted in the I/me distinction (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) where the 'me' is the identity that the 'I' is aware of. I make these conceptual links in a later section of this literature review.

change. The self was now part of segmented worlds of diverse and differentiated cultures living alongside one another. Yet, each of these worlds was subject itself to pluralism. Each different setting placed one's lifestyle in question. People then had lifestyle sectors consisting of different time–space configurations of identity, behaviour and routine.

Giddens (1991) argued that, under these conditions, we were not who we were – but rather who we wished to be. Living a good life required facing the reality that there was no permanence in human relationships. Life planning was delinked from place and with pre-established ties to kin. Kin relationships no longer defined where a person lived or who they were and would become. In late modern society the world was opened to the individual. Perhaps the individual was opened up by the world. A person may be more informed and connected to issues of global warming than to the leaking tap in the kitchen! This awareness of global issues structured one's identity and shaped choices. The contextual diversity drove multiple presentations of the self. A person may have as many selves as there are circumstances. This could fracture the self, or the self could create an integrative whole out of the many contexts in which it exists. Selves could remain tightly bound to narrow tradition – refusing any soft flexibility. But they could also be so moulded by context that they were inauthentic, direct representations of the environments encountered. In this late modern era, humanity began to face important dilemmas around unification versus fragmentation, powerlessness versus appropriation, authority versus uncertainty and personalised versus commodified experience.

There was a world of new transitions and changes that were no longer anchored in transition and transformation rituals. Giddens affirmed the modern character of choices around life-paths as distinct from traditional ritualised collectively bound transitions. In late modernity, life planning became an ever more urgent and pressing requirement. Tradition could still be reflexively organised but only through choice. It was the extensive range of choice that made the moment 'late modern'. For example, in following tradition, which traditions should be incorporated and in what ways? Religion can be similarly mobilised. It was now one of the many authority systems available for individual adoption as part of a lifestyle choice or through submission in response to the confusion of the surrounds.

It was not then that the person becomes separate from context or history. The person remained bound to context through reflexive choice about where and who to be – weaving together the contextual strands around them. The self had to do this now, however, without the structural supports that tradition and ritualised transition processes provided. This heightened anxiety. And it also disconnected people from moral existential questions that were historically answered in

tradition and religion. How these moral questions will be answered for individuals and for collective societies will shape human progress to come (Giddens, 1991).

The world now became “where opportunity and danger are balanced in equal measure” (Giddens, 1994, p. 58). To improve the human condition, people had to actively engage the world. This was a fraught project, but it also held up great potential. A posture of scepticism and commitment was now needed to confront the late modern condition. But this was difficult to sustain in most contexts - but especially in the day-to-day world. Social bonds needed to be forged rather than inherited from tradition. There needed to be dialogue where the other was recognised for their authenticity. In late modernity, society became both dangerous and emancipatory. Many risks emerged, but there was also the potential for a more humane and caring world (Lackey, 1992). I have extensively highlighted the key elements of Giddens’s theorising, especially drawing from his 1991 book, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Now I turn to Beck’s understanding of the ‘risk society’ and ‘reflexive modernity’.

2.2.4. Beck’s ‘second modernity’, ‘reflexive modernity’ and ‘risk society’

Beck has used the terms ‘second modernity’ and ‘reflexive modernity’ as part of what he has called ‘the risk society’ (Beck et al., 2003). Beck developed his ideas in Germany at the same time that Giddens developed his theorising on the role of identity projects in late modernity. Reflexive modernity, for Beck, occurred as a society went beyond transforming the institutions of traditional society, and turned its attention on itself. It also turned its attention to transforming modernity and its assumptions. For Beck, the ‘reflexivity’ in modernity was not simply a way of referencing the self-referential nature of modernity, although this was an important component. What reflexive modernity referred to was “the modernization of modern society” as “modernity reaches a certain stage it radicalizes itself. It begins to transform, for a second time, not only the key institutions but also the very principles of society. But this time the principles and institutions being transformed are those of modern society” (Beck et al., 2003, p. 1).

These principles and institutions undergoing transformation included the 1950’s ideal of family, including, for example, previously established ideals like the ‘male breadwinner’ and ‘stay-at-home housewife’. There was a transformation too of class-oriented politics and the established container of the nation state. The previous differentiation between belief and established knowledge was made less clear. Reflexive modernisation threw all these and other principles into flux. But Beck differed from those theorising around the unknowability of this process. He stated that there were rules to this new dynamic, and these rules could be discovered and analysed. This was less a

deconstruction as much as a reconstruction. Social science was now needed more than ever (Beck et al., 2003).

For Beck, the origins of these changes were located in advanced global capitalism – a process that upended so many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of earlier industrial producer-oriented capitalism. Under advanced global capitalism, borders vanished. Individualisation intensified. Gender roles were transformed. The family form was shifted. Full employment was no longer possible and companies used more flexible employment practices. The ecological crisis strengthened. Nature moved from being its own realm to becoming bound up with society. All these shifts led to words like ‘ambiguity’ and ‘contradiction’ becoming important descriptors for society. This reflexive modernity (or second modernity) followed the first. In this sense, for Beck, it did not apply to certain parts of the world. For this study then, it may apply less (or differently) in Africa, although Africa may be subject to its forces. Post-colonial dynamics will potentially moderate and shape these impacts. Beck argued that different non-European routes to and through reflexive/second modernity still have to be described (Beck et al., 2003).

The challenge put out by Beck was that the institutions of the first modernity were simply not up to the task of managing the second modernity. The answers provided were insufficient. The discontinuity was ontological in character, especially with regard to space and time. It was not that certain institutions like government or religion disappeared – but rather that they were repositioned. Risks emerged through this process. The consequences of industrial and scientific development brought immense challenges and these challenges now became unlimited by space. The second modernity was labelled as the ‘risk society’ because there was a complex distribution of society’s ‘bads’ (Lash & Wynne, 1992). While modernity has brought many positive developments, the shadow of these developments was found in the ecological impacts of the economy, the millions of deaths in the twentieth century, and nuclear power with associated risks. Theorists’ task became to work out how to build radical cosmopolitan democratic theory and practise that extended rights and opportunities to the previously disenfranchised (Beck et al., 2003).

There were also implications for subjectivity in this second modernity. The individual of the first modernity was reflective, while the individual in the second modernity was now reflexive. Reflective individuals consider the objects of their study from an independent scientific perspective. In the second modernity, scientific perspectives were now seen as consisting of their own interest-constituted intentionality. The duality between *knower* and *known* became blurred. Humanity moved from ‘I think, therefore I am’ to ‘I am I’. Reflexive was different to reflection in that it was immediate. The contemporary individual was now characterised by choice and needed to make

quick decisions. But there was insufficient distance from oneself to reflect and to easily construct linear and even narrative biographies. There was no longer the time or the space. Instead, people in the second modernity constructed bricolage-based biographies (Lash & Wynne, 1992).

In the first modernity, subjects encountered established boundaries that they may or may not transgress. In the second modernity, the boundaries were no longer firm. The question “‘What groups do I belong to?’ could no longer be answered collectively according to pre-given social patterns, but had to be answered individually with reference to changed probabilities and new stereotypes” (Beck et al., 2003, p. 24). Individuals had to now answer major questions such as ‘Who shall I marry?’ and ‘What is my sexual orientation?’. They then, free of structures, constructed their own biographies (Lash & Wynne, 1992). This was somewhat similar to what might be understood as the post-modern condition. But where it differs is that Beck held out the possibility of measuring and understanding these shifting boundaries rather than pointing to the unknowability of society. There was the potential then for people to be able to construct these biographies. Beck was convinced of the importance and merit in individual human decision making.

Beck et al. (2003) wrote that the individual can best be understood in this new period as a ‘quasi-subject’. The individual “can no longer be conceived of as a stable and unchangeable subject, but rather as a ‘quasi-subject’, the result as well as the producer of its networks, situation, location and form. The subject can no longer be conceived of as master of its surroundings within prescribed boundaries. Its rational action no longer constituted nor guaranteed a secure social order. But, paradoxically, the individual remained, and may become more than ever, a fictive decision-maker, the author of his self and his biography. The more careers have become unpredictable, the more importance has been given to the fictive narratives that imbue them with meaning, and the more such biographies have become recognized and expected. They have become the biography of the ‘self-employed’ in every sense of the term” (p. 25). This more personal uncertainty has been argued as another reason to see the second modernity as a ‘risk society’.

The internet became one domain that demonstrated the ways in which subjects self-select networks, but then became shaped by those networks. Through this, subjects demonstrated ‘socially constructed autonomy’. In this context Beck argues there were ‘surfers’ and ‘drifters’. Surfers embraced uncertainty and were actively conscious of the immediate need to steer. They were conscious that things can be straightened out over the long run. Drifters experienced the uncertainty as a threat. They were frozen and unable to steer their lives. Being shaped by others was too confusing. This led them to attempt to regain power or to aimlessly turn inward, both of which led to

pathologies of either over control or ambivalence. This emerging range of subject-oriented dynamics is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Consequences for subjectivity in late/second modernity from Beck et al. (2003)

	Simple or first modern society	Reflexive or second modern society	Post-modern society
Institutional and subject boundaries	Clearly defined and indisputable subject boundaries defining all aspects of social life, including its institutional, cultural and technical aspects Life trajectories steered within set limits set by these subject boundaries	Multiplicity of possible subject boundaries Recognition of the multiplicity of subject boundaries A necessity for the subjective drawing of boundaries, and their recognition as positive fictions Institutional, collective and individual difficulties, coordinating the multiplicity of networks and subject boundaries Subject as producer as well as result of its boundaries	Multiplicity of possible subject boundaries Necessity for the subjective drawing of boundaries not recognised Bricolage mentality; a pluralised subjectivity
The foundations of knowledge and rationality	Unambiguous foundations for drawing institutional, cultural, physical, moral and technical boundaries	A multiplying of the acceptable bases on which the subject can be defined A resultant individualisation of self-definition A simultaneous orientation towards several different patterns of identity A recognition of the unexpected consequences of individual and institutional decisions and an internalisation of the resulting uncertainty Cooperative decision making through ad hoc sub-political negotiations Recognition of the fictional nature of the models underlying personal decisions and biographies	Experimental, aesthetic or arbitrary and situational displacement of subject boundaries

Reflexive modernity arose from the problems and crises of the first modernity. New kinds of capital, labour and global order emerged. As this happened, all institutions became renegotiated. With the coming of reflexive modernity, the modern attitude towards problem solving was put into question. The future was less linked to the past. There was a recognition of multiplicity and for knowledge outside of science or non-rational ways of knowing. Beck (like Giddens) tried to reconstruct modernity rather than deconstruct it (Lee, 2006). Beck's reflexive modernity has differed then from much post-modern theorising in that there has remained a belief that the new rules could be understood, and that science could play its role. I now turn to Bauman's 'liquid modernity'.

2.2.5. Bauman's liquid modernity

Bauman (2007) preferred to use the term 'liquid modernity' to refer to the ways in which 'fluidity' is at the heart of societal change. Like the arguments of Giddens and Beck, the argument of Bauman has been for a different modernity, rather a transition to something new. Like Beck's reflexive second modernity, liquid modernity has been theorised as taking place in 'the developed' part of the planet. But Bauman laid out a far more strongly worded capitalist critique in liquid modernity than Giddens and Beck did. He was the most evocative and punchy in his assertions. Liquid modernity theorising has described the ways in which the institutions of tradition no longer provided a guide. But it also showed how the new institutions that were created passed away so fast that there became little to stabilise and guide the self in its life projects. Bauman especially emphasised the challenge for individuals, the demise of the nation state, the rise of consumer capitalism, and the turbulence of the world's growing urban spaces.

For Bauman (2007), liquid modernity created a range of challenges that people encountered in their lives. In liquid modernity, planning became impossible and was replaced by short-term projects of infinite number. In the work domain, these projects were not theorised as able to combine to enable progress or maturation into, what had been labelled, a career. With the emergence of liquid modernity, past successes no longer indicated future success. Forgetting old learnings now became more important than holding onto them. All the burdens of navigating a volatile and vexing life fell onto the shoulders of individuals. Individuals were now expected to be 'free choosers'. But this continued to be challenging as there were no longer any authoritative and agreed 'recipes' for life. In fact, many of the rules of life became mutually contradictory. People needed to continuously remain open to abandoning plans and embracing new circumstances as they emerged.

With the arrival of liquid modernity, national politics were no longer the sole domain of power. Power moved into an uncontrollable, even untameable, global space. Nation states no longer provided the kind of social security that they had done previously. The state became increasingly hollow. Individuals were left at the whim of the forces of advanced capitalism. For example, evidence emerged of an increase in the number of refugees who found themselves unneeded in their homelands and unwanted in their new territory (Bauman, 2007).

Moving to Bauman's (2007) views on the world as a whole, there were no longer any blank spots on the world's mental map. The openness of a globalised economy set nations and societies on a course they could no longer control. With these changes, the search for a free society, built by deliberate collective human effort now seemed to end in a bare and vulnerable place where people were without protection. The ground on which lives had been built became shaky. There was a new

existential fear. People began to live with this fear, taking protection into their own hands. But their actions perpetuated the same uncertainty they sought to avoid. There was a loosening of social bonds. Human beings became consumers, living in their 'now'. Capitalism under these conditions became like a snake, eating its own tail, most noticeably in the rising unemployed and in the global ecological crisis.

Bauman (2007) wrote especially evocatively of cities. For him, urban spaces became spaces of fear. In cities, architects insulated and protected people from the world, rather than integrating people into the surrounds. Cities became spaces where people left the familiar monotony and limits of rural life behind and were thrust at the feet of global capitalism. Cities became attractive and repulsive at the same time. Cities became spaces where cultures rubbed shoulders with one another. Conflicting cultures interacted in the same geographies rather than between them. It was here that collective anxieties were unloaded – for example, on innocent minority 'alien' shop owners. There developed a 'mixophobia', which Bauman defined as "a highly predictable and widespread reaction to the mind-boggling, spine-chilling and nerve-breaking variety of human types and lifestyles that meet and rub elbows and shoulders in the streets of contemporary cities" (Bauman, 2007, p. 86).

This mixing prompted segregationist urges. These urges pointed to a return to some kind of 'group belonging'. There was an attempt to avoid the difficult compromises that collective living required. Participation in diverse collective life was scary! It was dangerous and filled with challenge – it was potentially painful. The drive to connect with similarity therefore continued. Humans needed to withdraw from turbulence and tried to find ways to avoid the risks of 'going outside'. But all these drives and needs, when acted on, only provided a fragile shelter and a temporary escape. In these shelters and escapes, people no longer learned the capacity for negotiation and translation – they were therefore stuck in a dead end.

Bauman drew on Sławomir Mrożek, a Polish writer, to state that "In the old times, when we felt unhappy, we accused God, then the world's manager; we assumed that He did not run the business properly, so we fired Him and appointed ourselves as the new directors". But Bauman playfully proposes that business did not improve with the change of management because the new managers focused on their own egos, and "there is no limit to our ambition and temptation to make the ego grow ever bigger". The new management encouraged one another to "invent yourself, invent your own life and manage it as you wish, in every single moment ... from beginning to end" (Bauman, 2007, p. 106). In traditional times there used to be pain in the lack of choice. Now, there emerged a new pain from all the choosing, there was no trust in the choices made, and all that awaited people were more and more choices, none of which brought any further progress.

The pre-modern posture to the world was one of 'gamekeeper' where one was meant to guard the forest and animals from human intervention and preserve the natural order of things. The utopian modern posture was one of 'gardener' – in which plans are made and in which the garden is envisaged and created by thoughtful human effort. The liquid modern posture then became oriented around anti-utopian ideas. It was one of 'hunter', where each of us was now encouraged to go out and hunt larger and larger game. We were no longer concerned with whether the animals were close to extinction, for we became hypnotised into believing there were always new forests and lands to hunt in. This 'hunter society' was the logical outcome of a deregulated and atomised world (Bauman, 2007).

In liquid modernity, we became individualised and we relentlessly avoided uncomfortable questions. We were always without satisfaction – searching for escape in film, drugs, alcohol, new work, new lovers, new hobbies ... even new paint colours on the wall. Travel itself was a form of escape within the boundaries of consumer capitalism. We consumed culture through global tourism rather than understanding its real meanings. We were more gullible and egocentric – addicted to a world of delight that never fully fills the hole inside. Drawing from Andrzej Stasiuk, we started to continuously pursue 'the possibility of becoming someone else'. This suited the consumer-oriented economy and it replaced efforts to collectively work towards a better world. What was left was the effort to fight against losing – to remain among the successful hunters rather than the hunted. This required 24-7 vigilance. We were now hunters searching for a hare. But when we caught a hare, it did not help us avoid pain, even if hunting for the hare was a temporarily pain-relieving pastime. Rather than answering the deepest most crucial questions that life asked, we now work endlessly to avoid them (Bauman, 2007).

2.2.6. Globalisation and the self

Other scholars have focused on the social changes that have been observed and have linked them with the consequences of the concept of globalisation. Globalisation has had a substantive impact on the 'self' (Callero, 2003). It has been understood as a product of communication technology and the increasing dispersion of capital, people, information and culture. Globalisation has been strongly connected to economic integration and the expansive growth of global trade from the 1970s onwards. These changes have been associated with a loss of meaning and the erosion of tradition. In this process, different selves have emerged – both global and local. Oppositional identities have also been documented in the form of anti-globalisation movements, religious fundamentalism and nationalist identity projects. In this perspective, adults faced much difficulty in identifying a temporal coherence and constructing a life-story.

Globalisation has been understood as involving a process of increasing demographic, economic, ecological, political and military interconnectedness. Many positive dimensions to globalisation have been documented, for example, increasing empathy for the victims of natural disasters and man-made war – as well as increasing widespread cooperation and the opening up of new horizons for many people. But globalisation has an underside. There has been a rise in misunderstanding and prejudice as people have come into intensive contact with one another (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). It needs to be noted it has been questioned whether globalisation is the reality facing most people since they experience only limited mobility (both physical and social).

Globalisation has involved sweeping changes in the integration of the world into one market. But it has also involved sweeping changes in the social and cultural domains. These changes have led to a flourishing discourse on identity. There have arisen various struggles of identity, especially among marginalised groups. With globalisation, an increase in identity confusion has been documented among teenagers who are leaving childhood and entering adulthood (Arnett, 2002). During globalisation, there have been ongoing struggles of identification in a never-ending, open-ended process (Bornman, 2003).

Globalisation has been theorised as having an increased impact on self and identity. It has led to an increase in uncertainty. This increasing uncertainty has stretched the self beyond its traditional mooring. It has been theorised that, as this took place, globalisation created a kind of opposing tendency, the drive to find a local niche and to construct a local identity in opposition to the global one (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

At the heart of questions about globalisation has been the role of the nation state. The post-2007 response to the global financial crisis has also slowed the globalisation process (Hirst, Thompson & Bromley, 2015). The decision of Britain to firmly press ahead with leaving the European Union (Sabbagh, 2019) and the anti-global Trump Administration (Goodman, 2019) further illustrated the shifts that have taken place – and the alternative dynamics that have become a response to the inevitability of the globalisation process.

What emerged during the globalisation process was a delinking of identity from the boundaries of territory and geography. If modernity's processes forged the national identity from localised traditional identities, advanced globalisation shifted identities away from the nation state. This was also true of global elites who began to see themselves as cosmopolitan, as it was of locally constrained subjects who more strongly identified with their religious or ethnic identity. States created nations through discursive processes. But the power of states and governing political elites has changed through globalisation. Their relative power has diminished and even national identity

allegiance has in turn become more open to choice. Supranational and subnational identities have gained in power. Globalisation has driven the spread of consumer-based and knowledge-based capitalism – accelerating identity-oriented processes. New sites have emerged, not only for identity exploration and formation, but also for consumer-oriented practices around those identities (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999).

These processes have created complex overlapping dynamics through which there has been an increased homogeneity in terms of identity as the world has integrated and communicated more tightly. Institutions around the world now look more and more similar to one another. Globalisation has been theorised as a nomadic wandering ‘between unconnected places’ (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999). But these processes have been far from uniform. There remain many areas of the world in which these tightly bound dynamics have not been as all encompassing - especially in areas not yet integrated into global telecommunication networks. Even as this process has homogenised, local identities have remained important and even strengthened. The liberal ideal of a cosmopolitan worldview has not emerged. In fact, opposing dynamics have strengthened as people have turned away from the values of shared humanity and collective inclusion. This dynamic has been labelled as a ‘new medievalism’.

2.3. 'Outside-in' – Africa and South Africa in this global context

I have highlighted three crucial perspectives from Giddens, Beck and Bauman on the evolution of society through modernity. I have also shown some of the key issues associated with globalisation – especially those issues that have shaped the self. These have generally centred on understanding change in Western or Euro-American societies. Writing from South Africa, I am cautious about the risks of theorising about South African realities from Euro-American traditions. This is not to say that the global or Western theories of late, reflexive or liquid modernities are irrelevant to understanding the South African context. My sense is that there is lots of value to be gained from the vocabulary and perspective these theories bring. In this study, I seek to connect South African realities with this important global scholarship.

But a number of specifically alternative perspectives on modernity have developed from a more Afro-centric and Southern perspective. I now highlight some key elements of these perspectives below. I start with the multiple modernities approach (Lee, 2006) and then highlight some nuanced African perspectives on vernacular modernity and advanced modern African selves (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015; Mbembe, 2002).

Before outlining key elements of this scholarship, it is important to mention what makes Africa unique (if anything). Is it, for example, the geographical location, the historical background or something about socio-economic conditions? I acknowledge the value of a universalist position. African selves (like all people) are universally human. In this orientation there is nothing unique about Africans or any other human group. It can also be debated how coherent the idea of 'Africa' even is. Africa can be considered too diverse and too quickly stereotyped as something coherent (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015).

Then again, one of the universal truths is that context shapes people in somewhat distinct ways. As a continent, much of Africa has a shared history with the influence of colonialism, slavery and Apartheid, as well as Cold War political influences (Mamdani, 2002; Mbembe, 2002). The continent has been shaped by race-based (anti-Black) prejudice on the part of European, Middle Eastern and Asian migrants. It has also been shaped by the spread of Islam and Christianity. More recently it has been shaped by neo-liberal global capitalist processes. Going back historically, the continent was also shaped by pre-colonial internal mixing and migration. 'Africa' is certainly a complex construct, and Jewsiewicki (2002) and McNee (1997) have drawn attention to how being 'African' has been a somewhat artificial, self-imposed or other-imposed and problematically essentialist construct.

It is also a reasonable question to ask whether South Africa is African? Because there are specific dynamics of settler-native and race relationships in South Africa, with many more White and Indian

citizens migrating permanently and living as South Africans, compared to other parts of the continent. Another differing dimension when considering South Africa alongside many African states is around the scale of the South African formal economy.

A further way in which South Africa might not be indicative of the continent is related to the era in which South Africa gained its independence and 'liberation'. South Africa, as a post-1994 democratic nation, emerged into a different era to many of its continental neighbours who achieved independence from the late 1950s onwards. 1994 was after the end of the Cold War, with declining socialism and an emerging neo-liberal 'consensus'.

South Africa can also be considered different due to the role of Mandela-oriented reconciliation politics, the South African Constitution and the negotiated transition. The politics of South African nation building have potentially set South Africa on a somewhat distinct course to many of its geographic neighbours. Comaroff (2010) argued that the African National Congress (ANC) had to build a modernist state under post-modern conditions. With the end of Apartheid, liberation ran headlong into liberalisation. South Africa represents then a particular case of the global neo-liberal order with substantive emphasis on democratic pluralism. The ANC, together with its political allies, oriented the country around a civic-nationalist post-ethnic non-racial stance. Comaroff (2010) argued that the country was therefore a mix of highly liberal legal norms, where the polity was an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) of difference. The 'imagined community' of 'South Africa' and the category of 'South African' does seem to have some binding power and stickiness in the public imagination. This centripetal attraction has been seen in rainbow nation idealism (even when critiqued) and various sporting victories⁶. Comaroff (2010) also argued that recent research showed that the vast majority of people regard other identities – like religion or ethnicity – as more salient to them (than class or nationalism).

I close this section by reiterating that am not arguing that South Africa is representative of Africa. But I also do not take the view that it is not African in terms of sharing important elements of history, culture, political and economic life. I am arguing that South Africa is a somewhat unique and somewhat illustrative form of African modernity. The narrative identities of a group of South and Southern Africans journeying through a democratic transition are therefore an interesting context to study. I highlight some other ways of theorising modernity next.

⁶ Two good examples of the binding power of 'South African'ness that took place during the write up of this thesis can be noted. Firstly, the broadly popular victory of the national rugby team, the Springboks, in 2019 brought people together – even if temporarily and somewhat shallowly. Secondly, the binding energy of the idea of the South African nation is in the 'viral' popular Facebook group #ImStaying with close to 1.1 million racially diverse members joining within a few months of its inception.

2.3.1. *Multiple modernities*

One of the approaches that has sought to decentre Western narratives on modernity is the multiple modernities' approach. This approach refers to the diversity of contemporary societies in many developing countries⁷. Modernity through this perspective has not been seen as a linear path of development. It has been seen as an 'inclusive' and 'mutating' project.

The multiple modernities' perspective has drawn attention away from trying to find the right theory of the global challenges of our time – often heavily influenced by Western concerns. It has sought instead to root analysis in the varied ways in which post-colonial societies have grappled with the present. In this approach, tradition has been understood as living alongside new non-traditional dynamics. Whereas colonialism shaped modernity from the top-down, there was now a “multi-level interaction between the new and the old” (Lee, 2006, p. 364). For Lee (2006), multiple modern identities arose from the intersection of tradition and innovation in the quest to navigate the contemporary world. In this approach tradition itself is not seen as static and can be employed for different political ends. It can be understood as a recent modern development, 'invented' and 'arising' as a new practice legitimised through claims to being traditional in the sense of eternal (Hobsbawm, 2012). Mamdani (2002) pointed towards the complexity of references to tradition and how traditional practices can be leveraged for distinctly modern means. Islamic fundamentalism, for example, has been theorised as more a product of contemporary globalisation than the emergence of tradition.

Eisenstadt (2000) emphasised that the multiple modernities' approach goes against the 'classical' theories of modernisation and the classical sociology of Weber, Marx and Durkheim. He argued against the assumption that 'developing' societies have become, over time, evermore 'modern'. He pushed back on the assumption that rational and enlightened interests spread from Europe to the rest of the world. The evidence, he suggested, went against these assumptions. Eisenstadt (2000) saw modernity as the opening up of alternative ways of being, living and knowing that differed from orthodox single conceptions. Rather than one single movement opening up 'the modern' world, this change has opened up 'multiple modern' pathways and trajectories. This was demonstrated in Europe and across the world in ways in which different competitive movements have sought hegemony or influence. Eisenstadt (2000) saw an ongoing negotiation and dialogue between

⁷ 'Development' and 'developing' are contested terms for describing countries. But there are limited alternative conceptions and those often also have problematic dimensions such as 'Third World' or 'Emerging Nations'. Some use the term 'Global South'. I use the term here to indicate lower levels of economic development and peripheral relationships with the global centres of economic modernisation.

different interpretations of modernity and traditional forces as the best way to understand the contemporary world.

Nuances and criticisms of the multiple modernities' framework have also been presented. Schmidt (2006) argued that it was more useful to speak of varieties of modernity than to acknowledge the diversity of modern realities, while also allowing a conversation around a single phenomenon. Mota and Delanty (2015) showed how the framework of multiple modernities was useful in understanding nations, albeit with critique around some of the simplifications presented by Eisenstadt. The multiple modernities' frame has at least allowed for an opening into the potential for alternative African and South African realities. I now turn to some key theorists around African modernity.

2.3.2. African and South African modernity – thoughts from the Comaroffs

Modernity in Africa and South Africa has been intimately shaped by local cultures and their encounters with colonialism, nationalism and post-colonial realities. These specific historic elements have potentially made modernity here different to the West. But I state this cautiously. I point to the profound observation that every claim to some essential element flattens internal diversity – an issue that has been highlighted by theorists of identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

John and Jean Comaroff emphasised Africa's important place in the global present. They sought to 'subvert the epistemological scaffolding' upon which Western enlightenment thinking was built to theorise from the Global South (and especially Africa) to the 'developed' West and the Euro-American experience. They argued, what if, instead of the rest catching up with the West, the West was evolving towards the rest? There is more than simply new insight to be gained from this approach. There are profound implications. The argument of the Comaroffs (2015) was firstly that African modernity needed to be understood in its own right, rather than as a poor imitation of the West. And secondly, that it was actually Euro-America that was evolving towards Africa rather than the other way around. For example, it could be argued that the configuration of capital and labour (in high levels of inequality and social disruption, for example) occurred first in Africa then moved to the West. They argued that the general complexities of the modern experience were often first experienced in Africa before spreading to the Euro-Americas. Various books have been published to support this argument and describe this experience, for example, *Third World America*. They argued that 'First World' cities were starting to look more like Lagos, Nigeria, rather than Lagos starting to look like other cities (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). This is not necessarily a positive thing, since Africa has many serious problems, but simply an observation of the direction of change across time.

When it comes to concepts of the person and their relationship with modern global change, Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) made some additional important points. They highlighted that ideas

of selfhood in the historic African context, intensively observed in their study of the Southern Tswana, are diverse and nuanced. There is no such thing then as 'the African conception of personhood'. They also criticised the simplistic binary idea of the self as either autonomous and rights-bearing (in the West) or deeply inert and communalistic (in the South). They suggested that there are much more nuanced conceptualisations within Africa.

They showed how even in historically traditional Tswana contexts, selfhood was never prescribed by birth and genealogy – even as social standing may have been substantially structured. Tswana people have always shaped their own personal destinies in both a fixed hierarchy and a fluid relationship with one another. For example, traditionally, adult men were expected to build themselves up, to protect themselves and to negotiate their rank and status. But each individual adult man had to find his own way of achieving this. There were thus inequalities in outcomes. One's status had boundaries. Slaves and servants existed, and women were jural minors. But in the context of everyday social life, for an example, women were not powerless. Every person made ongoing, often quotidian, efforts to build cultural capital to invest in the future. As money became important, this too was accrued in differing ways depending on how every man or woman selected options and navigated life. 'Individuality' (people with agency, biography and the potential for authored action) has always existed in Africa, even if 'individualism' (as a Western concept of autonomous individualised selfhood) was introduced from outside.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) emphasised the concept of 'autoplexy' to describe selfhood in the Tswana society. Autoplexy involved playing with many different roles and identities in order to secure freedom of action and social position. In this approach to selfhood, different aspects of the self were revealed in different contexts. People presented only limited aspects of themselves in specific contexts of social life. From their observation of Tswana society, they highlighted "that the integration of the fractal human subject occurred towards the end of his or her funeral" (p. 61). At the funeral, people from diverse contexts of the person's life would narrate their experience of the person and, for the first time, the whole person would become known. They saw the Southern Tswana conception of personhood as a "historically wrought universe of meaning and action, an Afrmodernist universe in which labour, the self and the social were mutually constituting" (p. 61).

Comaroff and Comaroff (2015), when touching on Christianity and Christian elite encountered with the Southern Tswana, made a few additional key points that are relevant for this study. They used interesting words and phrases for Christian values, including 'competitive', 'get ahead' and 'liberal individualism'. They highlighted how concepts of 'virtuous labour' (with the Protestant tradition) resonated with Tswana concepts of 'great work' and 'being-as-becoming'. They illustrated the

emergence of both hybrid and segregated essentialist European *sekgoa* identities and essentialist Tswana *setswana* identities in the colonial 1800s. They described the emergence of a transcultural discourse of personhood for those who drew near to the church. Christian interaction set off a debate among the Southern Tswana themselves about selfhood and civilisation. There were many different responses. These included the embrace of *sekgoa*, rejection of *sekgoa*, and synthesis out of the antimony between *sekgoa* and *setswana*. They argued that this debate has continued today among Tswana people.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) saw these debates and the interaction between more traditional fractal selves and modern processes as illustrating how Euro-theory (of 'post' and multiplicity) was evolving towards African theorising. 'Fractal forms of subjectivity', as an African concept of self, has existed for over a hundred years. It was only recently becoming an increasing Euro-American focus and lived reality. This historic idea of personhood, autoplexy and fractal subjectivity, aligned with some of the post and late modern theorising. "Africa, in particular, and the south in general, come, in significant respects, to anticipate the unfolding history of the global north" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015, p. 15).

In their notes at the end of the book, Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) mentioned the importance of getting the vocabulary right, pointing to how their use of the language of 'alternative modernities' might have been better stated as 'vernacular modernities' to indicate the intentional efforts to create indigenous modernity across the continent.

2.3.3. African and South African modernity – Mbembe and beyond

Although Achille Mbembe has written extensively on African post-colonial realities, I focus here on a few key elements of his writing on selfhood in Africa. In doing so, I am forced to collapse the sociology-psychology boundary. Mbembe writes at the overlap of the outside-in and the inside-out. He writes of *the spider and the web* as impossible to separate.

In his book, *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembe (2017) focuses on the history of the word 'Black'. At the heart of his concern for Africa, and broadly for Black selves, is the empty prison that the categories powerfully symbolise. This has historic roots linked to modernity and colonialism. He writes that "... in canonical Black texts the colony always appears as the scene where the self was robbed of its content and replaced by a voice, one that, in the form of a sign, always turns away, revokes, inhibits, suspends, and obstructs the will for authenticity. For this reason, in African discourse, to remember the colony is almost always to recall the primordial displacement between the self and the subject" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 105). His work aims to unlock the imprisoning words, categories and concepts that we use on the continent.

The statement 'I am Black' is loaded with hundreds of years of history. It is a statement linked heavily to the Enlightenment, to modernity, to colonialism and to capitalism. 'I am Black' is a statement of identification in response to the question, 'Who are you?'. Mbembe asked, 'What is this word 'Black'?'. He responded to this question in by mapping a vast historic terrain around the word 'Black'. In doing so he drew on Fanon, Harvey, Césaire and Mandela to show the functioning of colonialism and its absolute power to dissolve Black selfhood and replace it with something lesser, something that has since been impossible to remove. He showed how this replacement and substitution of the self was always linked with violence and torture. Black selfhood was re-created through a colonial power that at all times emphasised how Black lives did not have the same weight as White lives. Through colonialism, Black selfhood was robbed of its content, and replaced by a voice that inhibits the self and that obstructs the will for authenticity. But he also shows how these grand figures of the past constructed a mental and psychic liberatory architecture (Mbembe, 2017). In terms of the liberation of Mandela, Mbembe wrote, "Although he was a prisoner confined between two and a half walls, he was nevertheless no one's slave", and that, "He penetrated into the night of life, close to the shadows, seeking an idea that in the end was quite simple: how to live free from race and the domination that results from it. His choices brought him to the edge of the precipice. He fascinated the world because he became a revenant from the land of shadows, a gushing force on the eve of an aging century that had forgotten how to dream" (p. 172).

For Mbembe (2002), there was a distinctly anti-African perspective in much of enlightenment thinking. In this thinking, Africans were not capable of complete citizenship. This was either through the labelling of the Black body or through the labelling of Black custom. The only freedom, a pseudo-freedom, came with inclusion through assimilation in White Western society. This was primarily through Christian conversion, the market economy and the adoption of enlightenment-inspired forms of government. Africa was always 'performing' for the West, struggling to explore its own self and story.

There has been a call for a modern African citizenry at home, on the continent, and in the world. Mbembe argued that African subjectivity has been eroded to the extent that "not only is the self no longer recognised by the Other; the self no longer recognises itself" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 240). People in Africa have sought greater self-exploration and expression. The strands for this self-exploration and definition have been heavily influenced by Western Marxist radicalism and by nativist traditionalism (itself shaped by Western ideas of the other). The first strand presented itself as radical, progressive and democratic. The second strand emphasised the native condition and promoted a unique African identity founded on membership of the Black race. These two strands

have been substantively shaped by slavery, colonialism and Apartheid, which were fundamentally about dispossession resulting in suffering and humiliation (Mbembe, 2002).

From Mbembe's perspective, these three events (slavery, colonialism and Apartheid) led to a need for Africans to discover their autonomy and sovereignty. He then asked where self-discovery was to be found. Not, according to Mbembe, in the two historic strands of self-definition – Marxist radicalism or neotraditionalism. Nor in anti-imperialist calls. These approaches fell short in that they were 'thin' in their simple telling of a complex history. In these approaches, Africans have been positioned as entirely absent in responsibility for the catastrophes that have befallen the continent. These approaches, especially in the Marxist tradition, simplified the emancipatory political community as 'labour' and the 'working class'. In doing so, this tradition failed to grasp the multiplicity of economic positions that can be leveraged for the pursuit of freedom. There was little role, for example, for the middle class. In these approaches, Africans were positioned as lacking in agency and as simply the victims of external forces. Many of these approaches lacked a conceptualisation of the self as autonomous and reflexive – instead, the self only served in the collective struggle (Mbembe, 2002).

For Mbembe (2002), self-discovery could also not be found in racial unity and solidarity. Racial unity was an unhelpful myth. Africans of European and international origin have become an increasingly diverse group, living in Africa, with different conceptions of self and identity in the continental context. To organise for the achievement of power and freedom, race remained crucial, yet it seemed contradictory to claims of equality.

Selfhood in Africa could also not be found in custom and tradition since these were changing. Mbembe (2002) wrote, "Discourse on African identity has been caught in a dilemma from which it is struggling to free itself: Does African identity partake in a generic human identity? Or should one insist, in the name of difference and uniqueness, on the possibility of diverse cultural forms within a single humanity?" (no page number). So, what is to be done? Where to then for authentic African self-definition?

Mbembe argued that there is a need for more writing around the self⁸ – an Afropolitan agenda. He argued that African self-writing needed to be thickened by the multiple realities of the present moment and the intersecting ways in which lives are stylised. African identity cannot be reduced to a

⁸ I get the sense Mbembe (2002) sees 'writing' more as 'authoring', 'self-presenting' or 'self-defining', rather than a literal specific written form of self-expression using a keyboard or pen and paper. But he is also in my reading, pointing for the need to codify what is happening, potentially through academic writing so that there may be a reflective dialogue between popular society wide self-definition and conceptually coded practices and ideals.

specific essence⁹. Victimhood needed to be replaced by subjecthood. One of the stepping-stones to this could be created through lessons from Jewish reflections on the Holocaust as a traumatic wound on the collective body. Another stone could be created on this pathway with the acknowledgement that Africans played an active part in the creation of painful experiences, such as slavery. This was hard, because it surfaced feelings of shame at the heart of one's family and cultural history. Because of this, ghosts have haunted the African subject, and have had to be continuously repressed. Developing selfhood in Africa required facing up to the ways in which Africans collaborated in colonialism and its seductive materialist powers. Africans were actors and agents of multiple responses to these events (Mbembe, 2002).

What then of more oft labelled post-modern approaches to the self? Mbembe (2002) has argued that "... the all-too-familiar and clichéd rhetoric of non-substantiality, instability, and indetermination is just one more inadequate way to come to grips with African imaginations of the self and the world. It is no longer enough to assert that only an African self-endowed with a capacity for narrative synthesis – that is, a capacity to generate as many stories as possible in as many voices as possible – can sustain the discrepancy and interlacing multiplicity of norms and rules characteristic of our epoch" (no page number).

Mbembe (2002) worried that because "the time we live in is fundamentally fractured, the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed. Only the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans stylize their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made" (no page number).

A number of other scholars have picked up and emphasised similar themes to Mbembe. Jewsiewicki (2002) agreed with the position of Mbembe on how being 'African' has historically drawn on ideas of resistance and freedom fighting. He argued that being 'African' was an identity imposed and sometimes self-imposed, either by the country of origin or by an 'othering' process. He argued that it is through 'indiscipline' and resistance that the African subject and identity have historically been oriented. And this indiscipline is both valuable and problematic in that it serves as a powerful liberatory force, but a poor orientation for governing. I get the sense Mbembe would agree with this view, but he might ask the question then about what 'African' can be, beyond indiscipline and resistance. And he would invite us to answer that question in multiple ways in order to 'thicken' African self-writing.

⁹ No identity can be captured in a single essence, so this point is redundant. But I need to make this point because Africa is so often conceptualised as a single place with one common identity. This pattern of thinking needs to be fought against. It is the reason for popular social media platforms with cheeky names like 'Africa is a country'.

McNee (1997) drew attention to how even the most sensitive and careful exploration of African autobiography carried the risks of essentialist framing – ‘Europeans are individualistic’ and ‘Africans are communal’. Although there is evidence for differences around the dimension of individualism-collectivism (Triandis, 2001), McNee sought a middle ground between communally embedded selves and autonomous agency. She argued that individuals retain agency in the ways in which collective communal frameworks are negotiated. Individuality should not be equal to individualism. For McNee, autobiography represented the most significant discursive articulation of the problem of negotiating self and community, agency and social structure. She drew from Eakin to argue that it was through autobiography that the fictional self emerged in relationship with others.

For McNee, Africa has always been part of the world even if it has been more dramatically integrated and connected in the last few hundred years. Africa was therefore not some authentic essence, nor was it true that all that remained after colonisation in Africa was *the West*. Individuals who shared collective experience and scholars needed to orient themselves to the individual in the context of the collective experience (McNee, 1997).

Berger (2010) also emphasised the need to get away from essentialist notions of African identity, and I get the sense would agree with Mbembe’s call for a ‘thickening of self-writing’ as the best place to begin when exploring what it means to be African today. He argued that the writing of one’s autobiography has been seen as a unique phenomenon of Western societies. It has been argued historically that Africans cannot write autobiography because their lives are too embedded in community to find an authentic voice (Berger, 2010; McNee, 1997). This view was universalised by some post-structuralist arguments – since no one can write an autobiography and that it has never been possible at any point in history. For Berger (2010) this was an illusion. Berger drew on the arguments of Gayatri Spivak, who took a view that everyone who answers the question, ‘Who am I?’ was engaged in exploring a problematised self. This would seem to be the foundational question for writing an autobiography. Having such a problematised self is certainly still common around Africa and South Africa.

I have mentioned that judging African autobiography always carries risks of interpreting the texts through a Eurocentric lens (Berger, 2010). Berger argued that before really judging and examining African text there was a need for a de-colonised theoretical frame. There was also a risk though in ‘othering’ African texts and making them a uniquely different form to ‘normal’ texts. What I take from Berger is the value of particularist orientations in enabling certain kinds of insights in any textual analysis. But a counter view is perhaps also useful to state – that there is also value in global

approaches even if located in somewhat Euro-American traditions. I point back to the equally problematic error in essentialist notions of identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Calhoun, 1994).

In my view, there is certainly a need to develop and sharpen sociological vocabulary to account for these contradictory and paradoxical tensions. Berger (2010) discussed how this might be possible amid the risk of African essentialism. One way through this complexity would be to explore unique elements of African discourse and to also explore and understand how they could be connected globally. Along these lines, African self-writing cannot be seen as separated from European self-writing. Interpreting African writing must be both specific and global. It is this overlapping pathway of connectedness and specificity that I seek to follow here.

2.3.4. Relevant issues from the 'outside-in' perspective

I have summarised some of the key scholarship of the self from the 'outside-in' perspective. In doing so, I have shown that 'the self' is at the centre of a set of dramatically important changing societal dynamics. Global grand theorists have pointed to a shift in the latter 1900s towards what has been conceptualised as late, reflexive or liquid modernity. These changes were conceptualised as less of a dramatic shift to a post-modern order and more as a further phase in modernity's evolution. The global context became more integrated, more plural, more fractured and more dis-located from both tradition and even modern expert routines. Capitalism was more advanced, demanding ever greater flexibility in production and labour. Choice expanded further into micro-dimensions of life.

These shifts have had important implications for the self. Unity of selfhood was now seen as a project of reflexive agency set against a globally mediated fragmentation and uncertainty. There were huge risks in this process since, without clear truths to hold onto, people had to navigate in unstable and fluid terrain. In the context of ontological insecurity and even 'subjective death', there were ever wider questions of 'Who to be?', 'How to act?' and 'What to do?'. The self had to be created rather than discovered. This was linked to lifestyle choices among many options. We were not who we were, but who we wished to be.

For Giddens, this reflexive project of the self required complex work to sustain a self-identity – understood as a coherent, yet continuously revised autobiographical narrative. Beck also highlighted the role of self-authoring a narrative biography, arguing that this was more important (even if somewhat fictive and fractured) than ever. Since the self could no longer master its surroundings, developing a story of one's life can provide coherence and enough certainty to make the next step. Sociological patterns and insight were still possible – more sociological analysis was needed, and this would enable human progress.

Bauman was more pessimistic in seeing the dangers of people being left to shoulder all the burdens on their own, without any social protection. He saw the emergence of a 'hunter' society where all that mattered was the ever-larger game (animals) you could shoot even as the environment was in crisis. He saw an increasingly urban society where conflict and segregationist urges emerged as different plural cultures rubbed up against one another in spaces constructed around fear.

From the perspective of those looking at the impact of globalisation on the self, identity confusion was now occurring as people were situated in new plural contexts. New conceptualisations of the self, such as the dialogic self were needed. Giddens and Beck pointed to the risks and rewards, the dangers, but also the emancipatory potential of this era. The self was an uncertain project. But emancipatory politics were possible.

After highlighting the orientation of this study towards late and multiple modernity, I turned to key strands of scholarship on African selfhood in modern contexts. Situating and writing of South African selves has been complicated by a Western and White 'gaze' (Gabay, 2018). There is a risk of seeing Africa through a Western lens, but there is also a risk that relevant Western-located theory is dismissed for being 'foreign' and not relevant, even when it is highly so. This tension is inherent in writing from anywhere in 'the South'. There is a range of theoretical opportunities for navigating this tension. One is to rather write of multiple modernities or vernacular modernities emerging at the nexus of innovation, tradition and contemporary social change. I have highlighted some of these approaches that see local modern conditions less as an outcome of the spread of something from the West and more as a product of plural co-creation. Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) wrote in this orientation but go even further. They argued for the need to understand African modernity in its own right – even when the African context is highly diverse. In doing this there was the possibility of turning theory on its head to theorise from Africa towards the West. They highlighted ways in which space for selfhood in Africa could be conceptually opened and may even provide models for post-modern or late modern selfhood in the West. For them, Africa has always been a site in which selfhood involved negotiating entrenched institutions that bound a life-course but also provided space for self-creation and self-development. Among the Southern Tswana there has also been a long period of negotiation between Western influences (*sekgoa*) and local custom (*setswana*) and a way of navigating different worlds through what they called 'autoplexy'.

My summary of some of Mbembe's (2002) thinking highlighted the need for a thickening of *self-writing* in Africa that begins to transcend colonial and post-colonial liberation politics as well as neo-traditional or racial essentialism. Who are Africans when not fighting against domination or turning to neo-native custom? Can African selfhood transcend historic limits? For Mbembe, victimhood

needed to give way to subjecthood. Essentialist nativism needed to give way to complex modern subjectivity. Race needed to give way to post-racial self-writing. Mbembe's position seems to me to emphasise the temporal and fractured. Can it also be more than a pastiche or collage of temporary and unstable lifestyling? The aim of this study is to contribute to these debates.

I have highlighted a variety of important perspectives from the 'outside-in'. I now turn, in the third focus area of the literature review, to the approaches to self and society that are located closer to the self with strong psychology and social-psychology orientation. I see these perspectives as writing 'inside-out'.

2.4. 'Inside-out' – self in the context of society

In this third focus area of the literature review I look at the self, not so much through the broader social pressures and structures that shape it, but on its own more intimate personal terms. I move therefore from the 'outside-in' to an 'inside-out' perspective. Using the analogy of *the spider and the web* (Nielson, 2013), I reduce the size of the frame. I focus on understanding *the spider*. Examinations of the 'self' could include issues of biology, unconscious dynamics, ego, cognition and personality. I generally ignore strictly intrapsychic theorising, biological approaches and psychological approaches focusing *only on the spider*; instead, I focus on theory and scholarship concerned with linking the micro-level psychology with the social context.

Much of the theorising within psychology has historically focused on intrapsychic dynamics. More recently, there has been a call to integrate the micro-identity focus of psychology with broader societal forces and concerns (Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Hammack, 2008). This was in order to better understand the person (McAdams, 1996). In this section, I describe these efforts to situate historically conceptualised intrapsychic processes in social and cultural context. I start by looking at the work of Mead (1934). I discuss his concepts of the 'I' and the 'Me' – the 'knower' and the 'known'. I also emphasise the importance of reflexivity.

I focus on identity and self-development models within the broad tradition of identity and developmental psychology (Erikson, 1950/1993; Kegan, 2009; McAdams, 1994). I see identity as an element of the self. The concept of the self is then a wider more inclusive concept than identity. I show why identity matters, and flesh out how I employ the concept as self-understanding or a situated subjectivity that emerges in answering the questions, 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?'.

2.4.1. Mead's 'I' and 'Me', and the value of reflexivity

A good place to start in the sociological tradition is with George Herbert Mead. Mead humanised the people who were often not at the heart of sociology by focusing on the processes of meaning-making and communication (Mead, 1934). He developed his arguments and theory in response and as a counter to the dominance of the behaviourism school at that time.

For Mead, what was important about humans is that they had minds. They could resolve difficulties and challenges by reflecting on what is happening and deciding on a range of options. They could also reflect on themselves – treating themselves as objects out there in the world. For Mead, this mind and this self rose out of the process of ongoing social interaction among people trying to cooperate together. What was important in this process were the common meanings and the

understanding of the experience of others. This ongoing process was what created society. In turn, this society shaped the same selves in an ongoing interaction (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 2008).

Mead advanced these ideas through the concepts of the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'I' was understood as the 'knower' that could comprehend the social 'Me' – the 'known'. The 'Me' arose through the organising of the experiences that others have about oneself. The 'I' and the 'Me' were distinct parts of the self (Mead, 1934). The 'I' gave the self a sense of freedom and of initiative. It is what made us distinct from other living creatures who cannot self-reflect. For Mead (1934) the "process of relating one's own organism to the others in the interactions that are going on, in so far as it is imported into the conduct of the individual with the conversation of the 'I' and the 'me', constitutes the self" (p 82). Dunn (1997) drew attention to the interesting similarities between Mead, as the philosophical source of symbolic interactionism in sociology, and post-structuralist views. Both had focused on the importance of language and the dynamic character of social life. Post-structuralists tended to reduce meaning and behaviour to the cultural effects of broader 'textual' practices. This upward influence emphasised discursive relations at the expense of subjectivity. In the analogy I draw on here, post-structuralists emphasise *the web at the expense of the spider*. Mead focused more on *the spider* and on intersubjectivity within a community of actors. Dunn (1997) saw Mead as attempting "to situate language and meaning in processes of social interaction, transforming the Hegelian-derived philosophical orthodoxy of subject/object relations into an intersubjective community of actors" (p 688). Since society was there when each of us is born, *the web came before the spider*. Society shaped the self. As the self developed, *the spider found many elements of the web already constructed*. Employing Mead's (1934) concepts required taking the structures, boundaries and firm relationships in society seriously. At the same time, it required seeing the ways that these structures and boundaries operated at more local levels – for example, in neighbourhoods and associational memberships.

For Stryker (2008), Mead's approach was not a theory that could be tested but rather a conceptual frame. The value of a conceptual frame is that it could be the source for theory building and theory testing – but a conceptual frame could not be tested empirically in and of itself. A frame was a manageable set of general assumptions. Stryker highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of Mead's conceptual frame. Mead's conceptualisations were limited when it came to race, gender, the divisions of labour, war, emotion, social conflict, as well as a range of social structures. This was somewhat understandable as Mead lived a century ago. His focus on meaning-making remained hugely useful. It suggested that a future can be created that is strongly associated with, but more than simply, a product of the past.

The Meadian frame opened up a conversation on the self 'as knower' and the self 'as known' – closely paralleling distinctions between 'process' and 'structure', as well as 'form' and 'content' (Côté & Schwartz, 2002). To self (as a verb) can be seen as to grasp experience as one's own. It can be associated with the feeling of agency as well as the sense of otherness. Some psychologists have called this selfing process the 'ego'. The studies of ego development suggest that it develops in the first 18 months of life and is sustained by a caring environment. It begins with an existential claim 'I exist' and then develops from there in its complexity. The 'Me' is the product of this selfing ego process. It is created by the 'I'. The 'Me' incorporates life-stories as its own. Through selfing, the person authors their story. The 'I' emerges and evolves. The 'Me' is produced (Mead, 1934).

Reflexivity, language and meaning-making have been at the heart of the social interactionist school of sociology. Mead (1934), together with other scholars like Blumer (1986), was a source of inspiration behind symbolic interactionism, an important school of sociology. In the symbolic interactionist approach, people transformed social worlds, engaging in social dialogue through reflexive processes. Symbolic interactionist sociology is the study of an interacting aware and reflexive species. There are many different schools of interactionism aligned with phenomenological, post-modern, structuralist, feminist, dramaturgical and other approaches. Interactionism's strength is in its variety of approaches and vibrant framing of social issues (Maines, 2001).

Interactionism has been associated with Mead's framing of the 'I' and the 'Me' (although sometimes this positions it unfairly with a micro-bias). Interactionists have tended to emphasise that people can think and that they possess self-awareness. This has led to work on selves, identities and cognition. Interactionists have taken seriously the way in which communication is central to human activity and hence have privileged language and symbolism. All forms of human activity take place in situations that involve institutions, nations, cultures, genders and races. Collectivities and human relationships are forms of action and therefore agency endowed (Maines, 2001). Arising out of these facts have emerged a set of three propositions:

- Human activity involves transactions of meaning. And thus meaning-making is central to sociology.
- Variation, change and uncertainty are intrinsic to group life. There is ordered flux.
- Society and the individual cannot be separated but are different phases of social processes. Interactionists seldom study one without the other.

Stories and memories and autobiographies have been seen in this school as always under construction (Maines, Sugrue & Katovich, 1983). When human beings have turned to the past, they symbolically interact with it in order to make claims on the present and the future. The past can then

be understood as bounded by the structures and reflections of people in the present. This brings me back to Mead's view of sociology through the situations of present-day interactions among groups of people. In this process, the past can be mythically created to direct future events or can be seen as an objective reality driving the present.

Callero (2003) argued that much of the post-modern perspective has not adequately engaged with Mead and the symbolic interactionist tradition despite potential links. This has been in spite of symbolic interactionism bring sociology's dominant theoretical approach to the self (Callero, 2003). Even though symbolic interactionism has been pragmatic in orientation and has stayed close to the ground and to real experience, it has not been employed extensively to understand the post-modern condition, a condition to which it is well suited. This was somewhat due to post-modern theories' emergence outside of sociology, in literary analysis and philosophy. It was also perhaps due to the ways in which symbolic interactionism has valued reason and rationality in contrast to the post-modern cleavage from the moorings of rational enlightenment. The critique has gone both ways, with many in the symbolic interactionist camp seeing little new or valuable in post-modern theorising (Callero, 2003).

Beyond symbolic interactionism, reflexivity and communication practices and routines have been at the heart of Archer's work (2000, 2007, 2012). For Archer, humanity has too often been reduced to being the outcome of society or alternatively society has been constructed only of individual human interaction. Reflexivity, understood as personal reflection and the internal conversation, could be seen as the way in which longer historical constraints and enablement of structure and culture were influenced and shaped by human agency. This was proposed as a more 'workable notion of humankind' that salvaged humanity's 'feet of clay' (Archer, 2000), ensuring human beings were not reduced to simply the outcomes of structural and cultural processes. Archer argued that through reflexivity, individuals shape structure. Archer made a strong case for the increasing importance for reflexivity in late modernity because people could no longer be guided by established routines. She identified four reflective stances towards society in the late modern period. The first she called 'communicative reflexives', whose internal conversations are immediately shared. They think and talk all at the same time. They tend to reproduce familial backgrounds. The second she calls 'autonomous reflexives', who are lone thinkers. They think, and then they act. They are not afraid to move away from initial context and can be seen as individualists. The third are 'meta-reflexives', who are idealists and critically reflect on their reflections. They can be understood as people who think, and then keep thinking. They tend to be contextually unsettled and, on the move – always searching. Fourthly, there are the 'fractured reflexives', who are individuals with broken lives whose powers for reflexivity have been temporarily suspended. They tend to be passive agents at the mercy of their

social environment. Archer (2012) saw the most hope in meta-reflexives, who show compassion for the underdog and the globally deprived and refuse the status quo. Archer made a case for communicative reflexives being on the decline. This was due to geographic mobility. It was also due to higher education levels and greater cultural diversity operating against contextual continuity. This increased the likelihood that people experienced a changed world from the one in which they started their lives. She argued that in societies of constant change, there was a 'reflexive imperative' where social guidelines no longer offered much help in orienting choices and practices.

2.4.2. How do I perceive the world? The self as 'knower'

I understand much of this discussion of self and society, in the Median tradition, to be about understanding *the knower* and *the known*. I see connections here with a more contemporary theory of the self, developed by Robert Kegan, a constructive developmental theory of the 'evolving self' (Kegan, 1982). Kegan was concerned with the difference between what people are subject to and what they can conceptualise outside of that subjective position through more objective processes. He was also concerned with the relationship between individual autonomous dimensions of the self and more embedded socialised self-dynamics.

Kegan (2009) saw contemporary culture (in diverse modern societies) as a kind of school where all of the adult roles are the equivalents of school or university courses we were enrolled in. We had a demanding schedule with courses in working, parenting, partnering and living in an increasingly diverse society. He asked what it took to succeed at these courses. And he found that if we were to do well in this school, then the 'curriculum of modern life' required us to learn not just new knowledge but to continuously transform the ways we saw the world and our place in it. This was necessary if we were going to be able to productively participate in more complex and expansive ways. The inference was that a person could gain greater levels of influence over their circumstances (the known) by transforming their thinking paradigm (the knower).

Kegan (2009) developed a theory of learning and action that saw higher orders of mind developing as people shifted something that was the subject of their knowing to becoming the object of their knowing. This theory was based on a constructivist developmental perspective. In this approach, a problem moved from 'having us' to us 'having it'. It moved from being hidden to the knower, to becoming visible to the knower. This relates to the analogy of unknowingly wearing and then taking off a pair of sunglasses. While wearing the glasses unawares, we are in a lower state of knowing, we are trapped in seeing the world in certain limited ways. The 'sunglasses have us'. We are captive to a way of seeing the world. In the new state, with an awareness that we are looking through a set of glasses, we now 'have the sunglasses'. In taking off the sunglasses, a new way of seeing and knowing

has emerged that is more expansive. Human capacity for operating in greater complexity may be increased through three particular subject–object movements, shifting from socialised, to autonomous and then to self-authoring stages of mental development (Kegan, 2009).

For Kegan (2009), the first stage of adult development was the interpersonal stage (late teenage to early adulthood) in which a person has to learn to conform to social needs and expectations – they cannot behave like a child with only their own interests anymore. He called this the socialised stage. The self, to fully develop, needed to find its own autonomy and self-expression – this is a more autonomous stage. In this second stage, the self can define its own agenda and follow its own self-defined ideology. The final stage in Kegan’s model was the inter-individual or self-transforming stage of development in which the self recognises his or her view of the world as only one of many – and learns to connect with others in a pluralistic social context of multiple perspectives and even paradigms. This is the self-authoring stage. I argue here that Kegan theorises that, in the Median tradition, the ‘I’ moves back and forth between the poles of independence and inclusion, but in doing so, comes to expand its sense of what is the ‘Me’.

I also see the three adult developmental stages of Kegan (2009) connecting in interesting ways with the reflexive patterns described by Archer (2007, 2012). In Kegan’s framework, the socialised mind has similarities to the communicative reflexive type of Archer’s. Communicative reflexives as socialised minds are well adapted to certain circumstances, but inadequately adapt to a changing world and are unable to exert their own autonomous agency. The self-authoring mind has similarities with the autonomous reflexives. Autonomous reflexives may be able to exert their own view on the world and delink themselves from the values and norms of their upbringing, but they cannot reflect on their own views and the dialectic between ideologies. Then the self-transforming mind in Kegan’s framework has similarities with the meta-reflexives of Archer. People with a self-transforming mind can reflect on their own views of the world and deconstruct and reconstruct them.

I have shown how Mead is a useful starting point to open up a conversation on the self and have shown the importance of reflexivity. I have made some early connections with sociological theorising around the nature of reflexivity (Archer, 2007, 2012). I have also shown how Mead’s ‘I’ and ‘Me’ – the knower and the known, can be linked to recent theorising in developmental psychology around subject–object transitions and higher orders of complex thinking (Kegan, 2009).

2.4.3. Who am I? The self as ‘known’

Moving to the self as ‘known’, the question ‘Who am I?’ has become a serious concern for scholarship, especially over the last 50 years. Answering this question, clarifies one’s ‘identity’. Kegan

of course, was not the first to put forward a developmental theory of the self. He built on other psychologists who focused on child and adult development (Erikson, 1950/1993; McAdams, 1994). Erikson pioneered an 8-stage model of child and adult development through the life-course. Each stage or chapter of life was defined by a central challenge – for example, *trust* versus *mistrust* or *initiative* versus *guilt*. Importantly, for the context of this study, Erikson was one of the first psychologists to theorise around the concept of identity. For Erikson, the development and negotiation of identity was a central challenge of late adolescence and young adulthood. As people grew into early adulthood, they were required to answer the question, ‘Who am I?’. This was the fifth stage in his model. In this stage of identity formation, the person needed to call on the material from the previous four stages (McAdams, 1994).

As the child transitions to adulthood, new challenges emerged. “In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, adolescents have to refight many of the battles of earlier years ... they are ever ready to appoint idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity” (Erikson, 1950/1993, p. 261). The central tension in this stage was between identity and role confusion. The kind of realisation emerges that one is not a child anymore. But who is one then? This stage was related to cognitive development. Jean Piaget believed that, when reaching adolescence, a person entered a cognitive stage of formal operations, where they were able to think about themselves in abstract terms. The person became able to imagine hypothetical ideals, such as the ideal self, family and society. The possibility of alternative lives became clear. The person then became concerned with who their ‘real self’ was.

The two crucial questions of this identity stage have been proposed as ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How do I fit into the adult world?’ (McAdams, 1994). This second question focused on the choices available in society and the availability of roles, occupations and even value systems. In Western society, the person is increasingly pressured to go beyond simply conforming. They are expected to define their own path recognising the opportunities and negotiating the constraints available in the social context.

2.4.4. Identity – what is it?

There is a lot to say when reflecting on the concept of identity. What is it? Why does it matter? Over the last 20 years of the last century, concepts of the self and identity moved into the heart of debates in the social sciences. Calhoun (1994) has argued for why identity needed to be a fundamental concern for social science. The long-standing focus on material inequalities now needed to be joined by an equally prominent concern with inequalities which related to the question of identity (Fraser, 2003). Identity has been seen as an increasingly plural reality in many contemporary

societies (Bond, 2006) and new terms, such as subjectivity, have been proposed in theorising (Prinsloo & De la Rey, 1999). Self has been seen as an umbrella term for different dimensions of subjectivity and individual human lives. Identity has been seen as one form of conceptual subjective self. It is a way of charactering some essential elements of ourselves. Identities may erode and evolve, but we remain ourselves as long as consciousness continues (Eakin, 1999).

The concept of identity has been used somewhat differently in sociology and the social sciences when compared with psychology. In psychology, identity has generally been seen as something that an individual possesses. In sociology, it has generally been seen as something that is held in common. I see the field of 'Identity Studies' as more sociological in nature and therefore concerned with group life and the ways in which commonly held roles and labels in the social sphere shape realities (Côté & Levine, 2002).

In sociology, the study of identity has drawn on symbolic interactionism, the sociology of knowledge and interpretive psychology, structural functionalism and critical theory. I have already mentioned Mead's role as foundational for the later symbolic interactionist school – and I have described important elements of that Median frame. Other sociological approaches to the self have also been developed. The Structural-Functionalist perspective has placed social identity in the context of society's increasingly diverse and pluralised institutions. As this has happened, identities have become diverse through centrifugal pressures. This has introduced a range of challenges for identity maintenance. Some of these were described by sociologists, such as Durkheim (1897/2006), as anomie or normlessness. Critical theorists, through the work of Habermas (1984/2004), have seen identity development through speech acts at the level of communicative action and embedded in social institutions.

For Calhoun (1994), identity was an essential concept to understand contemporary life. And it has become harder to establish and maintain 'who we are' under modern conditions. Establishing and maintaining 'who we are' always take place in relationship with others. As demonstrated earlier, Beck has argued for the increasing individualisation of social life, while Giddens has shown the importance of identity projects where people are required to choose their social location and the ways in which they make meaning of the world. So, while establishing and maintaining who we are still takes place with others, our relationships with others can no longer be linked to kin or to nation or to established mutually shared experiences, and this makes identity formation and maintenance complex (Calhoun, 1994).

Identity scholarship highlights the tension around unity and difference. Identity can be claimed to be solid and firm as well as deconstructed, different, intersectional, fractured and fluid. It has been

argued that the issue of recognition and belonging is at the heart of identity. Identity has linked intimate and personal self-oriented processes and societal pressures (Calhoun, 1994).

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) agreed that identity mattered but have argued forcefully against the current scholarly employment of a broad concept of identity. They argued that the concept of identity is expected to do too much and yet is not sufficient for the task. For a concept that has been used so widely, they have shown that sociologists can do better. To be clear, they argued that 'identity' matters. Identity politics, for example, had become a massive political phenomenon that needed to be understood. But identity had become a term that was used too loosely in their view. They argued against perspectives that placed undue weight in the ways in which identities are fluid and multiple. They believed this introduced the risk that the very essentialist elements of identities were not properly conceptualised. Specific dimensions then went unstudied and not properly theorised. To understand, for example, something as important as 'identity politics', a clear understanding of the category of 'identity' was needed (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Identity has become one of the most used concepts in social science – yet Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argued that it does *not do any actual work*. Prominent theorists generally acknowledged identity as a blurred concept but still saw it as essential. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) critiqued whether it was so essential after all. They were most concerned with the reification of the term. Reification was defined as 'the way a term that was not conceptually sound was held up to be a fundamental truth'. They compared it to the term 'race' or 'nation' to illustrate how these terms could be used in practical actions by people and groups. These terms have force and power and, in this sense, exist but 'race' and 'nation' have been shown to be socially and historically constructed and imagined. These terms were therefore not used without referring to their limits and were seen as insufficient on their own to be used for substantive analytic ends.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argued that "Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of 'identity' saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary" (p. 2). Identity has been used historically to indicate permanence amongst change, and unity amidst diversity. Identity was then being used to describe so many different things. It has been used to describe non-instrumental modes of action, self-understanding and the impossibility of self-understanding, core aspects of selfhood and the denial of those core aspects, group belonging and group affiliation. Emerging sociological approaches to identity, reflected new emphases on social constructivism, reflexivity and power. These approaches used the term 'identity' in ways

fundamentally different to others who believed people possessed a more essentialist stable core. This was *a problem* as it limited conceptual clarity!

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) showed that the term 'identity' was not needed in sociological analysis. They broke up its usage and suggested alternative language for the analytical work that identity did. They broke up the concept of identity into three different terminology sets:

1. *Identification and categorisation*: this showed the ways in which individuals came to position themselves as tightly entangled with different people, groups or issues and in opposition to others.
2. *Commonality, connectedness and groupness*: this could be used to indicate the ways in which groups came to function around unitary essences and collective action.
3. *Self-understanding*: this could be used to indicate a dispositional situated subjectivity, pointing to who one was, and where one was located in relational terms. It pointed to how one might act taking this into account.

Identity in this study is closest to self-understanding. Self-understanding can be cognitive and emotional. This term does not refer explicitly to a rational self – self-understanding can occur on the psycho-analysts couch, be spiritually committed, fractured or intersectional. Self-understanding can be stable or fluid. Self-understanding does not capture strong conceptualisations of one's essential identity, nor does it properly capture the way others might see someone. These dimensions can be explored through the two terms mentioned earlier. The very emotionally charged elements of the concept of identity, for example, might be best captured by 'identification' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000)

I see the two first terms of '*identification and categorisation*' and '*commonality, connectedness and groupness*' as more strongly linked to the analysis of identity politics. There are important debates on the merits of identity politics (especially as contrasted with perspectives arguing for strong cosmopolitanism). And there is substantive engagement on the best vocabulary to achieve this (Brubaker, 2003; Calhoun, 2003). I do not deal with identity politics, nor do I focus on identification, categorisation, commonality, connectedness or groupness in a substantive way in this study. I employ the concept of identity as self-understanding and situated subjectivity. I see this self-understanding as one's identity. Identity develops in response to two fundamental human questions: 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?'. I draw these questions from Côté (2000), Côté and Levine (2002) and McAdams (1994).

2.4.5. *Identity and life stages and types*

Identity scholarship is generally seen as starting in the 1950s. Erikson's fifth stage of the life journey involved the development and attainment of an identity. I now elaborate on this theory and other stage models and typologies. Erikson's sixth stage involved the negotiation of self and intimacy – this was the task of early adulthood. The seventh stage involved negotiation of generativity versus stagnation. Generativity was both productive and creative. This was the phase of life in which something needed to be created. This included parenting and community involvement, and other activities that were 'larger than self' and could live beyond the person. The final eighth stage involved the negotiation of ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1950/1993). In this closing stage, the aging adult looked back on life and accepted choices made and consequences experienced. There could be satisfaction or a struggle to accept the way life panned out (McAdams, 1994).

Erikson (1950/1993) theorised that the challenge of forming a stable identity and transitioning to adulthood involved an interplay between the social and the psychic. For Erikson, identity was about continuity over time and the sense of difference from others. Erikson's work on identity involved the subjective psychological dimension (ego identity and its sense of spatial and temporal coherence), the personal dimension (involving the behaviours and character repertoire) that connects people with others, and the social dimension (connecting to roles in the community). Erikson explored the nature of identity crisis as occurring when these three dimensions do not come together or are in transition. The resolution of an identity crisis occurred "when a relatively firm sense of ego identity is developed, behaviour and character become stabilised, and community sanctioned roles are acquired" (Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 15). The self needed a strong enough ego-identity to form a stable sense of how the self related to itself. But there was also the negotiating of a sense of how one fits in with others.

Finally, there was the emerging global challenge of how this could be done when relationships between and among others were in flux – how could people find a stable fit into the world when the world was always changing? Erikson coined the term 'identity crisis' to illustrate the common difficulty he found with many of his patients struggling with defining themselves. They could not properly answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?' amid a rapidly shifting social terrain (Côté & Levine, 2002). It has been argued that identity has become 'the spiritual problem of our time' because of the challenges associated with forming a clear response to these questions. In traditional times answering these questions was easy. In more contemporary times the complexity of finding one's unique self has increased. There are very strong links to Giddens (1991) in this regard. Identity is about 'self-definition'. This definitional process has moved from obligation (in traditional times) to choice (in modern and accelerated in late modern times).

Humans are not accustomed to living under such conditions – where something so important is left to them to figure out. It is a complex project with uncertain results.

Similarities between Kegan's self-transforming stage and Erikson's intimacy and generativity levels are noted. My own view is that the key difference between Kegan and Erikson is that Erikson sees the teenage years and young adulthood as a period of finding one's own self and identity, while Kegan sees it as a period of learning and conforming to social norms and expectations. There is not necessarily a contradiction in that one's identity is both personally defined *and* socially associated.

Researchers have built similar and more detailed frameworks, expanding on Erikson's idea of adult generativity. Kotre (1999) has called for a movement away from narrow ideas of self-actualisation and back towards older ideas of provision and begetting. He asked, what is the point in being self-actualised if you still die? He outlined a set of steps as part of 'the way' towards generativity, including talking to your past, stopping the damage, finding a voice of your own, blending that voice with another's, creating, selecting, letting go, and responding to outcome. Kotre (1999) identified four types of generativity listed as: biological, parental, technical, and cultural.

McAdams (1994) developed his own model with seven features of generativity. Important elements included the initial demands placed on people to care for latter generations, the internal desire to outlive oneself, the belief in the goodness of humanity, the resulting selfless offering and late life review of one's acts. Wilber (2000) theorised around developmental life-stages and collective stages of communal and tribal life. This was an extension of his broader theory of existence and universal development. There were a number of higher order levels of consciousness represented in Wilbur's framework of spiral dynamics. In the context of this study, what is relevant is that although proposed as different to other frameworks, a number of the stages of early adult development involved a similar vocabulary to the stages of other models reviewed here. For example, there are some similarities in Wilbur's (2000) framework with Kegan (2009) in the lower order emergence of tribal allegiances, social commitments and local loyalties. Then there is the later and high order emergence of rational thought and the ability to define oneself differently to the 'tribe' and the community of origin. For Wilbur, this achievement was not the highest level of development. The self then returned to community and overcomes its own egotistical needs and potential self-focus. The self in this stage of Wilbur's framework became able to comprehend pluralistic notions and multiple paradigms.

Marcia (1966) built on Erikson's work with the suggestion of four identity statuses (or stages). Marcia saw the choices around identity development as involving four possible pathways that arise from two variable factors – exploration and commitment. The first three statuses arose as a result of

failing to achieve the ideal of a specific identity. This happened for three main reasons. The first status was 'identity diffusion' in which the person did not explore options and choices, and also never made a commitment to any of the options available. The second status was where the person did not explore and rather committed to unquestioned assumptions from childhood – this was called 'foreclosure'. Foreclosures were the best behaved of the statuses (McAdams, 1994). The third status was where the person did explore options and was deeply questioning, but never made a choice and could never resolve the options and choices. Marcia called this stage 'moratorium'. The final and ideal status was where the person forms an identity. The person explores and may face deep choices and a crisis. But the person was able to make choices and commit to an identity. He called this status 'identity achievement'.

Other scholars have also built on Erikson's original work. For Côté and Levine (2002), the study of identity (in psychology) followed two traditions: one focusing on identity in the context of development and stage transition (development psychology). The second tradition focuses on identity in the context of self-maintenance (self-psychology). As discussed, the foundations of the identity literature were built by Erikson (1950/1993). I have already highlighted this. I have also discussed his developmental psychology, among others. The search for identity is a modern phenomenon in the sense that the questions, 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?' become important for people to resolve when selves (and cultures and society as a whole) become less beholden to tradition. For Côté and Levine (2002), forming one's identity was strongly associated with a healthy journey to generative adulthood. They described the tension between self and society resulting in identity confusion, alienation, fragmentation and the loss of a sense of authenticity. They believe that there is a widespread deficit of identity in society. They discussed evidence that up to half of adults remain in foreclosure or diffusion identity statuses. They called for more research to assess the adult trajectory and what arrests development. Côté and Levine (2002) developed a five-strategy typology for identity formation. These strategies were refusers, drifters, searchers, guardians and resolvers. Their approach and these five strategies are described below.

For most of human history, the average person assumed the roles that the culture, society and family required of them. There was no choice in the matter. If they did not do so, they would be sanctioned by the community in some way. While power and authority allowed some people more leeway in this regard, their options were quite limited (Côté & Levine, 2002). Because identity formation in traditional contexts was straightforward, few problems emerged. Given the complexity of modernity, human beings began to struggle with the choices of who to be and how to relate to society. Côté and Levine (2002) saw the formation of identity as profoundly linked with the journey

to adulthood in late modern society. As mentioned, they found five identity strategies, namely refusers, drifters, searchers, guardians and resolvers.

Refusers developed a set of self-defeating cognitive schema for avoiding the entry into adulthood. Through this they persisted with childlike behaviours and mindsets, and remained dependent on others, refusing to develop work skills. They often be-friend enablers. While this strategy may have existed for long period of time, it has been increasing in late modernity. Drifters were similar to refusers in that they were not integrated into the community. Unlike refusers, they may have had the financial and psychological resources to form a healthy adult identity, but they did not use these resources in a consistent manner. This was more a form of rebellion against the structures imposed on them. They may have felt like they were being asked to 'toe the line' and so avoided 'selling out'. For Côté and Levine (2002), this strategy was also increasing in late modernity. Searchers, unlike the previous two, had not given up on the search for identity. Instead, they just could not seem to find a community in which they could fit in and remain satisfied on an ongoing basis – they were therefore doomed to an endless journey with no destination. The guardian strategy involved the premature adoption of established routines and family structures, without exploring and therefore involving no substantive choice and agency. The resolver was someone who actively engaged themselves in the search and exploration of themselves and their place in society and who, despite the immense challenges associated with the anomic character of late modernity, took advantage of the context. These strategies were expected to exist across race, class and gender, although potentially in different proportions. Some pressure to search and explore was expected to be placed on all selves, considering the fluid and uncertain context in which people become adults.

2.4.6. Social Identity Theory, Identity Theory and Personal Identity

Before concluding this 'inside-out' section of the literature review, I briefly highlight a few additional approaches to identity. I start by examining Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Identity Theory (IT). Defining one's identity can be linked to role identification and group belonging. SIT is concerned with groups or categories while IT is concerned with roles. Stets and Burke (2000) saw a substantial overlap between IT and SIT. They showed that 'salience' is important in both theories. Also, in both SIT and IT, the self is reflexive in that it can categorise itself in relation to other social categories and identification.

For Stets and Burke (2000), the SIT (through group) could be compared to the organic form of social integration analysed by Durkheim (1893/2014). Durkheim (1893/2014) discussed social solidarity in the context of societal transformation and the greater individualising pressures of modern life. As Durkheim wrote, "How does it come about that the individual, whilst becoming more autonomous,

depends ever more closely upon society? How can he, at the same time, become more of an individual and yet more linked to society? ... It has seemed to us that what resolved this apparent antinomy was the transformation of social solidarity that arises from the ever-increasing division of labour" (2014, p. xv).

IT (through role) corresponded more to the mechanical form of social integration. A full understanding of society requires building in both this organic/group and mechanical/role element because each element links people to society in different ways. In SIT, this process has been called self-categorisation. In IT, the process has been called identification. Through these processes it has been argued, an identity is formed. In SIT, a social identity has been linked to the person's knowledge that they belong to a particular group. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are characterised as the in-group and those different are characterised as the out-group. It has been argued that there are thus two processes involved – self-categorisation and social comparison (Spears & Otten, 2012).

SIT has emerged as a clear reality through experiments in minimal group affiliation. These experiments brought together groups of boys who were identical in all aspects, except that they were allocated into Group A and Group B. They were then required to allocate resources among the groups in a way that would not impact them personally. Despite the 'minimal' reinforcement of group allegiance – they allocate the limited resources in differentiated ways – advantaging their own group (the in-group) and disadvantaging the other group (the out-group) even when there was no competition for resources. Further scholarship extended this work and theorised that people have a fundamental need for affiliation, assimilation and security. The solidarity that was desired required that the in-group was differentiated sufficiently from the out-group. Groups that were too homogenous failed to meet these human needs (Bornman, 1999).

There are important questions around how economic factors shape group-level psychological dynamics within SIT in particular in the context of this study, how upward mobility, urbanisation and positive economic prospects shape social identity. In liberal circles it has long been believed that, with economic prosperity, the above processes of group categorisation and favouritism would diminish in importance. The argument has been that if we were all wealthy or had enough, it would be possible to create the cosmopolitan ideal of a world citizen. As already stated, it has already been shown that competition is not necessary for these processes to function. Yet, it may heighten these dynamics, especially around status concerns (Bornman, 1999) or during an economic downturn. Relative deprivation has been found to heighten inter-group conflict. Urbanisation has brought more diverse people into contact with one another. This has increased competition for limited

economic opportunities. Newcomers are likely to be scapegoated in this process. Work segregation also heightens the feelings of 'us' and 'them'. Upward mobility can often heighten tensions, especially as one group advances relative to another (Bornman, 1999).

Within SIT, the belief that economic development will reduce inter-group conflict has rested on the assumption that market forces tended to create a society of increased individualism. In the absence of market-based opportunities, groups are forced to compete for opportunities through the state. While there may be some truth to this, it has been found not to eradicate these forces entirely. Group mobilisation has been found to exist even in the most advanced and economically prosperous societies. But increased economic opportunities for education and travel do correspond with an increase in liberal attitudes and values, as well as reduced ethnic group identification. This has been found to be the case for Afrikaners, for example. Economic prosperity can therefore be seen as a mechanism to reduce group conflict, but this should be seen and understood as limited alongside symbolic and cultural influences (Bornman, 1999). Economic growth in Africa therefore needs to be understood alongside processes of rapid urbanisation – which can accompany conflict (Patel & Burkle, 2012).

In IT, categorisation depends on a named and classified world and specifically the roles within it. The naming of roles invokes meanings and expectations with regard to the behaviour of yourself and others. In IT, the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role and the incorporation of the associated meanings and expectations into oneself.

In IT, roles are negotiated. Counter roles become important (for example, wife and husband) as do interaction as one performs a role. IT emphasises 'interconnected uniqueness'. Role identities maintain the complex interrelatedness of social structures.

Personal identity (PI) has been used to refer to the self's own goals and desires as separate from the group. One's PI has been conceptualised as the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual – operating across a range of situations. Both person and role identities need to be maintained. The situation depends on whether SI or PI is activated. PI has been understood as 'who I am as a person' across multiple groups and roles (Stets, 1995). It has been conceptualised as that part of a person's identity that it is not tied to circumstance and is not aimed at sustaining social structure or acting out a role. It is involved in personal action at every level. Examples of PI include one's self-esteem ('I am a confident person'), and one's sense of control over the environment ('I believe I can shape outcomes around me'). PI is not a personality trait. Traits are more inherent to the person (Stets, 1995). Personality traits are seen as deeply entrenched habits and not a function

of self-control. Central then to the idea of PI is the idea of control and feedback. Identities are maintained through a feedback process.

In summary, in SIT, who one is, is ‘who I am in relationship to other groups’. In IT, who one is, is ‘who I am through the roles I occupy’. In PI who one is, is ‘who I am as a person across multiple groups and roles’. In these frameworks people can define their identities in three different ways – by group belonging (through SIT), by role adoption (through IT), or in ways that are more uniquely personal (through PI). Although these bodies of theory are not the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge their value as adjacent frameworks to the late modern and narrative identity approach taken here. This concludes the section on the ‘inside-out’ perspective on identity.

2.4.7. Relevant issues from the ‘inside-out’ perspective

I have shifted from *how the web shapes the spider* to theorising around *the spider itself and how it interacts with the web*. I have highlighted the key issues. I first highlighted Mead’s theorising and the prominence of the concepts of the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ interacting in a reflexive process. This approach has been at the heart of the symbolic interactionist approach (Stryker, 2008). It has been concerned with meaning-making in a pragmatic orientation with real experience (Callero, 2003). In this approach, people have been seen as reflexive beings who, through this process, transform themselves and their social worlds (Côté & Levine, 2002). I have shown that reflexivity is therefore a core mechanism in which agency and structure interact – especially under late modern conditions (Archer, 2007).

I have shown that there are a variety of ways of theorising the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’. I highlighted the importance of transforming the subjective perspective to an objective reality in order to navigate the dynamics of late modern life (Kegan, 1982, 2009). I have shown how the question of ‘Who am I?’ has become a serious focus area of psychological scholarship.

I have introduced the concept of identity. This concept came to the fore through the work of Erikson (1950/1993) that conceptualised ‘identity’ and documented the increase of people facing an ‘identity crisis’. Identity theorising has been further developed by a number of theorists and I have highlighted some interesting elements of these approaches (Côté & Levine, 2002; Kotre, 1999; Marcia, 1966; McAdams, 1994).

I have highlighted some important critiques of the concept of identity as being too broad a concept to actually *do any work*! I have shown that an improved vocabulary is needed to understand the very important issues that identity points to (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). I agree with Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and building on this alignment I specify that my use of identity in this study is in terms

of self-understanding and situated subjectivity. Drawing from others I see this identity developing in response to two fundamental human questions: 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?' (Côté, 2000; Côté & Levine, 2002; McAdams, 1994). I have also emphasised the efforts of Côté and Levine (2002) who have concerned themselves with the hugely important task of bridging the sociological and psychological approaches to identity. They have focused on how individually different people interact with social structure.

In closing, I have also shown three other important ways in which identity has been theorised through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT), Identity Theory (IT) and Personal Identity (PI) (Bornman, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000).

2.5. Narrative and identity

2.5.1. *The narrative turn*

In the first two focus areas of this literature review, I looked ‘outside-in’ from *the web to the spider*. In doing so I showed how late, reflexive, liquid, multiple and vernacular modernity offer important perspectives on the challenges people face at the current moment in history. In the third focus area of the literature review, I looked at how we can think about how *the spider lives in the web*. In doing so, I highlighted the key elements of the scholarship on the sociology of the self and further highlighted scholarship on the important concept of identity.

I now turn, in the fourth focus area of the literature review to the issues of narrative in sociology and the social sciences. Narrative can also be used from the ‘outside-in’ or the ‘inside-out’. *The spider is embedded in a narrative web of stories* – it is shaped by the culturally powerful stories and story elements. *And the spider is also an author – it tells its own stories of the web*. The stories the spider writes have the potential to shape its own character and that of the web.

While there have been many ways to theorise about self and society, in this I now show the value of taking a narrative approach and I connect this to identity concerns. There has been a broad narrative turn within the social sciences (Maines, 1993). Narrative scholarship has developed into a large area of theorising over the last 30 years (Hancock, 2014). In this period, it has been shown that narrative is one of the fundamental ways that the human experience and identity is organised (Bruner, 1991; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams, 1996). There is now a wide range of substantive scholarship on an autobiography, memory and identity from a narrative approach. In this section, I highlight key issues from this body of scholarship.

Until relatively recently, sociology had been a late adopter of narrative studies, despite its adoption in psychology, history and philosophy (Ezzy, 1998). Maines (1993) differentiated between storytelling and narratives. Storytelling is an overt, conversational activity, and narrative structures are cultural frames that can prefigure some stories¹⁰ – this was even as narratives could be understood as sociological phenomena (Maines, 1993). Maines argued that the incorporation of narrative into sociology is part of a broader turn towards a post-positivist era. It was hoped that narrative scholarship in the sociological tradition could open up new spaces for understanding group life.

¹⁰ I use both narrative and story interchangeably because the distinction between what is spoken and what is embedded and unobserved is not a crucial distinction for this study. I do not want the reader to draw too many conclusions from the use of one term or the other.

Within the narrative approach, some common assumptions (across different disciplines) have been that stories and storytelling are ubiquitous and that most societal activities, if not all, require some form of narrative. Narratives need to be understood not only as structures but also as social acts. Maines (1993) took what he called a Simmelian approach that identified three minimum criteria for a narrative. The first criterion was that events had to be selected from the past for focus and commentary. The second was that those elements had to be transformed into some form of story. Stories require plot, setting and characterisation that confer “structure, meaning, and context to the events studied” Maines (1993, p. 21). This criterion was fundamental. Thirdly, a temporal ordering of events had to be established so that questions of how and why could be asked. Narratives needed to be understood as representations of ‘unobservables’ in a time–space configuration. There are a variety of other definitions and approaches to what constitutes a story or a narrative. One feature of narrative is that there is often a beginning, a middle and an end. There is a thoughtful sequence and sense of timing of events. Then the sequence needs to add up to make something significant. There needs to be a meaningful connection. Narratives or stories (used both interchangeably as mentioned) have also been conceptualised as involving selectivity. They are not objectivist depictions of reality. There needs to be a rearranging and a simplification (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997).

Maines (1993) made five propositions upon which to build a narrative sociology. Firstly, it was important to realise there was always the potential for storytelling as soon as people came together – because all socialised humans are storytellers. Secondly, it was important to start by acknowledging that almost all speech acts have some element of narrative within them. Thirdly, there are always different interpretations of events and therefore different narratives of the ‘same’ reality. Fourthly, there was conflict and cooperation in narrative dynamics. And lastly, all narratives needed to be understood as inherently incomplete due to human ambiguity and differences in linguistic competence.

Narrative analysis has developed into a scholarly tradition with interests at the individual, organisational and societal level. For example, at a more personal level, a large body of work on narrative and personal change has been developed (Sommer, Baumeister & Stillman, 1998). In psychology, narrative therapy has been used to explore a dominant problem-narrative – a narrative that is limiting (Swart, 2013). In the psychology tradition, problem-stories have been conceptualised as powerful in that they constrain the possibilities of becoming something different. They define how we socially construct the world. Changing them can therefore change how we respond to shape the world around us. In this approach, the client has been required to look for experiences that disconfirm that narrative and is then asked to explore the possibility of alternative more empowering

narratives. These alternative narratives are then given a name. At the heart of this process is the idea that ‘a word opens up a world’ (Swart, 2013, p. 1). A number of scholars have explored the therapeutic role of narrative, especially focusing on how people can tell different stories about their past (White, 2007).

At the organisational level there is now a large body of work on narrative and organisational change (Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009; Browning, 1991; Reissner, 2010). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) together with Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) have shown that narrative identity interacts with role expectations and role change. Life-story has also been found to be an important resource for leadership development (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

In closing, in late modernity, selves use a range of resources in the process of self-construction. In this sense, the spider does not objectively tell stories about itself and the web – the spider uses the stories *that pre-exist* in the web to construct itself. By this analogy I mean that these stories or narrative resources should not be thought of as drawn from an individually created toolkit. Instead, they should be seen as part of a cultural toolkit that developed in a social setting. For Maines, self-narratives are autobiographical stories that draw on cultural frames (Maines, 2001).

2.5.2. Narrative identity

I have illustrated the ‘narrative turn’, in which sociological phenomena have been seen as constituted of stories (Maines, 1993). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the notion of the self as storyteller had come to the fore. This was inspired by a literary theory and new theories of narrative cognition. Selves and individual circumstances started to be understood as the product of narrative – irrespective of what was deemed ‘real’. Because of this history, *narrative* has been historically associated with literature, and *identity* associated with psychology. Until around 20 years ago, the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘identity’ were seldom considered together (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001).

It had previously been assumed that “Literature is a wilderness, psychology is a garden” (Albright, 1994, p. 19). A wall separated them. Literature, the domain of narrative, had been the domain of undomesticated nature with all its irregularities and myths and unfathomable complexity. In this frame, the wilderness cannot ever be properly organised – while psychology, the historic domain of identity, had been concerned with trying to more methodically engage and organise nature. It was concerned with ‘gardening’ methods and ‘cleanliness’. There have been strong efforts to break down the wall and link the garden and the wilderness through the concept of narrative identity (Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1991; Somers, 1994). For Ricoeur (1991), the problem with the conceptualisation of

identity at that time was that it was used indiscriminately to refer to both *sameness* and to *the self*¹¹. Sameness meant that X and Y were fundamentally alike. Self was understood as overlapping with sameness when the concept of time was introduced – then the self could be said to remain the same as time passes. People change over time through the plot of a story.

Biography and life-story have been theorised as intimate to our identity and how the self is understood (Ezzy, 1998; Linde, 1993; McAdams, 1996). By acquiring a biography, it has been argued, we become a person (Maines, 1993) and through biography, we shape our lives (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Somers (1994) highlighted how important identity is as a political, social and personal phenomenon. But she believed the concept was lacking without a narrative dimension. She introduced a narrative perspective to the study of identity in order to specifically deal with some of the weaknesses of a time-less and setting-less concept of identity. Key to narrative for Somers (1994) was ‘emplotment’, which brings sequence, place, character and evaluation to a context. She emphasised the importance of *narrative requirements* and the *relational setting* to properly understanding identity. She also identified four narrative categories: ontological narratives, public narratives, meta-narratives and conceptual narrativity.

Bruner (1990) was foundational in the development of the early narrative approach. He criticised cognitive psychology of its failure to properly understand the true nature of people. Cognitive psychology had been a radical response to the limits of Freud’s psychology of the subconscious. It was an important new line of theorising that sought to account for issues that could not be accounted for by behaviourism or by biological drives. But cognitive psychology fell in love with the idea of the computer and became focused on processing information and stimulus–response. In this focus it was extremely successful. But what was missed in this success was crucial. He forcefully argued for a reorientation of psychology away from a narrow conception of the self and rather into a broader engagement with the humanities. The field had ignored the study of meaning and needed to strongly turn towards the study of “the nature and cultural shaping of meaning-making, and the central place it plays in human action” (Bruner, 1990, p xii).

Bruner (1990) proposed that the most important moment in human evolution was the moment when culture became the major factor in giving form to the minds of those living under its influence. Human beings were then no longer bound by their skins, but from that moment onwards became expressions of broader cultural dynamics. At this moment, culture became more important than biology. Biology is therefore important, but insufficient in explaining many actions of humans. While

¹¹ Other concerns have been highlighted earlier in this review of the key literature around the unspecific use of the term ‘identity’ for a variety of different phenomena – see Brubaker and Cooper (2000).

these ideas had been well understood in anthropology, they had not been understood in psychology. It has already been established that culture depended on shared meanings and shared concepts and shared values. And these meanings, concepts and values stretched and redefined natural limits. For example, in general, humans can remember around seven things at a time, naturally. But there are all kinds of cognitive and mental tricks that allow humans to remember many more things. In doing so, people can break through natural limits.

Bruner (1990) showed the importance of folk psychology as the psychology of ordinary people and the ways they explain and interpret the world. Themes from scientific psychology found their way into folk psychology, but folk psychology was itself a powerful domain. It was through folk psychology that people made meaning of their existence and decided on the value of their lives. Folk psychology (and its interpretation of events) was principally expressed in narrative. What was meant here by Bruner was that, whenever ordinary people try to document and explain events, narrative is involved. For example, 'I went there. I met him. He said I should not have come. Can you believe it! I felt so humiliated ...'. This example shows that narrative is sequential. Narrative contains a plot. And it is the plot that helps to position and orient the characters. Narrative is concerned with the ordinary and the surprising.

Narratives are rooted in ancient patterns of human storytelling. At least since the enlightenment, the study of mind has centred on how people achieve 'true' knowledge of the world (Bruner, 1991). Empiricists have looked to the way in which the senses experience the world. Rationalists have looked to the powers of the mind through right reasoning. These two traditions have both emphasised universality of knowledge – the narrative approach lent itself to multiple ways of knowing and more of a social-constructivist orientation. Constructivism recognised that reality did not come to us waiting for us to merely make a copy of it. Perceiving is an act of interpretation (Kegan, 2009). Rather than operating as rational empirical scientists, "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing or not doing" (Bruner, 1991, p. 4).

Narratives are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by 'narrative necessity' rather than empirical evidence or logic. The human mind cannot express itself without the enablement of symbolic systems of culture. There are specific domains of human knowledge and skill supported and organised by culture toolkits. Cognitive studies had advanced and strengthened this view. The early narrative psychologists began to show in detail how, in particular instances, narrative organised the structure of human experience (Bruner, 1991). They showed, for example, how, since self-narrating occurred in relationship with others, the self was proposed as *distributed*. This concept of the

distributed self gained credibility among social constructionists and interpretive social scientists (Bruner, 1990). It was argued that “the human condition cannot make plausible sense without being interpreted in light of the symbolic world that constitutes culture” (Bruner, 1990, p. 138). Selves were then not seen as isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head but distributed interpersonally. Selves did not arise rootlessly in response only to the present; they made meaning of events from within a culture.

What do people do when they set forth an autobiography? Bruner made it clear that stories came in patterns. Even though the individual events and details differed, there are genres of stories.

Biographical writing in the nineteenth century was hardly concerned with issues of social construction. All that was needed was to hear a story and capture it *as heard*. There was also little concern for epistemology or essentialism and diversity. This tide turned. An overwhelming concern for the constructive process of text-making developed. And a big concern emerged with the literary forces that shape autobiography (Bruner, 2001).

For Bruner (2001), an autobiography involved a narrator telling a story of a protagonist who, as they journey from the past to the present, fuse their consciousness with the narrator. There is generally growth or change and stages of life. Narrative constrained and enabled certain things. Narratives needed two things: they had to centre on people and their hopes, fears and desires; and they had to focus on how those intentional states led to events and activities. Narrative also had to answer the question, ‘why?’. There needed to be a deeper significance to the story. Autobiography needed a sequential order and needed to be concerned with the past. Yet, Bruner (2001) found that 30 per cent of sentences in autobiographies he studied were not in the past tense. He also found that the present tense sentences concerned themselves with the evaluative dimension of autobiography.

Bruner argued that narrative did not solve a problem – it simply located it so it could be understood. Stories both presented people as part of a collective culture and as distinct within it. There are sets of cultural givens, which our lives represent. Yet, we are not slaves to culture in modern times – uniqueness has become important. To be unique, we need to tell a story that is interesting. This requires telling something that is counter to the expected trajectory. Bruner (2001) argued that Western autobiography was concerned, for example, with turning points. There was an important need to claim how one comes to be where one is. In- and out-groups were an important part of the self-telling because of the relational element of self-positioning. Despite narrative referring to the past, it was argued that these past-located narrative selves mattered in the present, as Bruner (1990) argued, “When somebody says, as if summing up a childhood, ‘I was a pretty rebellious kind’, it can usually be taken as a prophecy as much as a summary” (p. 121).

Ezzy (1998) wrote that a person could be defined as a 'self-narrating organism'. Ezzy argued for the integration of narrative theory and a sociological conception of self. In doing so, he provided an explanation of narrative self-identity as "a subjective sense of self-continuity as it symbolically integrates the events of lived experience in the plot of the story a person tells about his or her life" (p. 239). For Ezzy, the main purpose of a life-story was integration – through which a 'selfing' process made a patterned identity out of what may appear as a random and scattered set of events in a life.

2.5.3. Ways in which narrative has been employed

Initially, narrative studies drew heavily on the development of narratology and from work associated with structuralism. There was a sense that there was something lying below the surface of a system or practice – a kind of Chomskyan 'deep structure' (Chomsky, 1965). There was a kind of modernist attempt to discover a universal grammar. More recently, through post-structuralism, there has been an awareness of the messiness of any research project and a humbler and more integrated use of narrative approaches (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). These later theorists believed it was more accurate to see people as *locations* of "intersecting forces and interacting voices situated within a particular social community and linked in the post-modern era to many other communities around the globe" (McAdams, 1996, p. 298). The self was *out-there* in the uncertain changing world rather than *in-here* inside each one of us (McAdams, 1996).

A debate developed around whether people were simply a set of diverse identities waiting to be brought forth or whether there was a meta-identity and narrative that bound people together. The debate was about whether narrative identity was *one way* of describing a true essence or whether it was actually *the true essence* – where nothing existed outside of a narrative self. In the narrative identity approach, this became a foundational question. There was debate around whether autobiography was historical non-fiction or more closely related to fiction. There was a debate around whether the *narrating of the self* ordered the illogical and disparate chaotic events into a whole; or whether the narrative existed even before the events as part of a pre-visible universal order. In this latter approach, narrative was seen as antecedent to the story that then tells of its existence (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Carr (1997), for example, has argued that life is made up of beginnings, middles and ends. These are not inventions to organise randomness. They are the fundamental ingredients of reality. There is birth, life and then death. There is the day you meet someone and the day you say goodbye. These are part of a pre-existing structure of life.

Finally, it has become clear that while narrated events might belong to the past, the narrating of the event belongs to the present. While the child's experience shaped the adult's experience, it has also

been shown to be true that, through the telling of events, the adult shapes the memories of being a child (Freeman, 2001). The present then, in a sense, influences the past.

Narrative identity has also been seen through a social constructionist lens. Watson (2009) showed how narratives not only lived in the lives of the individuals presenting them – they were sourced from the stock of knowledge of societies. Through this, they could be seen as an important tool in the social construction of reality. In this sense, there was no way to take culture out of the person. There was also no way to take the global and local context out of the person. Watson defined identity work as “the mutually constitutive process in which people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of the personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives” (Watson, 2009, p. 431). Narrative identity was then also inseparable from local discursive conditions. It was reproduced anew through interactive communication. Narrative identity could be seen as a discursive process along the lines that Foucault theorised – involving power binding individual action (Foucault, 2019). Narrative could be seen therefore as not only a way to understand identity but also power relations. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) quoted Salmon Rushdie along these lines when he wrote “those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 135).

This post-structuralist perspective has offered substantive insights but has also been critiqued for failing to account for the agentic potential of individual life – where individuals play with discursive practices to create something different and potentially new. The narrative approach can also emphasise the power of individuals to retell their stories and shape their responses to the world and in turn shape society (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). Sommer et al. (1998) collected first-person narratives of people’s everyday life events, such as small interpersonal differences and romantic heartbreaks, and then compared these stories. They argued that human beings have a deep and fundamental need for meaning-making. They found that the human need for a meaningful life was shaped by four needs: the need for a sense of purpose; the desire for feelings of efficacy; the need to view their actions as having positive value; and the want for a sense of positive self-worth.

A number of other studies have used narrative to understand social and organisational conditions. Katriel (2011) focused on genre, setting, participants and ends in the exploration of stories circulating in the public sphere. She was interested in the ways in which late-modern personal-experience stories can give insight into how individuals construct the self in the context of larger

societal processes. She was especially interested in local contexts and the role of ideology in shaping stories.

Approaching multiple narratives of identity in a different way, Loseke (2007) has argued that scholars need to better understand the reflexivity between cultural, institutional, organisational and personal narratives. Through cultural narrative analysis, this approach has considered formula stories and schemata. Examples include the 'standard North American family'. Institutional narratives consist of characters such as the 'welfare mother' or the 'woman victim'. Organisational narratives have been identified in the working of 12-step programmes where the story of 'being in recovery' has resonated.

Personal narrative scholarship has developed through the observation that the modern industrial and post-industrial society makes it difficult for people to find a sense of stable personal identity. Identities have been observed to no longer be rooted in tradition. Despite this, it has been observed that people still need a sense of coherent identity and therefore still seek to construct it (Loseke, 2007). Identity coherence has been found to occur through making sense of life events and placing them into meaningful wholes. Loseke (2007) has argued that there is much to be gained by those interested in social change and more personal change in exploring the relationships between and overlapping dynamics of narratives operating at different scales.

2.5.4. Eakin's concept of living autobiographically

Eakin (1999, 2008) has extensively documented what it means to create identity in narrative and how we 'live autobiographically'. He has shown that the relationship between narrative and identity is so close that we can speak of narrative identity. Inspired by Ricoeur's (1991) perspective on the crucial importance of narrative in understanding time, and substantively influenced by Bruner's (1991) narrative psychology, Eakin argued that the self and the story of it are entangled complementary parts of the process of identity formation (Eakin, 1999).

Talking and writing about ourselves performs a crucial function in the world. Life-stories in this sense are not 'about us' but actually 'are us'. The "self-inheres in a narrative of some kind" (Eakin, 2008, p. xii). There is evidence that human beings empathise less with people who do not have a story – for example those with Alzheimer's disease are sometimes seen as less human. There is a difference between 'being alive' then (which is biological) and 'having a life' (which requires that each of us has a story to tell) (Eakin, 2008).

In reflecting on self and identity, Eakin (2008) used Neisser's framework for the self in which he distinguished between five modes of self-experience:

- The ecological self, which relates to the physical environment.
- The interpersonal self, which engages in physical terms with others.
- The extended self, which describes the childlike sense of self-awareness.
- The private self, which describes one's awareness of one's own inner thoughts as private and distinct.
- The conceptual self, in which the self conceives of its role in society and sets of relationships with others.

For Eakin, three of these selves can be understood as 'reflexive' selves: the extended, private and conceptual self. It is the extended self that first emerges especially as temporal (by age 3). This extended temporal self provides the "foundation of the self-represented in autobiography, providing a proto-narrative, temporal armature that supports and sustains our operative sense of who we are" (Eakin, 1999, p. 102). Through this armature, the brain constructs memories rather than simply recalling them from the archive.

Eakin (1999) also argued, like those cited earlier, that when fashioning our stories, we draw on, but are not wholly consumed by, cultural and social constraints. Cultural and social constraints present a 'given reality' just like neurobiology presents a 'given reality'. He has extended the work on narrative identity by exploring the relationship between emerging neurobiology and narrative. He has suggested that we make our autobiographies not just with a sense of the present but in the context of hopes and plans for the future.

2.5.5. McAdams's life-story approach

I have shown how much of the theorising of identity has been in psychology and has been focused on intrapsychic dynamics (Côté & Schwartz, 2002). I have also shown that there has been a call to integrate the micro identity focus with broader societal forces and concerns (Hammack, 2008). I want to highlight McAdams's (1994, 1996) life-story approach as one of the stronger responses to the calls to build an integrative understanding of the self by bridging psychological and sociological theories.

McAdams (1996) argued that what is unique about a person is defined as their personality. Personality studies have tried to get at the internal psychic unique adjustments that emerge as people interact with their environment. Personality as a psychological construct was first advanced by Gordon Allport. Allport positioned his theory as a humanistic alternative to Freudian determinism (Allport, 1955). Within a few decades, a range of alternative personality systems were proposed. The contingencies of personality were explored and critiqued. At the end of all this, the traits perspective of personality, and its utility in predicting a range of outcomes, emerged as a powerful and useful

concept. The most celebrated general framework for personality proposed has been the five-factor model of personality traits known as the 'Big Five'. This framework was developed in the 1980s and has become a compelling framework developed from synthesising other factor models. It has allowed for a range of new studies and has deepened the understanding of personality (McAdams, 1996).

But the study of individual persons undertaken in personality psychology has struggled to develop a conceptual framework capable of making sense of the person in their social and cultural context. For this reason, McAdams (1996) proposed a framework that is founded on the earlier Meadian (Mead, 1934) distinction between the 'self-as-I' and the 'self-as-me'.

McAdams (1996) articulated three independent levels of the personality. Level one involved traits (as more or less isolated from context) and Level two involved personal concerns (which engage contexts). But it is Level three and its focus on 'life-stories' that connected the person to the context more deeply. Each person's life-story could be located within a particular literary tradition of their culture and context.

A life-story can be seen as one's narrative identity. Narrative identity manifests a) structure and content, b) function, c) developmental course, d) individual difference, and e) extent to which the life-story facilitates adaptation or reinforces pathology for the person whose identity the story is (McAdams, 1996).

The concepts developed by McAdams (the life-story model of identity) were important in the evolution of the field of narrative psychology (McAdams, 1996). For McAdams (1996), the self needed to be viewed as a reflexive project that is worked on. The modern self was multi-layered and deep – with a difference between private and public selves. For McAdams, the self developed over time. Making sense of the self in modern times required the construction of a coherent narrative. The rise of the novel and of diary-writing and autobiography has been observed as part of this process. This process has been observed in ordinary life – one does not have to be a king or queen or have a special relationship with God to be a unique self.

McAdams (1996) studied over 200 life-story interviews to come to the conclusion that stories have a) narrative tone, such as optimistic or pessimistic, b) specific evocative imagery associated with the 'feel' of the story, c) theme, such as love or power or the discovery of agency, d) ideological setting, which is a moral stance on what is 'good', e) nuclear episodes, which are the high points and most memorable moments, f) imagoes, which are smaller possible or ideal selves or voices or

personifications, and g) endings, which (in modernity) often include generativity script about the legacy created.

For McAdams (1996), the main purpose of a story was integration. By binding aspects of the person into a broad narrative frame, the self could be successful in the modern self-reflexive project. The life-story shows how the self was similar, yet different to others and was connected to society as a whole. The presentation of a life-story is an exercise in artistry (Goffman, 1978) as the teller seeks to stake something out.

McAdams (1996) saw identity and the life-story developing in three phases. In the first phase, from childhood to adolescence, was a phase in which the material for a story is constructed. The second phase, running from late adolescence to early adulthood, could be called the narrative era. In this phase, the individual began to create a self-defining life-story. This creation process continued throughout life. In the final phase, a person might look back on the life lived and their life-story may be accepted or rejected by themselves.

McAdams (1996) documented that modern adults in their 20s and 30s concentrate their identity efforts on fashioning and refining their imagoes. They seek to make sense of themselves in terms of the main characters and roles – such as ‘the caregiver’ or ‘the small businessman’. ‘Selfing’ explores how these characters can enrich life. As one encounters mid-life there is a search for balance, harmony and the stirrings of reconciliation. There may be even more focus on generating the right script and ensuring the story ends well. The adult comes to realise that ‘I am what survives me’.

Generative adults tell stories that turn the negative into positive. McAdams described this as the ability to integrate a “reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated futures in terms of beginnings, middles, and endings” (McAdams, 1996, p. 298). Less generative adults more often tell stories in which good periods flow into bad. Generative adults often tell stories about gifts that they want to pass on to the next generation.

2.5.6. Memory and the past

Before discussing the South African and a business school context, I want to briefly highlight some of the key sociological literature that examines the issue of memory. Jedlowski (2001) linked the work on memory to sociology. He showed how the way memory has been conceived and has operated has now changed in the contemporary era. Memory should no longer be understood as a ‘store’ but rather a complex ‘network of activities’. The study of memory shows that the past does not remain the same. The past changes as it relates to the necessities of the present in a number of ways. Not only does the past shape the present, but the present shapes the past by ordering and

reconstructing it and its legacy. Memory-making and storing has been shown to be a social process. Memories are associated with meanings and meaning-making is a cultural activity. Memories are better understood as inscribed within 'social frameworks' that are stabilised through repeated social interaction. Personal autobiographical memory has been shown to be functionally and structurally related to cultural myths and social narratives (Nelson, 2003). These are expressed through language and discourse, often in the sociological tradition in the form of narrative or autobiographical accounts (Jedlowski, 2001). Individual memory needs to be seen as collective – one recalls one's memories in a social context (of cultural myths, for example) and very often for a social purpose (Reese & Fivish, 2008).

The sociological approach to memory has sought to explore its collective and social dimensions – rather than seeing it as the property or process of an isolated individual. In its relationship to history, memory has been shown to be inaccurate. Memory has a strong relationship with meaning-making – and in some ways this meaning-making element can be more powerful than history. Olick and Robbins (1998) have pointed to the way in which collective memory acts as a mirror to reflect back reality. They have shown how it also acts as a lamp to point to specific things in clearer light than others. For Olick and Robbins (1998), social memory studies have been a non-paradigmatic and unrooted field. They have shown its varied eclectic foundations, tracing its development from the distant past to the modern era. Memory studies have emerged as a new field, developed with the support of those fighting for marginalised voices. It has also been associated with post-modernist researchers who have been interested in reviewing and providing nuanced perspectives on single truths. Memory study is part of the movement away from the studied and measured knowledge of outside experts, towards perspectives that focus on the structure of the consciousness of the ordinary person in the street.

Memory and autobiography have some similarities in how they can be understood. Subjectivity and the social context show up in both of them. Narration requires language, and language is a social institution. I have emphasised extensively how narrative mechanisms are culturally mediated. But the act of telling or narrating also involves others or assumed others who are hearing the story. There is also a social element of storytelling. Storytelling has been found to be embedded in multiple social relationships – thus justifying the concept of the 'multiple self' (Jedlowski, 2001). In this sense, memories do not represent the past, but rather an individual's attempt to make sense of a disparate set of temporal events in a discursive context. In memory studies, a social constructivist orientation has most often been assumed. The past plays an important role in political discourse as a society makes decisions about how to institutionalise its memory. Collective memory-making has been shown to be open to co-option by powerful elites serving their own ends.

There is substantive scholarship about individuals and their storytelling in the context of history and memories of the experiences of previous generations. Fivush, Bohanek and Duke (2008) argued that we construct our sense of self through our own experiences, but also through how our personal history fits into the larger social and cultural time. In this sense, we are 'who we are' from what we have experienced and what we have been told about the history around us. Collective family or communal memories have been found to be both very personal but also shared. The group's memory manifests then, in the individual's memory (Reese & Fivish, 2008).

Evidence suggests that collective representations, even when about problematic traumatic events, seem to be beneficial for individuals. Knowledge of family history and participation in collective remembering have been associated with increased self-esteem and wellbeing. Not knowing one's family story seems to make it more difficult to construct one's own story. This is especially true for those who work to reclaim their history from the margins. But collective memory-sharing can also marginalise stories and this can have a negative impact on individuals who resonate with these silenced stories. Collective memories are not monolithic. They can be contested. For example, different family members can refuse to face certain events or choose to see them differently to others. As time passes, collective memories become less autobiographical as people share them with those who were not present. They have been found to take on mythic established schema and end up being used to teach later generations, even if they no longer have the emotional force of 'real lives in real time' (Reese & Fivish, 2008).

Even if memories fade and the trauma subsides, Hirsch (2008) showed how the second generation to powerful traumatic events, preceding people's birth, seem to constitute memories of those events (even if they never experienced them). This was different to post-traumatic stress disorder in that it was mediated by a generation – but these memories remained powerful. Memories tend to be guarded by the second generation, who act as a bridge between those who experienced events directly and those who will follow in the future. There can be a sense of responsibility for this task of building a 'living connection' with the past as it passes into history. Hirsch drew from Susan Sontag in asking 'What do we owe the victims?', 'How can we best carry their stories forward without having our own story displaced by theirs?' and 'What can be transformed from memory into action?'. There are questions about the role of memory as different from history – such as, 'What it might be able to specifically and usefully provide?'. Hirsch (2008) called the second-generation memory the post-memory with the word 'post' illustrating the layering and mediation of time and era.

Scholarship of memories and narratives has taken place at different levels of collective experience. Four examples illustrate this in terms of nation, class, race and family. Firstly, national identity has

been examined through shared national narratives (Feldman, 2001). Group stories have been shown to have a distinctive genre and plot structure, and to be shared by group members. These shared stories have been found to impact on individual autobiography and life-stories, especially when individuals were strongly identified with the group. These stories became part of the 'cognitive equipment' used by individuals to make sense of and construct their lives (Feldman, 2001). They shaped how meaning was made of events.

Secondly, at a class-level, Silva (2012) found that few working-class people were able to live a life defined by their parents and tradition. Instead, they were stuck *in the middle* and needed to turn to alternative ways of navigating the world. This included religion, but also new rituals. Often this involved telling therapeutic narratives that saw them overcoming life's difficulties. These journeys to adulthood required a witness – that could come through therapy. Becoming an adult was therefore, ultimately, an interactional accomplishment.

Thirdly, Parham (2008) documented attempts to grapple with race and memory. For example, in the United States, there have been efforts to organise African Americans to understand their roots. Parham was concerned with how different ethnic groups captured their histories and the ways in which groups organise around different histories.

Fourth and finally, identity, memory and narrative, have been found to operate at the family level. Fivush, Habermas, Waters and Zaman (2011) showed how parents who have rich autobiographical styles of family conversation generally enable their children to develop more coherent personal narratives and a stronger sense of self. They argued that autobiography is a critical developmental skill for children and adolescents. Fivush (2008) noted especially the impact of maternal reminiscing style on adolescent development and the ways in which storytelling styles and approaches were gendered.

There have been shifts in the contemporary era around how memories shape people. The cultural ingredients for the formation of life-scripts have been found to be increasingly sourced from friends, relatives and the media through social learning – this was rather than being passed on through the church or through other traditional structures. These non-traditional structures shared what can be seen as vicarious memories that inform the life-story of the person (Janssen & Haque, 2017).

In closing this section that grapples with the past, I need to comment briefly on the ways that historians have considered narrative in both positive and problematic ways. History as a discipline in the social sciences has struggled with similar questions around the role and importance of narrative – questions that have cut to the core of integrity and relevance of the discipline itself. Narrative

inquiry can show history in new ways, by revealing the changing plot structures and cyclical patterns of life. White (1984) summarised a number of debates within the discipline of history around the role of narrative. 'Narrating' is ubiquitous and common and ever present. One view is that, since science needs to be critical of taken-for-granted norms, especially descriptive and explanatory ones – narrative needs to be used cautiously. History has often aimed to tell stories that are factually true, but not narratively true. Narrative, as a scientific tool in the history discipline, was therefore demoted and sidelined in attempts to build the science of history.

White (1984) pushed back on this, arguing that narrative should be considered the *appropriate tool* for historical explanation. It was also exactly what was standing in the way of history becoming a legitimate science. Narrative may be used to describe as a crucial dimension of *time-consciousness*. Narrative may be considered as the way for historians to practise *their craft*. The push back against narrative generally was concerned with the problematic drama and emotion within narrative. White (1984) acknowledged these concerns but believed they ignored the productive role of narrative in providing alternative meanings to 'chronicles of facts'. He argued that literature-oriented descriptive approaches had something to teach historians. Narrative historical events needed to be understood by their significance, a process connected to the story's *plot*. They showed that something was a 'tragedy' or a 'farce'. The implications were important. Furthermore, it could only be determined whether something was a 'farce' by employing literary tools – not factual-historical ones. Narrative accounts were then always allegorical. But my reading of this approach is not then that narrative had an alternative objective to the factual objective – it is more that crucial overall understandings of historical events required narrative 'allegorical' understanding – in order to get the overall story (White, 1984).

2.5.7. Relevant issues centred around narrative and identity

In the first two sections of this literature review, I summarised the key perspectives on the pressures on the self as society changes (*the web*) and I then turned in the third section to specifically consider the person (*the spider*). In the third focus area, I also demonstrated how the person can be understood within their social context. I summarised the key theorising on identity.

In this fourth focus area of the literature review, I have shown how a narrative approach has developed in sociology. I have shown how it has been used to gain insight into the dynamic between self and society. The essential insights are that individual stories and collective narratives have been found to be powerful and even *essential* in living a human life. People's stories draw from cultural frames. A story of a person and their family can be understood as a particular personal and social construction. It says as much about who that person is as it does about the reality of a world 'out-

there' and events that happened before. I particularly emphasised McAdams's life-story approach to identity (McAdams, 1996).

Furthermore, drawing from memory studies, our stories of our past are not absolute truths. We pull together the facts in intentional and unintentional ways. Group stories have been shown to have a distinctive genre and plot structure and to be shared by group members. These shared stories can impact on individual autobiography and life-story, especially when individuals are strongly identified with the group. These stories have been shown to become part of the 'cognitive equipment' used by individuals to make sense of and to construct their lives. They shape how meaning can be made of events. Storytelling and memory-sharing have been shown to shape self-esteem, for example. These acts have also been found to be gendered, and they are increasingly distributed through non-traditional structures.

In the fifth main focus area that follows, examine the institutional location of this study – the business school. I show that this is a particularly important institution for adult learning and identity development in the late modern era. And I show that there an important gap in terms of the absence of narrative identity scholarship – especially with a contextual focus.

In the closing section of the literature review I turn to the country and regional context of this study, South Africa and Southern Africa, to highlight the key scholarship on identity and societal change.

2.6. Identity in the adult-learning business school context

It is important to state that the learning context of the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) is substantively different to the traditional university context. From a geographic perspective, the business school is located in a different city (Johannesburg) to the main campus (Pretoria). GIBS occupies a relatively small custom-built campus close to the main head-offices of many of South Africa and Africa's major companies in Sandton. The school is generally oriented towards adult mid-career learners – generally in mid-upper management in their institutional contexts. The main difference to main campus environments lies in this different student body. GIBS is generally both a formal and informal space for senior management and leadership development. The mission of the school is to “significantly improve individual and organisational performance, primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in the African context” (Gordon Institute of Business Science, 2020a).

Perspectives on ‘the university’ generally see its teaching role as oriented toward equipping young people. One of the key differences is that GIBS does not serve those who are *continuing* their learning. Rather it serves those who are *returning* to learning after substantive work experience. It is exactly this difference that makes the group of authors interesting and the contribution of this study of value – it adds to the body of scholarship on late modern adult learning. In this section of the literature review, I highlight how adult learning has been theorised, especially in the context of late modernity. I then explore identity concerns in adult learning and some of the work on narrative identity and adult learning. I also show that the issue of identity has been of scholarly interest in the business school as well as in the workplace.

2.6.1. Background on adult learning

Adult learning has been closely associated with life-long learning. This has been a substantively theorised field (Alheit, 1994; Tennant, 2000; Tusting & Barton, 2003). Adult learning emerged as an important policy area in society in the 1970s, starting with a more personal development orientation. But it has increasingly focused on economic and employability concerns (Field, 2012). Alheit (1994) describes how the complex changes happening in society have placed new pressures on adults. Because of this, new forms of adult learning are now needed to deal with an unstable social context. Life planning has become more difficult as previously more predictable life phases become less certain. The period of old age has been extended. Similarly, the established ‘learning phase’, ‘activity phase’ and ‘relaxation phase’ of life are no longer the norm for anyone except a small minority. The ‘activity phase’ of work is now often interrupted and there is a need for learning to deal with that disruption. Collective biographical patterns are being replaced by individualised risk

management. What used to be a biography defined by the collective is now open to individual choice (Jansen & Van der Veen, 1992). People are subject to heterogeneous choice and alternative futures. Biography becomes more subject to self-will and new learning must take place without a curriculum (Alheit, 1994).

Biesta and Tedder (2007) showed that the ideals of life-long learning have been associated with enlightenment values centred around autonomy and rational independent decision making. Adult learning has been, in this sense, connected with the concept of agency. For Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency has been made even more important in the late modern era (along the lines theorised by Giddens, Beck and Bauman) as a 'pre-given life' gives away to a 'life chosen'. But this choosing is increasingly complicated with the decrease in clear predictable paths that can be followed. They have highlighted the importance of imaginative distancing (from one's own life) as a source of agency development. Through this, one's own current narratives can be opened to reworking and transformation.

Biesta et al. (2008) showed that adult learning can be structured or incidental. It nearly always involves reworking earlier experiences. In this latter sense, the learning biography of adult learners matters! Adult learning is ubiquitous. It is often tacit. It is also often triggered by major life-changing events. It can aid people in how they respond to those events. Learning can be self-initiated or forced by circumstance. Learning can increase agency as indicated by an imaginary personal statement, such as 'I see now that I can overcome this' or 'I have a new qualification that now opens up economic opportunity'. But it can also decrease agency, for example, when someone feels that 'I see now that I can't overcome this and that there is no point in even trying'.

There has been much debate as to what counts as *worthwhile* adult learning (Biesta et al., 2008). There is less focus now on learning for learning's sake and more focus on learning for economic participation. Adult learning is increasingly associated with the decline of the state as the provider of security and welfare towards a new role of the state as the provider of a context in which individuals can advance their private goals. Large-scale research projects have emerged to fully understand adult learning in the contemporary society – taking seriously the idea of the 'university of life' (Biesta et al., 2008).

In more recent literature, it has also been argued that, in theorising the self in the learning process, it is important to move beyond the idea of the autonomous, unitary, rational self as the foundational entity. The self should rather be considered historically situated (Clark & Dirkx, 2000). In this line, attempts to discover an 'authentic' or 'true' self in the process of learning should be seen as impossible. Adult learners need to be understood as situated in history and culture (Tennant, 2000).

Critical perspectives around race, class and gender have added to our understanding of the adult-learning process. In addition, post-modern perspectives around adult learning have illustrated contested, fragmented and less-grounded realities. Finally, feminist views have looked at how learning environments inhibit and empower women's development and emancipation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Important lines of adult-learning theorising have been focused on transformative learning, meaning-making and new perspective formation (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). Adult learners are generally conceptualised as self-directed learners – where the institution of the school or university is only one (and not necessarily the most important) of many contexts in which learning is done.

One key debate in adult learning has been around the role of emotions and the therapeutic paradigm in contrast to adult learning that seeks to shape the context itself. Alheit (1994), together with Ecclestone, Hayes and Furedi (2005), criticise the therapeutic movement. They argue that, even if it seems like the right fit for the contemporary human condition, the appointed teacher 'therapist' is subject to the very same complexity and cannot claim the authority to heal. Furthermore, the therapeutic paradigm cannot reach the majority of people – who also seem to be finding ways to solve their life problems in ordinary but important ways. There is a further concern that the therapeutic paradigm points learning inward towards vulnerability rather than outward towards struggle, freedom, knowledge and skills. To me, this seems to be a debate around whether we should adapt to social systems (and do our best within them) or fight for freedom from oppression, and to change the very systems of which we are a part.

2.6.2. Adult learning, identity, biography and narrative

Adults have widely differing dispositions towards learning. It can sometimes be very important to one's identity. The capacity to learn from one's own life has been shown to be something that can be learned. Narrative and narration can be key in learning processes and can be captured in the term 'narrative learning' where stories and storying (including concepts like narrative intensity, plot, emplotment, evaluative dimensions, flexibility, etc.) are vehicles for learning. Narrative learning has been shown to operate at the intersection of one's own 'internal conversations' and the social practice of storytelling (Biesta et al., 2008).

Wojecki (2007) connected Giddens (1991) and Bauman (2007) to adult-learning theory showing the importance of the identity concept. He showed how it is important that adult-learning theorists pay attention to 'biography'. For example, experiences of being wounded as a learner will shape the learner identity. Learner identities then come to shape beliefs, such as 'I can't learn this' or 'I can learn that'. This can be a form of 'habitus' that firmly links routines from the past to the future. But

this trajectory can also be interrupted with the right learning scaffolding. Hodkinson et al. (2004) showed the merits of including the individual issues that learners bring learning experiences to their workplace. They showed that workers bring prior knowledge and the ways in which habitus shapes their subsequent learning journeys.

In some ways, reflecting on one's life can be understood as *the* approach to adult learning (Michelson, 2011). Understanding biography can enable learning processes to become voyages of discovery (Alheit, 1994). Alheit argued for the importance of biographical reflexivity and the importance of understanding one's life-story in context. "Only when specific individuals relate to their lifeworld in such a way that their self-reflexive activities begin to shape social contexts, is contact established with that key qualification of modern times, what I have termed elsewhere 'biographicity' ... Biographicity means that we can redesign again and again, from scratch, the contours of our life within the specific contexts in which we (have to) spend it, and that we experience these contexts as 'shapeable' and designable" (Alheit, 1994, p. 290).

Tennant (2000) showed that adult learning is also concerned with change, so the journey of adult change is important to understand. Most conceptualisations of adult learning see some form of individual independence from social pressure as a higher order goal of adult learning. But this has been critiqued as a gendered norm that does not apply to women's lives in the same way it does to men. Women may find more value in connection than autonomy, for example. Tennant (2000) highlighted the value of the work of McAdams and his three-level model of the person (this is substantively dealt with earlier in the literature review). Tennant (2000) showed how McAdams's model was an important model for how the self can be understood alongside other older models for the adult-life journey. I will not discuss these in detail here because I have already highlighted many models for identity in the life-course earlier in this literature review. What is key to highlight here is the convergence of the field of adult learning with other theorising around late modernity, identity, biography and narrative.

Along many of the social construction-oriented lines of theorising discussed above, Michelson (2011) strongly criticised the 'taken-as-fact' nature of biographical reflection. She argued that "... what we treat as free expressions of newly uncovered authenticity are actually reproductions of specific narrative tropes and that rather than engendering free self-exploration our practices shape self-representations in quite specific ways" (p 5). Her argument was that "for all our valorizing of individuality and uniqueness there are only some stories we allow to be told and only some forms of selfhood we allow to emerge in the process of telling them" (p 5). She saw the life-stories produced

in the classroom as ‘fictions’. In this sense, by writing their stories, students are not *discovering* themselves but are actually *inventing* themselves. But this invention is bound by unacknowledged discursive dynamics. In other words, only certain types of selves can be invented. This perspective aligns partly with the view taken in this study – that the stories being written should not be read as fundamental historical truths, but rather for what they say about the person doing the writing – and also about the cultural context within which the person is situated. The stories that I examined show what can be told, and so illustrate societal pressures and norms, as well as personal subjective truths.

Michelson (2011) pointed to importance of Tenant’s taxonomy of transforming selves: the authentic self, the repressed self, the autonomous self, the storied self and the entangled self. And she believed these categories help to highlight the complexity of the autobiographical undertaking. In the context of this study, the concept of the storied self (Michelson, 2011) is particularly useful. It lives “fully in history, continually under construction and available for re-inscription and reinterpretation as different themes and identities develop in a lifetime. To the storied self, we, like our narratives, are multiple and open-ended, (re)creating ourselves through a process of reassessment over time” (p 6). Importantly, this self is irreconcilable with the idea of the authentic self. The authentic self is awaiting discovery. But the storied self is always in creation, formation, flux and open to narrative re-interpretation. Michelson (2011) shows how the work of creative self-making is bound, in the classroom setting, by contextual culturally prescribed narratives.

2.6.3. Business schools as adult-learning environments for identity work

I have shown the convergence of adult-learning theorising with the theorising around identity, biography and narrative in broader social domains. I now turn away from adult learning at the general level, towards the adult-learning institution of the business school.

Adult learners have been marginalised in university policy and planning, and often seen as a side issue. Universities have generally been seen as locations for learning among youth and young adults. This is despite evidence for rapid growth in adults above the age of 25 pursuing formal and informal university study. The growth of for-profit education providers, corporate universities in business and virtual digital delivery systems are important trends in this regard (Kasworm, Sandmann & Sissel, 2000).

Business schools are a proliferating increasingly widespread institutional form both within public not-for-profit universities and increasingly in the for-profit form. Parker and Guthrie (2010) argued that within the university community, business schools have a relatively poor standing. They raise

substantive revenue and so are seen as ‘cash cows’. But this revenue has often come at the expense of academic respect – they are rarely held out as illustrative of universities’ contribution to society. They tend to focus on post-graduate study – but they also increasingly focus on mid-career levels and non-formal learning. A number of business schools serve the mid-career managerial business elite through what is known as ‘executive education’ (Lockhart, 2013). Mid-career executive education is a key element of programmes at GIBS. GIBS is ranked number one in Africa and number 36 in the world in this regard (Gordon Institute of Business Science, 2020b).

I want to comment on the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Since the 1960’s MBA-granting institutions have increased rapidly and widely even as concerns have grown as to the nature of the education being provided (Leavitt, 1989). Earlier concerns included that business schools developed students into creatures with “lopsided brains, icy hearts, and shrunken souls” (Leavitt, 1989, p. 39). These concerns were given renewed energy by the global financial crisis. In the years that followed, business schools were heavily critiqued for their consequentialist logic. While there has also been substantive scholarship on the relationship between business schools and the broader society (Ghoshal, 2005; Leavitt, 1989), until the last decade, this rarely focused on identity concerns. Debates have now emerged on the importance of identity work and the need to help students better answer the questions, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the purpose of my life?’ (Khurana & Snook, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010).

There is a solid substantive argument that, because of the demands of the late modern context, mid-career students are being tasked *not just* with learning technical knowledge, but with transforming their identity. The business school can be seen as a place in which these identity shifts take place. The business school, in this sense, is an ‘identity workspace’ where students do not just ‘learn about’ but ‘learn to be’ (Khurana & Snook, 2011). Identity work has been theorised as a bridging metaphor and useful frame in business scholarship (Brown, 2015).-Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) state that this identity work is ongoing but is “more frequent and necessary in fast-changing social contexts in which individuals are constantly pressured to confirm or adapt their self-concepts vis-a-vis fluid social configurations and multiple discourses” (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 45).

Much of the critique of the implicit ‘identity work’ of business schools has been concerned with the consequentialist economic logic that students might bring to the business school classroom and which is legitimised into an identity through the dominant logic of the school. This identity work needs to be taken seriously, especially as I have shown earlier in the literature review, more fluid social configurations are increasingly the norm.

Khurana and Snook (2011) also highlighted how identity is important for understanding how people act in the world. Students in a business school face questions around success, life-path selection, and what it means 'to lead'. Together with others, they argued that the modern-day business school has served as more than a site of knowledge acquisition. They theorised that business schools have played a role for students in answering the question, 'Who am I?'. Because business schools often serve the corporations of today and the business leaders of tomorrow, 'What is taught' and 'How it is taught' are important in shaping the character of those who will end up leading companies of huge global influence. Khurana and Snook (2011) believed that the fight for the future of business school education is a battle of ideas. "At its very core, this war is about identity, our souls, the very nature of who we are" (Khurana & Snook, 2011, p. 360). They argued that there are ever-present societal norms shaping who students will become, based on notions of 'success'. They also saw the business school as a 'holding environment' and as an 'identity workspace'. They advocated for these terms as metaphors alongside the existing metaphors for business education as a 'marketplace' or a 'temple'. They suggest that one of the most important roles of a business school is to help students "address two of life's animating mysteries: First, to help them discover who they are, and second to support them in their struggle to both discern and grow into whom they might become" (p. 360). March (2011) argued that "business schools have become indistinguishable from metaphors of markets. The problems of business schools are pictured as problems of creating educational programs (or public relations activities) that satisfy the wishes of customers and patrons rich enough to sustain them. It is a conception that yields useful insights and is not to be dismissed thoughtlessly. But it is a conception that fails to capture the fundamental nature of the educational soul" (p. 356).

I have shown above that much of the theorising around the identity forming role of the business school has been concerned with the economic logic that is perpetuated. In the section that follows, I show that there has been another dimension of the identity-oriented scholarship that has focused on how identity evolves in the workplace. Business schools can help with career-related identity transition. For example, identity transitions are important during a role change in one's workplace. This could take place, for example, from employee to manager or during an organisational change process (Khurana & Snook, 2011). It has been argued that mid-career executives have begun to look to the business school (as opposed to their company) as a partner in their career changes and direction.

But I argue in this study that business schools may also act as identity workspaces with regard to other dimensions of identity beyond work and career development. Who are business school students then in a broader societal context? It is to this question that this study is focused. To do this important work of building relevant and empowering 'identity workspaces', it can be argued that

business schools need tools for understanding our students beyond surveys that measure traits and motivations (see McAdams's life-story model of identity). One final intention of this study then, is to locate the business school students in their broader social context.

I conceptualise business schools as a form of adult-learning environment that focuses on a mid-career group navigating career and life transitions associated with late modernity. But I also see this environment as offering generalisable insights beyond this context. Mid-career executives are more than employees, managers or economic actors. They are struggling not just with career issues but broader pressures on their identities. I strongly believe learnings from the business school context can also inform understandings of late modern adult-learning identity processes in South Africa and potentially globally.

Based on the late modern theorising cited earlier, mid-career MBA students at GIBS can be seen as being drawn back to the formal learning environment by their own assessment of the risks and opportunities of the fluid uncertain economic and social context (Bauman, 2007). In the process of their return to study, new skills are learned. But as shown above, the school also acts as a holding environment for identity work. As adult learners, they return to GIBS with an established or partially formed identity. The programme environment then becomes a site for the reworking of this identity and the sustaining of a new identity under pressures of late modernity. The average student on the GIBS MBA is in their early to mid-30s. I see this in terms of life-course theorising as 'early-mid-life'. And it is this early-mid-life that the group are navigating during the course of their studies.

Narrative analysis has not played a large role in understanding business school education as far as I could find. One study that stands out is from Ruth (2017). Ruth (2017) used narrative analysis to understand the reasons students undertook the MBA journey. A set of storylines was developed that captured the reasons students studied an MBA. Ruth found that a storied approach to studying the MBA provided important learnings. She identified a set of seven stories to describe why students chose an MBA: The Show Goes On; The Quest; Born Again; Deus ex Machina; The Voyage; The Servant; and The Big Apple. Ruth showed how story analysis can add to the study of business school contexts.

2.6.4. Workplace and organisational scholarship on identity

I briefly show here that the construct of identity and narrative identity has been used in theorising beyond the business school and has also been used as a concept to understand the workplace itself. There has been a surge of interest in the construct of identity within organisational scholarship (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). The construct has enabled the development of substantive new insights (Ashforth, 2016). In reflecting on the organisational theorising of identity, Ashforth

highlighted how this concept is useful because it cuts across the macro and micro contexts. It has proved to be a powerful bridging construct for understanding organisational, managerial, professional and occupational phenomena. Its utility is in its ability to be linked to almost anything in any organisational setting.

But Ashforth (2016) was equally concerned with looking beyond the generativity of the concept of identity to its problematic indiscriminate utilisation. He believed that it needed more discerning use and that elements of the construct needed much firmer definition. He defined 'identity' as the central distinctive and enduring quality of an actor, while 'identification' referred to the ways in which those aspects become self-defining. For example, 'our team is creative' would point to the identity of the team. But when a person feels, that as a member of that team, they are creative, this is the identification process.

He then identified five different focus areas that would help reduce the over-use of the construct. The first was to focus specifically on the process of organisational identification. The second was to focus on the consequences of identification versus other forms of attachment. The third was to focus on other targets of identification such as dyads and teams beyond the organisation. The fourth was to focus on the 'dark-side' of identification. And the fifth was to examine other identification frameworks beyond Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the self-categorisation theory. Here he specifically highlighted the potential value of Erikson's identity approach, among others. He saw identity as a root concept and, in this regard, best approaches from multiple perspectives (Ashforth, 2016).

For Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008), identity in the workplace context referred to "subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and – by implication – 'How should I act?'" (p 6). They saw identity as a frame that was a "useful trend – at once fashionable, substantive and productive" (p 7). They highlighted how identity scholarship in the organisational sciences has been approached from different philosophical frameworks. These include functionalist, interpretivist and post-structuralist-critical perspectives. All these positions theorise a strong link between *identity and action*. Identity studies in organisations have been most focused on SIT and on how individuals come to identify with an organisation. This focus tended to be functionalist in orientation. Alvesson et al. (2008) showed how a second orientation of the field has been around 'identity work' described as the ongoing answering of the questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' as change unfolds, and anxiety and uncertainty set in. This focus has tended to be from the interpretive paradigm. The third and final main focus of organisational identity studies has been more from a critical post-structuralist perspective. This approach has been concerned with power and the dominant discursive relations in which identity is controlled.

Alvesson et al. (2008) further outlined a research agenda for identity scholarship in organisations. Of relevance for this study was their appreciation of scholarship that was about using the concept of identity to understand and bring empathetic insight to people – including who people are, and what they do. They highlighted agency as important, where the individual subject narrates tales of the self, but is also subject to 'extra-individual' forces especially through discourse and institutionalised patterns of culture. They further emphasised the need to understand the raw material from which identities are created.

I argued earlier that much of the management scholarship on identity has focused on the employee's relationship with the organisation in which they work. Or it has been oriented around career development (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). Beech (2011) has shown the liminal period in organisational identity shifts. In these periods, executives a) experiment with different identities, trying out different versions of themselves, b) reflect on themselves, and c) recognise through an epiphany or dawning that they have become this new self. The lack of ritual and other supportive processes in organisational contexts can lead to ambiguity becoming pervasive and not easily resolved. Psychological dysfunction can be the result (Beech, 2011).

At the highest managerial level, a segment of this grouping has been considered transnational in their identity (Petriglieri, 2014). For this group, the 'nomadic elite', their work is of huge importance to their self-concept. But in a world of 'flux' and change, where work is so unstable – this existence can also be meaningless. They also face a double bind. Flexibility is essential for success. Yet so is commitment. And yet, the more one commits, the less flexible one becomes. The two identities of 'flexible' and 'committed' are in tension. And the 'nomadic elite' struggle to reconcile them. One way of reconciling them is for these business professionals to be deeply committed to the place they are in, the people they work with, and the purpose of their work – for the time they are there (Petriglieri, 2014). Petriglieri (2014) advises this group to be 'someone's leader' rather than 'a leader'. He argues that this group need to aim to lead 'for' something rather than simply aiming to lead for its own ends. And that if anything, it is more important to put people first – before purpose. Making these commitments requires embracing sacrifice and loss. The tasks and the choices the managerial elite face require substantive psychological and identity work though giving up parts of oneself. As Petriglieri wrote, "Don't shy away from loss. Whether it is the loss of a more traditional community, or a more traditional lifestyle, or whether it is the loss of the freedom that mobility used to afford you – as now you are committing to something and, therefore, you're staying put in one place and in one group" (para 47). He argued for leaders not to shy away but rather to face those

losses and accept them. “Make sure it’s not just a simple loss, but a sacrifice. Sacrifice is a beautiful term, because it’s a word for a meaningful loss for a bigger purpose, or for someone we love” (Petriglieri, 2014, para 48).

Sociology has played an important role in the study of management and organisations (Duarte, 2009). Scholars of organisational change have used a narrative approach to understand how organisational change can impact on personal identities (Reissner, 2010). Changes in the work environment have been shown to result in major revisions to organisational actors’ biographical selves and accompanying stories that give meaning to past experiences and future expectations. In a fast-changing work environment, organisational participants need to reconcile competing expectations. These impact on their sense of self. Reissner (2010) argued that not enough is known about the dynamics of identity development under conditions of organisational change. The development of these personal identities has been seen as a narrative (Linde, 1993) and reflective process (Archer, 2007). The successful management of organisational change has been shown to require managing an identity transition through the meaning-making of events. A breakdown in meaning-making acts as a barrier to identity transition - and associated management of organisational change. Reissner (2010) found that positive experiences and expectations of the future are key in preparing oneself for change.

In the organisational context, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) have shown that narrative identity interacts with discourses and role expectations. Life-story has been found to be an important resource for leadership development, especially for authentic leaders for whom an understanding and clear sense of themselves is an important foundation for leadership (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) have documented how ‘self-narratives’ as stories make a point about the narrator and help people to reconstruct their identities during role transitions in the workplace. They pointed to the absence of research on work transitions during which people re-story themselves and use narrative to create a sense of continuity between where they have been and who they are becoming. They propose that narrative identity work will be more prevalent during work transitions than in the absence of a transition. They also theoretically suggest a range of propositions for understanding the character of identity transitions during workplace change – arguing generally that the more heightened and socially complex the transition, the greater the role of identity work. They speak of ‘gaining ‘passage’ as a requirement for successful transition. During a successful transition, a compelling and coherent narrative set emerges from repeated interaction and revision.

As indicated above, much of the work on identity and the workplace has focused on organisational and work-based identities. There is also scholarship on non-work identities. I have already highlighted a few elements from Booyesen (2007) and her work on South African identities in the workplace (in an earlier section on race and identity in South Africa). Héliot, Gleibs, Coyle, Rousseau and Rojon (2019) have examined how religious identities play out in the workplace. Ramarajan and Reid (2013) 'shatter the myth of separate worlds' in their discussion of how non-work identities are negotiated at work. They were interested in identities associated with nation, gender or family, among others. Organisational pressures lead people to respond by surfacing or suppression elements of these identities. People enact different strategies, including asserting to, complying with, resisting or inverting pressures. A variety of consequences result. Ramarajan and Reid (2013) saw these dynamics increasing as the work/non-work boundary shifts associated with declining job security, increasing workforce diversity and the spread of communication technology. They summarise the scholarship of work, identity and non-work identity. Ybema, et al. (2009) in their work on identities in organisations argued that individuals draw on discursive resources in defining their identity. They pointed to the importance of the agency-structure debate in this identity work. They also pointed to the importance of reflexivity, showing that people construct both private and public identities. Identity may therefore be seen as a bridging concept between the individual and society (Watson, 2009; Ybema et al., 2009).

2.6.5. Relevant issues from the business school and organisational science scholarship

In this fifth focus area of the literature review, I have provided substantive detail on the learning context of the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). I have shown how it is substantively different to the traditional university context in its focus on mid-career adult-learning executive education. I have highlighted critical scholarship on adult learning (Alheit, 1994; Field, 2012; Tennant, 2000; Tusting & Barton, 2003). Adult learning can arise by choice or through circumstance. It is pervasive and often tacit – most of it takes place outside of formal learning institutions. It almost always involves reworking earlier experiences through imaginative distancing (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Adult theorising has focused on transformative learning, meaning-making and new perspective formation (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). Adult learning has been associated with more enlightenment ideals of autonomy and independence – but has also been located within late modern, post-modern, feminist and critical paradigms (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Wojecki (2007) connects Giddens (1991) and Bauman (2007) to adult-learning theory showing the importance of the identity concept. Biography is crucial in adult learning. In some senses, it is the approach (Michelson, 2011) where understanding biography can enable learning processes to become voyages of discovery through 'biographicity' (Alheit, 1994). It is important to see biography

less as an authentic expression of a true person, and more as a socially constructed phenomenon (Michelson, 2011).

I have illustrated the convergence of identity-oriented scholarship in the late modern tradition with the adult-learning scholarship. As the life-course has become less predictable, adult learning becomes essential. I then highlighted the relevant business school and management education scholarship.

I showed the importance of business schools on the revenue and growth side, even if from an academic perspective they are not always highly respected (Kasworm, Sandmann & Sissel, 2000; Parker & Guthrie, 2010). The boom in the proliferation of business schools has come under criticism, especially in the post-financial crisis period. Some of these concerns have focused on the identity formation component of business school learning. Business schools are being encouraged to help students better answer the question, 'Who am I?' and 'What is the purpose of my life?' (Khurana & Snook, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010).

Due to the demands of the late modern context, mid-career students are being tasked *not just* with learning technical knowledge, but with transforming their identity. I have stated that the business school, in this sense, is an 'identity workspace' where students do not just 'learn about' but 'learn to be' (Khurana & Snook, 2011). Identity work is a core part of adult-oriented business school learning (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). The business school needs to be seen as an 'identity workspace' and an 'identity holding environment' alongside the common metaphors of the business school as a 'marketplace' or a 'temple'.

I have shown above that much of the theorising around the identity forming role of the business school has been concerned with the economic logic that is perpetuated. But there is also concern with role transition and the identity changes that the workplace requires. In this study, I take a detour from this scholarship and expand theorising by looking at non-work identities in the business school context. Narrative identity has been less studied in the business school context. One study that stands out is Ruth's (2017) work on narratives of MBA students' motivations to study the MBA.

I finally show that the construct of identity and narrative identity has been used in theorising beyond the business school and has also been used as a concept to understand the workplace itself (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Ashforth, 2016). This has been very valuable but also has blurred conceptual boundaries and there is lots of recent concern about its ubiquity. For Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) identity refers to "subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and – by implication – 'How should I act?'" (p. 6).

The 'nomadic elite' have been an interesting group from which to theorise with their transnational identity (Petriglieri, 2014).

While there is important non-work identity scholarship in the business context on race (Booyesen, 2007), religious identity (Héliot et al., 2019) and gender/nationality (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), more is needed. I highlighted how Ybema et al. (2009) showed the importance of discursive resources in defining identity.

In summary, identity is an important concept in adult learning. GIBS is an adult-learning institution, especially focused on addressing the needs of mid-career adult-learning as they navigate lives and careers associated with late modernity. Business schools are increasingly acting as 'identity workspaces' (Petriglieri, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010) and insights from the business school can inform broader contexts.

2.7. Identity and change in South Africa

In this closing section of the literature review, I examine a number of critical issues in the local context that make the study relevant for global theorising. It is at times a very high-level summary of social change identity-oriented issues in South and Southern Africa. This is because much of this scholarship is provided more in terms of background. Because this study has its focus on offering insights for global theorising (around the three objectives) making extensive links back to the local context is beyond its scope.

2.7.1. Disruption and transition

In conceptualise South and Southern Africa over the period of the lives of the 55 authors' stories as an intensified African example of broader global processes. The authors' lives have been subject to a substantive disruption and ongoing societal transition. The disruption and transition have not just been from political Apartheid to political democracy. There has also been economic liberalisation, rapid urbanisation and the coming together of previously separated diverse racial groups. As indicated in the 'outside-in' section on late modernity, multiple and vernacular modernities, these shifts have been conceptualised as important globally. By studying lives that have been intensively shaped by South Africa's journey, an important contribution can potentially be made to fleshing out and elaborating on theory.

Let me clarify what I mean by 'disruption' and 'transition'. I use the analogy of a wave on a beach. A wave rising up and crashing on the beach is what I mean by disruption. It reflects a dramatic period of social disruption in which there is a fast reconfiguring of the principles on which a society is based. The crashed wave then moves up the beach in uneven and powerful ways. This is the transition. Some things get washed away. But this can take time. Some things remain even with the wave. They are deeply located in the sand and even the transition hardly moves them. Disruption can be understood as dramatic and shorter in duration than transition. Both matter.

Disruption can be seen in the similar ways to how Gersick (1991) defined and conceptualised punctuated equilibrium. Gersick (1991) called a punctuated equilibrium a shift in the 'deep structure' (not to be confused with the way Chomsky might refer to deep structure – see earlier). In a sporting analogy, the game of basketball may be highly dynamic and turbulent on the surface. And certain change, such as moving the net higher or adding a player to the field, may alter it. But a change in the Gersick-conceptualised deep structure would be the equivalent of taking away the net. This changes the fundamental way the game is played. For someone living in South Africa, the changes associated with the end of Apartheid constitute both a disruption in which, over the period of a few

years, much of the policy changed and certain rules of the game were amended. However, the changes also constitute a transition in which the results of a disruption play out over time.

In times of more rapid and turbulent disruption, sensemaking has been shown to be more difficult (Weick, 1988). Sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended in words and that can serve as a 'springboard into action' (Weick et al., 2005). "Sensemaking is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking often requires not simply understanding *in order to act* – but acting *in order to understand*.

'Transition' seems slower and steadier to me than disruption. Transitions can be somewhat all-encompassing, for example, in the way that Fukuyama (1999) theorises around the 'great transition' from an industrial to an information age. Transitions can also be more micro-level, for example, a young person might be struggling with a transition from one school to another. In this study, South Africa's transition is strongly linked to global processes, but also shaped dramatically in this specific case by the disruptive shift from Apartheid to democracy in South Africa.

The South African democratic transition and its debated consolidation have been theorised from a range of perspectives (Howarth, 1998). It has been described through institutional terms (Lipton, 2014), and as involving a settlement that acts as a holding pattern of unresolved issues (Robinson, Steinberg & Simon, 2016). It can also be seen in global terms as part of a third wave of democratisation processes in the 1990s (Diamond, 1994).

This study focuses on how the identities and self-concepts of individuals are influenced by larger societal forces associated with both disruption and transition.

I have generally used the term 'transition' to refer to the changes that have occurred in South Africa, because the term 'South African transition' is often used in the literature. But the South African transition has included disruption too. A disruption may occur when an Indian child moves from their previously allocated township to the suburbs. A disruption may be felt for a young Black South African when they enter a previously White school in the early 2000s. I do not use the term 'transition' to exclude disruptive elements of the changes. It is important to see the South African broader change process as involving both disruption and transition – happening at different times and different scales.

Individuals have been shown to both thrive or struggle in the changing societal requirements (Reissner, 2010). A successful or unsuccessful identity change has been linked to a range of consequences. During societal disruption, Becker (1998) places an emphasis on the body and bodily

experience, and the stories that encapsulate this experience. In her view, the body can be said to reproduce culture. In her model there are three elements to the disrupted life: there is the disruption itself; then there is the in-limbo period which is a liminal period; and then there is the period of reorganisation (Becker, 1998). People attempt to make meaning of disruption in relating the experience to tradition and the past. There is a loss and need to define the self and the world. This meaning-making process is influenced by culture. For example, in the West there is a view that chaos is bad – and a belief in order, predictability and linearity (although Becker argues that in the West this may be changing). Lykes, Blanche and Hamber (2003) have shown how accounts and narratives of personal change are mediated by the context in which those narratives emerge. In deep conflict resolution, the importance of identity transformation has been documented (Strömbom, 2014).

2.7.2. Identity change during the South African transition

The context of this study is South and Southern Africa. South Africa is a country undergoing dramatic social, economic and political change. The change processes result from post-Apartheid newly democratic forces, but they are entwined with broader forces of late modernity. People in South and Southern Africa have been exposed to more diverse cultures, smaller geographic boundaries and elevated educational prospects. There has been ongoing economic liberalisation and globalisation. There has also been rapid urbanisation with an expected renegotiation of traditional forms of life. These dynamics have been theorised as crucial to understanding global processes and late modernity (Archer, 2007).

In South Africa, political changes at the national level led to a range of changes in different elements of society. In this section, I document some of the changes around identity. Ethnic and racial group identification in South Africa has historically been shown to be an important empirical reality (Bornman, 1999) – even if not a biologically sound reality. This sociological dynamic has remained important even as the socio-political and economic landscape of South Africa has changed.

Attitudes between race groups in South Africa have been imprinted by historical separation and oppression. A distinct (still contested) national identity in South Africa has emerged in the context of the broader processes of deterritorialisation and fragmentation associated with globalisation (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999). Although global integration has been happening for many centuries, there has been a rapid acceleration in the late twentieth century. This has especially related to the advancement of a globally integrated capitalist system and especially of transnational capital. This new South Africa has emerged within the global reality of fluid changing and competing forces. “Against the backdrop of ‘the market’s universal church and the retribalisation politics of particular

identifiers', South Africa has to attempt to build its own democratic institutions and fashion new forms of identity out of narrowly communal memberships" (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999, p. 25). No system can endure without connections of loyalty, identity and affiliation that bind the collective to which that system is connected. Common binding cultures and allegiances have been shown to matter. Individual identity affiliations are therefore crucial to the democratic constitutional efforts of South African nation building.

There have been efforts in South Africa to construct a national identity. Examples include the slogan 'Simunye – We are one' for SABC1, the national broadcaster in the mid-1990s. Despite these efforts, identification with sub-national groups continued to occur through the democratic transition (Bornman, 1999). The changes in South Africa around this time provided "often uncomfortable spaces for the exploration of shifting and relational identifications" (Prinsloo & De la Rey, 1999).

These dynamics in South Africa are best understood as part of the global shift towards understanding the ways in which multiple identities matter. This has been partly in response to the growth of identity politics – where citizens have searched for ways of collective recognition beyond an overarching common humanity or national identity (Bekker, 1999). Through the South Africa of the 1990s, there was an effort at reconciliation and nation building which included the aims of developing a national identity¹². There were a variety of reasons for this which I will not cover substantively here – except to recognise that this project was informed by modernist assumptions within the governing African National Congress. It was also underpinned by both Marxist and Liberal political positions.

Through negotiation of the constitution and the pragmatic political realisation of the democratic South Africa, compromises were sought and achieved. The Constitution that emerged represented an individually oriented human-rights-focused, liberal, progressive, constitutional framework. But space was provided for customs, tradition, culture and collective identity (Bekker, 1999). There were contradictory expressions of the idea of freedom. In the new nation, communities would be free to pursue their collective self-expression and cultural identities. These freedoms could be in tension with one another – for example, between traditional rights in some rural areas governed by patriarchal traditional authorities and women in those communities who wanted to purchase property. Complex and contradictory elements of collectivism and individualism were laid down in the new society (Hudson, 2000).

¹² I am not stating here that different groups in South Africa reconciled. I am also not stating that the effort at reconciliation was sufficient. White South African's efforts have come under renewed scrutiny. All I am pointing to is the efforts at reconciliation and nation building. These included the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and the 1996 Mbeki 'I am an African Speech'.

Historic studies of culture and identity in South Africa were understandably oriented around the ways in which race and ethnicity were political tools for division and oppressive segregation. Race and ethnicity started to be understood as political inventions. For some then, there was a concern in academic circles for studying race, ethnicity, identity and culture, because it might cement and affirm the divisions that Apartheid so brutally enforced. This perspective changed in the early democratic era. Identity, in South Africa, has continued to shape self-concept which shapes behaviour. It therefore has remained a crucial element in the forces shaping the nation. Between 1992 and 1997, a number of academic conferences explored the emerging issues in this domain (Bekker, 1999). This does not mean that in writing about race there are not risks. Even as race continues to be an important and salient dimension of South African society, it has been highlighted how imagined and socially created constructs can still stereotype people (Booyesen, 2013).

Before discussing race and identity in South Africa, I needed to make a choice on capitalising or not capitalising race. I have reviewed the fast-moving debates on the capitalisation of racial identities, such as at the *New York Times* (Coleman, 2020). The emerging consensus in the United States media is to capitalise Black but not White, although there are arguments for capitalising White too (Appiah, 2020). Traditionally in South African race grammar, across the four historically labelled race groups, black, white and coloured were not capitalised but Indian was. Indian is capitalised like European or American are capitalised – the term links to a geographic region. But the counter view is that ‘Indian’ in the South African context is a racial category, not a nation or geography of origin (the people called Indian do not all come from India). One part of me wanted to capitalise everything for consistency and to highlight how race matters. This would be consistent with the initial selection frame, using race, gender and age as visible markers of potential life histories and ensuring some balance and a broad representation. It would also be consistent with the important powerful role of socially constructed race in the period being examined. But another dimension of this project was to examine lives and life-stories, not strictly through the lens of race. I have tried to open lives up to their multi-dimensional character and have deliberately not organised the findings in racial categories. This latter approach would lend itself to retaining the uncapitalised black, white and coloured and the grammatical norm. Not capitalising ‘indian’ just looks odd. But debates at the time of writing this report were occurring around capitalising Black in the United States. This was linked to claims to power and history - the affirmation of particular life-stories and contexts that have not been heard or seen. Similarities have been drawn with the advocacy and push for capitalising ‘negro’ to be ‘Negro’ (Appiah, 2020).

I was further influenced by the American Psychological Association (APA) rules (which I used for the referencing and citations). The American Psychological Association has long preferred capitalising

Black and White and other race categories. The American Psychological Association (2020) stated that “Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use ‘Black’ and ‘White’ instead of ‘black’ and ‘white’” (no page number).

In the end, this nudged me towards capitalising all four race groups. I select this approach both for APA grammatical consistency, as well as to align with contemporary efforts to better portray important hidden histories. Capitalising, especially in academic works, can also point to race in a way that shows its stark socially constructed impact – and this can allow for deconstruction and debate. This debate is moving quickly and ongoing and I needed to make a choice in the middle of it. My choice should not be read as absolute endorsement of strong positions on the issue. The risk of capitalisation is that it makes race so salient that other dimensions of identity and parts of one’s life-story are diminished. It risks indicating that all Black or White people are more similar within their group than they are different. It also risks affirming and elevating White identity, which carries risks when so much work has gone into diminishing its historic power. White supremacists capitalise White – so this risks playing into their narrative. The only time I do not capitalise race is where I use direct quotations from authors who use the uncapitalised form in their own stories or texts. I have kept their original usage.

I have been clear across this study that race matters, but I have also been even clearer that all kinds of other elements of one’s story and one’s situated subjectivity matter too. I hope these nuances remain even as racial grammar constrains. The nuances will be evident in the findings and discussion.

Bornman (2010) found that, in the democratic era, localised South African identities (national and subnational) emerged as more important than supra-national or global identities for the majority of South Africans. Exceptions included an emerging broader African identity among Black South Africans and ongoing connections among English-speaking Whites with Western culture. The democratic changes then have not eradicated or solved the problems of heterogeneity, diversity and identity conflict.

South Africa has been theorised to make ‘extraordinary demands’ on its members in terms of internal and identity work. Le Pere and Lambrechts (1999) raised an important question in asking “how do people in South Africa who have not only experienced a particularly harsh form of identity manipulation but who can also not escape the decline in ‘identity confidence’ experienced globally, situate themselves in the ongoing tension between various sites of identity construction?” (p. 24). Collective memories are crucial in the formation of shared identities, which are tightly connected with the sustainability of any shared system of governance. Therefore, questions like this have

important significance for the sustainability of the nation (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999). This is illustrated in the figure below.

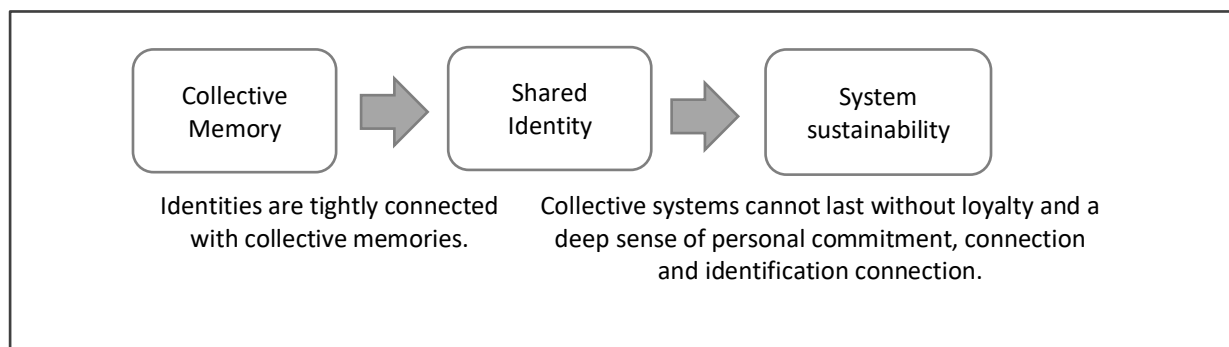


Figure 1: Memory, identity and social system from Le Pere and Lambrechts (1999)

In the 1990s a national ‘imagined community’ in South Africa was constructed. It was oriented around certain values and principles. But this does not mean that other emerging collective identities were not salient or important. Norval (1998) reflected on how people changed in South Africa and on issues of memory and how this linked to identity. Any group or individual identity – the sense of sameness over time and space – is only sustained by remembering. But this memory work is always embedded in complex structural conditions. Barber (2001) summarised the cultural shifts to argue that there were new cultural developments “bubbling up all around in daily life” and that South Africa was a place where there was “the refashioning of personal and collective identities, and in the rediscovery of a common humanity” (p. 177). She highlighted the contexts in which these collective identities have been forged – a country opened to international business, consumer capitalism, and the internet. For this study, she importantly highlighted how a culture of autobiography emerged as part of a pluralising exploration of identity in the post-Apartheid period.

Many of these identity issues have played out in the South African workplace. Booyesen (2013) has analysed these workplace relationships, illustrating the powershifts in society, the economy and organisations. Booyesen (2013) described how, prior to 1994, power was almost exclusively in the White male domain. This is evidenced by the fact that only six women were elected to Parliament in the entire 50 years of the regime of the National Party. In 1994, in the first democratic government, women made up 27% of parliamentarians. South Africa went from 141st to 15th (in terms of women in Parliament), literally from one day to the next on 27 April 1994. In the economic landscape and the world of work, substantive affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment policies began to shift economic power. The exact percentages of split between White and Black South Africans are contested with some arguing that little has changed and others arguing that there is evidence for substantive change. Booyesen (2013) stated that as of 2013, White South Africans controlled just over

50% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange compared to 98% in 1994. She argued that, in terms of economic power, Black South Africans are not yet equal with White South Africans, but that there has been real change and that the momentum continues. Social power has also shifted from White to Black as evidenced through new networks, advertising messages, newspapers and other media stories.

In the workplace, in 1994, management power resided almost exclusively with White men (who held 80% of management positions). Data shows progress in changing this, although it tends to be episodic and is not one-directional. Booysen (2013) argued that dominant national identities spill over into and become salient in the workplace. The 'us' and 'them' processes have tended to be oriented around race and gender. There has also been evidence for how 'contact' rather than diminishing in-group and out-group dynamics has tended to enhance them – with conflict arising often along historic race lines (Booyesen, 2013).

Since race continues to be an important and salient dimension of South African society (Booyesen, 2013), it is important to summarise what has been written around racial identities in the South African transition. Before doing this, I briefly note concerns around writing about difference and 'otherness'. There is a risk that in writing about differences, that these become normalised as different rather than questioning the very assumptions that lead to the label of difference. In doing so, resistance is removed from its discursive construction. For example, in writing about homosexual men, the categories of male, female, gay, straight, even sex itself are taken as facts. Scott (1991) argued that the entire 'phallic' economy is not questioned. History is not properly considered.

I am therefore aware of, and it is important to note, the risks of writing in the South African context in ways that entrench a range of powerful implicit norms. For Scott (1991), it was important to go beyond simply the study of experience to ask how the people doing the experiencing were produced. The value of experience is that it gives agency to those whose views are portrayed as outside of the dominant norm. This is powerful and important. But unless experience is also open to critique, the experiencing individual is taken for granted and the production of the individual is missing.

Race still orients so much of the experience of South Africa. It is the most commonly theorised identity orientation. The authors in the study and the writers whose books I analysed were all influenced in some ways by race-based classification either in their upbringing in South Africa or when moving to live in South Africa later. I therefore focus below on the literature on how race, as a subjective experience of identity, has been evolving and has been theorised in recent scholarship.

2.7.3. Black South African identities

Black selfhood is a vast landscape. It can be approached in detailed grand theoretical terms or through bounded empirical research projects. In grand theoretical terms, Black selfhood has been strongly rooted in the consequences of colonialism, of which Apartheid is often considered a special type. Mbembe (2017) has illustrated its brutal realities and potentialities. Mbembe (2017) wrote, “To be Black is to be stuck at the foot of a wall with no doors, thinking nonetheless that everything will open up in the end” (p. 152). He wrote, “The Black person knocks, begs, and knocks again, waiting for someone to open a door that does not exist. Many end up getting used to the situation. They start to recognise themselves in the destiny attributed to them by the name. A name is meant to be carried (p. 152).

For Mbembe (2017), there is an ongoing struggle to inhibit and to transcend the label ‘Black’. There is a struggle to belong fully to the world and to pass from the status of excluded to being included. Race is an act of imagination and of mis-understanding, but always of dominance. Black selves have been subject to sexualisation and the fear of their imagined sexual power.

I now turn to empirically bounded project-based research on Black selfhood in South Africa. The group being studied in my research was generally in their mid-30s when they wrote their stories. In the workplace Black South Africans have encountered historic White spaces. Booysen (2013, p. 14) highlighted this in a quote from a Black manager, “The current culture is white, we don’t like golf and having wine at a restaurant, because we do not enjoy it – nor have the money. This is not black culture”. Corporate cultures are one space that has been experienced as exclusionary.

Among younger Black South Africans, collective identities have been found to have shifted in favour of more individualised identities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). Everatt (2018) showed how younger South Africans are concerned about ‘acne and violence’ as they navigate typical youthful concerns and the difficult socio-political context. He highlighted the emerging sense of betrayal that began to be felt in the late 1990s (and has come to burn through universities in the last few years). Soudien (2008) examined racial dynamics on the university campus with a special focus on Black student’s experience. It was found that they experience the university as both an opportunity for confidence building as well as a challenging place in which they must navigate a White world.

In the second and now third decade of South African democracy, the ideals of the ‘rainbow nation’ have been challenged. The general consensus that ‘all is now OK’ in the new South Africa has been contested. Popular anger has focused both on economic inequality, as well as ongoing racism and colonisation. There is some recent evidence for increased animosity from Black South Africans to White South Africans (Durrheim, Tredoux, Foster & Dixon, 2011). There has also been some evidence

for greater Black identification with their broader African cultural roots emerging in the democratic era alongside racial, ethnic and 'rainbow nation' identities. This can potentially be seen as an effort to develop an identity in opposition to westernising pressures (Bornman, 2010).

Quite recent studies from 2010 and 2011 now seem antiquated in lieu of the rapid changes that have taken place. The challenge of navigating historical and contemporary influences became especially salient for younger Black South Africans in universities during the time of this study. South Africa, and especially the university landscape, have been heavily shaped by #feesmustfall and other powerful 'Fallist movements' starting in 2015. These movements form an important contextual backdrop for this study, even if they were led by students that are at least ten years younger than my cohort. As Hodes (2017) argued, "By late 2016, whether seeking to participate actively and sympathetically, or not, all students and staff in the South African academy were part of the Fees Must Fall" (p. 141). This has been a dramatic, emotional and violent period for South African universities. And one that will, without doubt, be studied further (Hodes, 2017; Luescher, Loader & Mugume 2017). Habib (2019) described this period as one in which institutions, and especially universities, were placed under intense pressure. Fear was always present.

This movement has been seen as a response to the inadequacies of 'transformation' – a term used to describe the ways in which wealth and opportunity have been partially transferred to Black South Africans as part of an incomplete response to Apartheid (Mbembe, 2008). In lieu of the limits of transformation, student movements have preferred the term 'decolonisation' – to indicate a preference for a more substantive and radical cultural and epistemological programme of change in opposition to the limits of the 'new' South Africa (Heleta, 2016). This response from many Black students can be understood in the context of broader historical theories of race and the self. It can be seen as a rebellion against the binds of 'double consciousness' (Lemert, 1976/1993) and the ways in which White society was experienced as constraining Black freedom.

In this period of South Africa, 'Black Consciousness' ideas have been crucial in helping Black South Africans explore and define their identity (Biko, 2004). In the recent period, Frantz Fanon (1991) re-emerged as a critical theorist who inspired protest as well as the academic reflection. It is Fanon's voice to those oppressed in post-colonial transition contexts that has spoken so effectively to the disenfranchised of contemporary South Africa. It has been argued that a Fanonian reading of the new South Africa shifts the frame from celebrating democratic freedom to mourning and rebelling against the selling out by new Black elites (Gibson, 2011).

As further background to this study, the above issues have also coalesced around a relatively new political party – the Economic Freedom Fighters who espouse a policy of assertive race-based

economic redistribution and nationalisation. It has described itself as “a radical and militant economic emancipation movement” (Economic Freedom Fighters, n.d.).

2.7.4. White South African identities

A number of key perspectives on post-Apartheid White experience in South Africa have been published. White South Africans have been found to be proud of being South African due to living through and helping to facilitate the transition. They have also been found to be proud ‘for no reason at all’ – being proud just because one is South African – a tautological connection to one’s country (Steingo, 2005).

In the transition, there was a need for White South Africans to develop a new sense of cultural rootedness and this was both enabled and limited by the label of ‘African’. What is important for Matthews (2011) was that White South Africans engaged with their own race. Their claims to ‘African’ness have been increasingly self-affirmed but contested by many Black South Africans.

White South Africans have been conceptualised as consisting historically of Afrikaners and White English-Speaking South Africans (WESSAs). WESSAs have tended to see themselves as ‘not having a culture’. They have tended to see others as having culture, but that their culture is just ‘normal’. They have tended not to organise around group identity, and rather have focused on individually oriented business paradigms and middle-class advancement. They have ongoing cultural ties to the United Kingdom, Europe and global Western norms.

J.M. Coetzee wrote, “white writing is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African” (Coetzee, 1998, p. 11, cited in Salusbury & Foster, 2004). Ballard (2004) cited Rian Malan’s text on childhood in which Malan wrote, “Looking back, the strangest thing about my African childhood is that it wasn’t really African at all. It was a more or less generically Western childhood, unfolding in generic white suburbs where almost everyone subscribed to Life and Reader’s Digest, and to the generic Western verities they upheld. Our heads turned to the north like flowers in the sun, towards where the great white mother culture lay. Our imaginary lives were rooted there, not in this strange place, where Zionists danced on Thursdays and rain washed the red earth of Africa into the streets” (Malan, 1990, p. 62, cited in Ballard, 2004). Ballard (2004) identified four responses of White South Africans searching for comfort in their identity: ‘semi-gration’, ‘segregation’, ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’. He argued that the integration response was the high path to identity development, which was oriented away from the West and rather engaged the diversity of local society.

White Afrikaner identity has developed through a more ethnically group-oriented and locally embedded politics. It is both White and Western and something African. Steyn (2004) argued that Afrikaner identity has had an existential crisis in the democratic transition and has needed to be reworked and repackaged for the new South Africa. Options for Afrikaner identity survival have included maintaining cultural and ethnic purity, going into exile, alliances among all Whites, forging a language and cultural community rather than a racial one around Afrikaans, building a united engaged narrow Afrikaner political community and then seeking to hybridise itself into Africa by giving up its superior position.

There has been analysis of White resistance speak and the second of White pro-transformation speak (Steyn, 2001; Nuttall, 2001). Steyn (2001) has positioned much of the emerging character of White identity within a fresh critical global conversation on race and whiteness studies. As an example, Steyn and Foster (2008) employed discourse analysis to label and open up for inquiry – a range of ways in which White South Africans positioned themselves (both authentically and inauthentically) in a changing landscape. They identify ‘New South Africa Speak’ and ‘White Ululating’. They highlighted important conversational routines including the following: the use (or is it abuse) of non-racialism and colour blindness to deny the effects of race. This orientation was often in opposition to the collectivist orientations of the African National Congress (Hudson, 2000).

Because there has been limited work on White autobiography, I briefly cite work by Nuttall (2001), even though the stories she captured were located in the Apartheid period. Nuttall (2001) explored freedom struggle White identities in analysing a number of autobiographies of well-known White South African struggle activists. She was interested in the ways in which the ‘settler’ identity (a starting point for White identity) shifts and breaks down. She presented a fascinating discussion of how White identity operates when it begins to separate from White privilege. Nuttall leveraged perspectives from major social theorists to dive into many of the psychological processes operating. She drew attention to Antjie Krog’s sense of unstable belonging and exclusion – prominent in statements like “It is mine, I belong to the continent” and “You whom I have wronged, please take me with you” (p. 129). In writing about Antjie Krog’s self-disclosure and self-observation in *Country of my Skull*, Nuttall (2001, p. 128) wrote, “the constructing of one’s identity is always public, political, but also a private, act”. This kind of very personal examination of lives and self-writing is connected to my work here.

2.7.5. Coloured South African identities

Adhikari (2005, 2009) examined the history of Coloured identity through the rise of White supremacy, Apartheid and the democratic transition. Coloured identity was a product of racial

binaries and oppressive European and White power and policy. But it has also been a product of Coloured people themselves. It has varied according to class, religion, geography and ideology. In addition to the substantive role of subjective agency, there are also many other nuances. It should go without saying that there has never been one Coloured identity, but there have been some common themes. The effect of forced removals has been prominent, as have been the effects of marginalisation, assimilation, shame and hybridity. In the newly democratic South Africa, Coloured South Africans had to come to terms with the ways in which they had gained more under Apartheid than Black South Africans and had participated in their oppression. But even though more politically free, there has been a sense among some Coloured South Africans that they have been more disadvantaged than ever before. This was highlighted in the title of Adhikari's 2005 book *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*. There has been a fluidity, but also a profound uncertainty in the present time about whether and how to embrace 'colouredness'. Attempts to reconfigure the identity have remained at the margins. It is also important to note that these types of analysis tend towards oversimplification. They miss the potential, that the political and racial identity 'Coloured' might not have a corresponding singular subjective identity correlation for many Coloured individuals (Prinsloo & De la Rey, 1999).

2.7.6. Indian South African identities

Historically Indian South Africans were also subject to forced removal and had to live in isolated 'group areas'. Like Coloured South Africans, research has shown that Indian South Africans have often had an ambivalent relationship with the Black majority. They too were oppressed by the Apartheid government but were not as harshly treated as Black Africans. They have tended to vote for the political opposition in the democratic era (Ramsamy, 2007). In the context of being a minority, there has been an effort to reinforce and support their own culture. In doing this there has been a reinforcement of difference. One of the ways this has happened is highly gendered and has involved the reinvention of an idealised feminine icon (Radhakrishnan, 2005). This was emphasised in a popular radio station advertisement in which an Indian woman was rejected by both Black and White South Africans, and only found true self-expression and happiness when she embraced the multi-coloured culture of her ancestry. Through this kind of cultural embrace, racial differences have been reinterpreted as cultural differences and worthy of preservation. But this served, problematically, to preserve racial difference. There has been a feeling that South African Indians are 'left out' and have to compete for limited jobs with Black Africans but without access to political power and state support – this has been especially true among economic disadvantaged Indians. Contemporary Indian identity has been enacted through performance and display, such as the Miss India Worldwide event. There has been a fusing of global Indian identity (such as through Bollywood)

with local contexts. Radhakrishnan (2005) detailed three strands of Indian women's approaches to identity: firstly, traditional female roles; secondly, negotiated and contested liberal roles; and thirdly, a poorer Indian identity shaped by poverty and frustration at the lack of state support.

There has been a tension as to how Indians should best identify in the new South Africa. This has been complicated by occasional political attacks on Indians by politicians and musicians. Day-to-day interaction between Indians and Black South Africans has been quite shallow and superficial despite historic political alliances. It has become popular for Indians to visit India and search for their roots. The connection with India has been reinforced by Bollywood and international and Indian T20 cricket (Vahed & Desai, 2010).

Vahed and Desai (2010) argued poetically that "Post-Apartheid South Africa ... legally imprisons people into the category Indian (or Asian). Satellite television locks many into an imaginary world of diaspora and homeland. Money allows people to buy into gated communities. The rich can live in worlds that at once tie them in and liberate them, while the poor remain confined in townships whose socio-economic conditions see more and more young people seeing less and less hope of entering universities or the job market. The response to a 'better life' is met with barely concealed cynicism. Less visible to the 'outside eye' is that Indians are simultaneously creating even narrower boundaries around them as South Indians, North Indians, Hindus, Tamils, Muslims, Telegus, Gujaratis and Hindustanis" (p 6).

2.7.7. Broader Southern African and continental identities

South Africa has a contradictory relationship with the broader continent. At times, its connections to Africa are embraced, while at other times its relationship with the continent is pushed aside. In its tourism policy, for example, it positions itself as both African and 'not African' (Mathers & Landau, 2007).

South Africa has always been a destination for migrants, but the inward movement of African migrants accelerated through the 1990s and the 2000s, especially with the implosion of the Zimbabwean economy in the 2000s, leading up to substantive violence in 2008. Anti-immigrant sentiment has remained high and there has been an acceptance of the use of violence (especially against Black African migrants) by many South Africans. South Africa's experience tracks recent global experience where increasing mobility and migration has come alongside a rise in prejudice and fears of 'being flooded' (Jinnah, 2010) – although between 2006 and 2010, there was a slight improvement in sentiment (Crush, Ramachandran & Pendleton, 2013). In this challenging context, Black African migrants to South Africa face an ongoing negotiation of identity (Muzondidya, 2010). Their identity has been shaped by xenophobic violence and experiences of 'otherness'.

Inner city urban spaces, especially Johannesburg, have become centres of migration. In these contexts, the impulse towards the rootless and the rooted has played out as people from different, mostly African, contexts live side by side with people who define themselves as South African. The ultimate outcome of this contestation is unknown, but new forms of belonging and exclusion have occurred in Johannesburg since no group can claim indigenous rights to the urban space – even as the majority of new arrivals have been from South Africa (Landau, 2006). Immigrants to Johannesburg encountered a new South African nationalism, a hostile immigration regime and xenophobic violence. They have reacted with what Landau and Freemantle (2010) have called a ‘tactical cosmopolitanism’ to deal with the opposition to their presence. This is a kind of ‘cosmopolitanism from below’, where migrants struggle in everyday actions to meet their needs and achieve their interests. In doing this, they have sought a partial inclusion in South African society without becoming bounded by South African identity. They argued that migrants in Johannesburg use the power of cosmopolitanism without being bound by its responsibilities.

Muzondidya (2010) highlighted the psychic and sociological dimensions and the role of the other in identity development. Migrants from Africa have countered South African discourses of otherness with claims to common broader pan-African connection, and indebtedness to the role of other countries in the South African freedom struggle. Zimbabwean migrants have learned local languages, but they remain distinguishable by their accent and mannerisms. Those arriving earlier have been able to secure citizenship or residency, but this has become increasingly difficult through legal channels. They have had to navigate a corrupt state bureaucracy. But Muzondidya (2010) also showed how Zimbabweans employ their own self-aggrandising vocabulary in which South Africans are lazy, dishonest and uneducated. Zimbabwe is cast as safe and well mannered, unlike South Africa. Through these defensive processes, Zimbabwe has become this mythical, somewhat idealised, land.

Migrants from South Africa’s immediate neighbouring states would be expected to have a different experience to those from further north in the continent. Taking one example, migrants from Somalia have been found to feel like they are particularly ‘easy prey’. Violence and looting of Somali shops have occurred since 2008. Somali migrants have formed their own business networks and used their business savvy to carve out a unique space in the South African economic and geographic landscape (Jinnah, 2010).

It is important to note that of all the Black African migrants to South Africa, most of the studies focus on the lower-skilled migrants. The highly skilled face the easiest path and are integrated into the

higher elements of the economy (Muzondidya, 2010). Most of the non-South Africans in this study would be in this latter highly skilled more easily absorbed group.

2.7.8. Gender, identity and South Africa

Gender and race were the two visible criteria used to proportionally select the initial stories. All the authors are identified as male or female in the student database available. Because these external demographic criteria were available, I aimed to select a 50:50 proportional group in terms of gender mix. I now summarise some of the literature on gender in the South African and Southern African context.

Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger (2012) make clear the key issues around gender relations in the country. 40% of households are female-headed. Traditional marriage is negotiated through a formalised payment of *lobola*. Many men cannot afford this payment and so many couples remain unmarried. In addition, the majority of women have their first child before the age of 21. A large number (close to half, in 2002) of children grow up in families with absent fathers. South Africa has high levels of domestic violence. At least half of female murder victims are at the hands of their partner. In some surveys up to 28% of men admitted to having committed rape. The country has an extremely high HIV rate – the majority of those infected are women – a statistic linked with the high inequality and violence within gender relations. These facts emerge from a gendered colonial and Apartheid history. The role of the migrant labour system in drawing men away from rural homes to work on the mines is also especially important to note (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012).

Mayer and Barnard (2015) documented how new identities are negotiated in the South African workplace, which is an increasingly diverse and complex working environment. There has been pressure on people to manage among different value systems and “ambiguous interpretations of work and life realities” (p 331). The concept of culture has remained strongly connected to the context of race. Women in South Africa have to negotiate historic identities around home-building and caring with new work identities. Work is important generally to most South African women even as they often navigate male-dominated spaces with resilience, finding ways to thrive and flourish. Recent scholarship has focused on the positive ways in which women navigate the work–life interface when compared to earlier work that focused on the challenges and difficulties they encountered (Mayer & Barnard, 2015).

Women have played important roles in the democratic revolution. It has been argued that their participation in public life needs to move beyond the legal agreement for equality and towards a more substantive reality (Hassim, 1999). In terms of men and masculinity, Moolman (2013) has explored the concept of intersectionality to better understand masculinity in South Africa. She

observes that “African masculinities are a complex matrix of relations of power, historical, ideological, and material” (p 96). Masculinities in South Africa have been seen as in crisis and in transition (Moolman, 2013). Political attempts to portray a neo-traditional strong form of masculinity have been observed in South Africa in opposition to efforts to advance equity – for example, in the masculinities portrayed by Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012).

Swarr (2012) used the concept of ‘transition’ to connect gender shifts to the South African transition. In some ways the fluidity and changing nature of society as a whole makes personal identity transitions easier. She started her book with a quote from a transsexual whose own bodily reconstruction parallels that of the country in 1994. She used the language of gender ‘liminality’ to describe the spaces for gender in between socio-cultural certainty. She showed how gender was formed through political economy, race and colonialism.

In the context of sexual orientation in the South African context, Gunkel (2010) highlighted the violence against lesbian women in South African society and especially in the townships. She described how art around traditionally non-confirming sexuality provoked strong conservative reactions from many in South Africa, while also providing an opening to new possibilities and important conversations. This happened alongside one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and the outlawing of legal prejudice against any person of any sexual orientation. There has been tension then between the constitutional law and lived experience of homophobia.

2.7.9. Relevant issues for South/Southern African change and identity

This final section of the literature review provides important contextual nuance for understanding the relevance of the study for global theorising. The focus of this study was on examining local dynamics with the intent to contribute to global theorising. I do not build explicitly in this report on this South and Southern African scholarship. Although I do return especially to Mbembe’s work around self-authorship in the discussion section.

That said, it should be clear that there have been a number of changes that a wide range of South Africans have experienced through the democratic transition. These have not just been in material contexts, but also at the level of identity and self-representation. These have been associated with many shifts: the transition from Apartheid to the democratic era; the transition from a more traditional fixed ethnic identity to a more fluid contemporary identity; and the push back against this movement.

Race has continued to matter in the way it shapes how one identifies and in how one identifies others. I have not dived into the important theme of intersectional identities in South Africa,

although a few points have been made about gender and sexual orientation through the democratic transition. There is always a risk in essentialising and 'flattening' the experience of different people.

I close this section by repeating the point made by Swarr (2012) that the fluidity and the changing nature of society as a whole makes personal identity transition salient – in some cases easier. There has been a certain liminality in terms of race, gender and identity in South Africa. This is not to state that everything is fluid and open to newness. There are also firmer identities emerging in response to processes of othering and labelling by both oneself and others.

2.8. Literature review conclusions

This section pulls all of this extensive literature together in a tight summary focussed on the three gaps identified – although there is of course some overlap in how research questions link to different sections of the literature review.

2.8.1. First gap: An African context can extend late modern identity-oriented theorising

The first objective of this study was to bring a transitioning South African post-Apartheid perspective to extend late modern identity-oriented theorising. In order to achieve this, I firstly summarised the work by global theorists who have pointed to a shift in the recent evolution of modernity towards late, reflexive or liquid modernity (Bauman, 2007; Beck et al., 2003; Giddens, 1991). These changes have been conceptualised, less as a dramatic shift to a post-modern order, and more as further phase in modernity's evolution. The global context is now more integrated, more plural, more fractured and more dis-located from both tradition – and even modern expert routines. Capitalism is more advanced and is demanding ever greater flexibility in production and labour. Choice has expanded further into micro-dimensions of life. These shifts have important implications for the self. Unity of selfhood is now understood as a project of reflexive agency set against a globally mediated context of fragmentation and uncertainty. There are huge risks in this process since, without clear truth to easily hold onto, people must navigate in unstable and fluid terrain. In the context of ontological insecurity, there are ever wider questions of 'Who to be?', 'How to act?' and 'What to do?'. The self must be created rather than discovered. This is linked to lifestyle choices where we are *not* who we are, but who we wish to be.

Further theorising has taken focussed on the process of globalisation. It has been argued that globalisation has exposed the self to new complex processes (Callero, 2003; Fraser, 2003). I need to especially highlight the scholarship of Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) who theorise that as globalisation pulls people apart, there is a corresponding drive to find a niche and to construct a local identity in opposition to the global.

I have also showed that despite extensive global theorising (with a special reference to the work of Giddens), little scholarship has considered an African or South African perspective in these debates. Beck himself has argued for the differing routes to and through these processes (Beck et al., 2003). To remedy this, I have highlighted perspectives oriented towards a variety of societal contexts of late modernity (Eisenstadt, 2000; Lee, 2006), and especially Africa and Southern Africa where there is the possibility of 'turning theory on its head' to theorise from Africa towards the West (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). I have especially highlighted Mbembe (2002) for his call for a thickening of self-

writing in Africa that transcends colonial and post-colonial liberation politics. I have also shown how Black selfhood remains a complex project (Mbembe, 2017). I briefly touched on the scholarship of Berger (2010) who called for linking of the scholarship of African authoring with global theory (as Africans and Europeans were both human). I also highlighted a few key issues from McNee (1997) around the risks centred of essentialism when discussing anything African and the need for a middle ground communalism in which individual agency remains important.

I have shown in highlighting all of the extensive global and less extensive local scholarship that there is a need to extend global theorising around late-modernity and identity by bringing an African perspective. This was the first objective of the study.

2.8.2. Second gap: Narrative analysis may be missing an African vocabulary

The second objective of this study was to examine the relevance of existing narrative approaches to identity in this changing African context. I hoped to extend the narrative coding vocabulary to account for local dynamics.

Using the metaphor of Nielson (2013), the first part of the literature review (oriented towards the first objective) was written from the ‘outside-in’ perspective. It highlighted key theorising from society-to-the-self or in my analogy *from the web to the spider*. In order to understand identity issues, I then focussed the literature review directly on the self as well as onto narrative identity. These sections of the literature review turned theorising ‘inside-outward’, moving to examine the *spider in the web*.

I emphasised reflexivity, by locating its discussion in Mead’s ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ interacting in a reflexive process (Maines, 2001; Mead, 1934;). I linked Mead to Symbolic Interactionism (Stryker, 2008). And I highlighted the concerns with meaning-making in a pragmatic orientation (Callero, 2003). I discussed reflexivity and the ways in which people are seen as reflexive beings (Archer, 2007). Through reflexivity they transform themselves and their social worlds – and in turn are changed by those very worlds they have created (Côté & Levine, 2002). I showed that reflexivity is a core mechanism in which agency and structure interact – especially under late modern conditions (Archer, 2007).

I highlighted the importance of transforming the subjective perspective to an objective reality in order to navigate the dynamics of late modern life (Kegan, 1982; 2009). I linked Kegan (1982; 2009) and Archer (2007). This was in order to show that there are a number of ways of linking the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’.

I then turned to the identify-oriented question of 'Who am I?' and Identity. I stated that it has become a serious focus area of psychological scholarship. This was initially inspired by Erikson's focus on 'identity' and 'identity crisis' (Erikson, 1950/1993; McAdams, 1994).

I showed how identity theorising has evolved (Calhoun, 1994; Côté & Levine, 2002; McAdams, 1994; Wilbur, 2000). I elaborate substantively on Brubaker and Cooper (2000) to highlight the way that I use identity in this study – as situated self-understanding.

In this section of the literature review explored two critical issues: the identity concept (as a response to the question 'Who am I?') and the importance of reflexivity in making meaning and mediating agency and structure. I closed this section with a brief summary of some of key the life stages and typologies associated with identity. And I made note of related concepts such as Social Identity and Personal Identity (Bornman, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000) that I do not elaborate on further but which this study certainly relates to.

After having summarised the key perspectives on the pressures on the self as society changes (*the web*), and then the scholarship closer to the person (*the spider*), I then took a narrative turn (Maines, 1993). In the fourth focus area of the literature review, I showed how a narrative approach has developed in sociology. Narrative has been a bridging concept between *the spider and the web*. The essential insights are that individual stories are powerful and even *essential* in living a human life. These stories draw from, and are located within, cultural frames. Furthermore, drawing from memory studies, stories of our past are not absolute truths. We pull together the facts in very intentional ways. We also get facts wrong. A story of a person and their family can be understood as particularly personal, *and at the same time*, a social construction. The life-story says as much about who that person is, as it does about the reality of a world 'out there'. I particularly want to emphasise McAdams's (1996) life-story approach to identity in this regard.

In the first two sections of this literature review, I summarised the key perspectives on the pressures on the self as society changes (*the web*) and I then turned to specifically consider the person (*the spider*). In the next focus area, I have shown how a narrative approach has developed in sociology (Hancock, 2014; Maines, 1993). The wall between the garden of psychology and the wilderness of literature was broken down (Albright, 1994). I have shown how narrative started to be understood as one of the fundamental ways that human experience is organised (Bruner, 1991; Ezzy, 1998; McAdams, 1996). The concept of 'Narrative identity' captured this storied sense of self - theorised by Bruner (1990), Ricoeur (1991) and Somers (1994).

The essential insights are that individual stories and collective narratives have been found to be powerful and even *essential* in living a human life (Eakin, 2008). People's stories draw from cultural frames (Maines, 2001; Watson, 2009)). A story of a person and their family can be understood as a particular personal and social construction. It says as much about who that person is as it does about the reality of a world 'out-there' and events that happened before. I positioned this study within the debate on the self as nexus of intersecting forces and voices (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001).

I discussed a range of ways in which stories had been recorded and analysed. I documented Eakin's (1999; 2008) concept of 'living autobiographically'. For the purposes of this study, I particularly emphasised McAdams's life-story approach to identity (McAdams, 1996).

Furthermore, drawing from memory studies, I showed that the stories of our past are not absolute truths. The past never remains the same (Jedlowski, 2001). We pull together the facts in intentional and unintentional ways (Reese & Fivish, 2008). Group stories have been shown to have a distinctive genre and plot structure and to be shared by group members. These shared stories can impact on individual autobiography and life-story, especially when individuals are strongly identified with the group. These stories have been shown to become part of the 'cognitive equipment' used by individuals to make sense of and to construct their lives. They shape how meaning can be made of events. Storytelling and memory-sharing have been shown to shape self-esteem, for example. These acts have also been found to be gendered (Fivush, 2008).

It is important to note that although a number of key studies of narrative and identity were highlighted in the literature review section, a number of key frameworks were rather located in the methodology section. This was because they were primarily concerned with 'coding' and narrative analysis. The boundaries between narrative identity and narrative analysis overlap substantively. So, I want to briefly mention a few key scholarly works highlighted in the methodology section since they are later integrated into the discussion chapter of this report. This includes the scholarship of Saldaña (2009) and Silverman (2011) on narrative coding. It touches on life course studies and issues of trajectory and transition (Shanahan and McMillan, 2008).

The methodology section also highlights the work of McAdams (2001) on agency and structure coding, as well as Lieblich et al. (2008) on the same themes. The methodology section also highlighted the temporal and evaluative dimension of life paths (Brockmeier, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

All of the extensive scholarship above was summarised as a platform to achieve the second objective of this study. This was to examine the relevance of existing narrative approaches in this changing

African context. I aimed to extend the vocabulary used in the narrative coding to account for these local dynamics.

2.8.3. Third gap: Extend business school theorising through narrative identity in context

In this focus area of the literature review, I provided detail on the difference between executive education focussed business schools and the traditional university context.

I highlighted critical scholarship on adult learning (Alheit, 1994; Field, 2012; Tennant, 2000; Tusting & Barton, 2003). I have shown links between adult learning and late modernity and identity (Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Wojecki, 2007). I showed how biography is crucial in adult learning (Alheit, 1994; Michelson, 2011).

I highlighted how the proliferation of business schools has come under criticism. One of these concerns have focused on the identity formation component of business school learning. Business schools are being encouraged to help students better answer the question, 'Who am I?' and 'What is the purpose of my life?' Business schools act as 'identity workspaces' in late modernity – where students don't just 'learn about' but also 'learn to be' (Khurana & Snook, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010).

Recent business school scholarship has been concerned with identity. For example, there has been concern for the 'nomadic elite' (Petriglieri, 2014). There has been a focus on career-oriented identity development (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). And Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas (2008) and Ashforth (2016) have developed an agenda for the study of identity in the workplace. There is also scholarship in non-work identity in the business context (Booyesen, 2007 Héliot et al., 2019 Ramarajan & Reid, 2013 Ybema et al. (2009).

But there is very little scholarship on narrative identity and even less on narrative identity in its social context. One study that stands out is Ruth's (2017) work on narratives of MBA students' motivations to study the MBA.

Thirdly then, I have shown that there remains a gap in theorising narrative identities in context, in the business school institutional environment. Business schools are one of the more influential locations for adult learning. It is an ideal location to study late modern adult learning and identity dynamics.

2.8.4. Identity and Change in South and Southern Africa

I ended the literature review with a focus on describing the local context and on identity-oriented scholarship from South and Southern Africa.

I show that the South African transition is a complex process (Diamond, 1994; Howarth, 1998; Lipton, 2014), that tensions remain (Robinson et al., 2016), and that individuals can struggle with changes like these (Becker, 1998; Reissner, 2010; Weick, 1988)

The South African transition exhibits many global processes in a condensed form (Archer, 2007; Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999).

Much of this material is provided for contextual purposes, since I do not (in this report) develop all of the potential linkages with the local context. What this section does highlight is the ways in which historical South and Southern African identities are relevant in the present era and are also evolving (Prinsloo & De la Rey, 1999). I particularly emphasised a number of high-level perspectives on some of the identity related scholarship from studies of the four main Apartheid racial classifications (while acknowledging their complicated present and socially constructed nature). Apartheid racial identities continue to have an influence on contemporary South Africa.

In illustrating many of these themes and particularly in highlighting that South Africa makes 'extraordinary demands' on its members (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999), I have shown the value of a South and Southern African context for global theorising.

2.8.5. Summary statement: The key gaps identified

In summary, three gaps were identified in a wide-ranging review. This study sought to address these three gaps.

1. Firstly, little scholarship has considered an African or South African perspective on debates around self and society under late modern condition. There is a call for a thickening of African self-writing (Mbembe, 2002) and for a better understanding of late (Giddens, 1991; Beck et al., 2003) and vernacular modernities (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). What kind of late modern selfing pressures are salient in the South African transition? By bringing a transitioning South African post-Apartheid perspective, I aimed to extend and add nuance to existing frameworks.
2. Secondly, there is a need to explore narrative identity issues (Côté & Levine, 2002; Ezzy, 1998; Marcia, 1966; McAdams, 1996) and especially narrative analysis approaches (Silverman, 2011) to the local context. By deploying narrative analysis, I was particularly interested in whether the existing 'Western' vocabulary (Lieblich et al., 2008; McAdams, 2001) was adequate to account for local dynamics.
3. Thirdly, business schools are locations for late modern adult learning (Alheit, 1994). It is an important location to study identity dynamics (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016; Khurana & Snook,

2011; Petriglieri, 2014). Business school and management development scholarship has examined identity in a number of ways, including using the narrative approach (Ruth, 2017). But this scholarship has yet to substantively consider self and identity processes associated with narrative identities – especially in their social context. My third main objective aimed to draw on the findings to make suggestions for the work of business schools and similar adult-learning institutional contexts. What life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students' narrative identities in a wider context?

3. Methodology

3.1. Summary of the approach taken

In this methodology section, I position this study within the qualitative tradition. I provide some historical background on narrative inquiry or narrative analysis as a method of qualitative research. I then unpack different approaches to coding within narrative inquiry, emphasising the difference between researching the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of stories. The ‘what’ aligns with more traditional *thematic analysis* and the ‘how’ with *structural analysis* of the text. I highlight two other approaches. One can also consider the institutional context within which the ‘what’ and ‘how’ is produced – this third approach has been called *interactional analysis*. And one can consider the *performative* dimensions of storytelling.

I also highlight in this section a few varieties of ways in which narrative analysis has categorised stories and considered the different dimensions of these. Some examples of the different components of stories are provided in a set of lists, drawing from Silverman (2011), Riessman (2005) and Saldaña (2009).

I describe ways of organising stories by temporal shifts and ways of seeing them in more artful dialogical ways. I explain some of the links between narrative analysis and linguistics. I also briefly describe dramaturgy, as well as motif coding.

I substantially summarise the scholarship on *structure* and *agency* within the narrative analysis tradition. In closing, I describe the adjacent approach of life-course study.

This sets the scene for a summary of the specific approach taken. Although informed by post-structural and discursive traditions, I make clear that I was more oriented to writing of the authors as having agency in how they tell their story – even as I acknowledge they draw from cultural toolkits and are socially influenced in how they structure their stories.

In emphasise in the methodology section, I drew from Riessman’s (2005) thematic analysis approach with crucial elements of structural analysis. In this sense I was initially concerned with the ‘whats’ but included important reference to the ‘hows’ around the way stories are told. In parts of my analysis, I highlight that I draw on Gergen and Gergen (1997) in developing a multi-generational lifeline of ‘ups and downs’. I paid attention to the ‘setting’ and in the latter part of the study to the ‘plot’ through which I came to call common ‘archetypal storylines’ (Saldaña, 2009). Life-course studies have tended to focus on people who start life under similar conditions and then diverge. My group started life in different places and positions, yet all ended up studying at the same school at a similar phase of their lives. This is not in this sense a life-course approach but, drawing from

Shanahan and Macmillan (2008), I kept in mind the importance of ‘trajectory’ and ‘transition’ as well as ‘turning points’.

I also drew heavily on McAdams (2001) and themes of agency and communion. McAdams showed how “people’s life-stories differ with respect to the salience of agency and communion themes, and those differences are measurable” McAdams (2001, p. 1). I coded for a range of themes around this, including agency, structure, communion and serendipity (Lieblich et al., 2008).

It should become clear that there were substantive deductive components to the analysis, and I was informed by existing narrative coding approaches. But I also tried to approach the stories with an open mind and included new codes and themes that were salient. Although this study is not strongly aligned with Frank’s (2011) Dialogical Narrative Analysis, the spirit of Frank’s call for artful narrative inquiry and for opening dialogue was always present. In this sense I hope my emotional response to these stories and connection to these real lives lived adds to the study rather than clouding the findings.

I then discuss the ‘sampling’ or story selection risks and the potential biases that may be part of the approach taken. I provide a detailed summary of the processes that I followed to allow the reader to understand the assumptions made, and I highlight how ethical concerns were dealt with. This also brings up issues of generalisability which I discuss. The addition of the analysis of five autobiographical books emerged as a response to initial concerns around the particularity of the group studied. I believe this latter addition of the five books substantively sharpened and strengthened the findings.

In the methodology, I also respond to any potential performative issues. This is important because the fifty-five essays that were analysed were written as a requirement for an MBA course that I taught in 2016 and 2017.

3.2. Key elements in the qualitative approach

Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that qualitative texts, consisting of words rather than numbers, can preserve chronological flow and enable stronger explanations. Qualitative research can lead to 'serendipitous findings'. It can help researchers go beyond initial conceptions and enable the revision of existing frameworks. Words have a qualitative 'undeniability'. The meaningful way that words are written can be deeply convincing. Despite the development of robust methods, a number of issues with qualitative research have not gone away. These include the time intensity of gathering and analysis, the possibility of researcher bias, the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be examined, the credibility of findings, and their usefulness for the real world.

This study is oriented within Miles and Huberman's (1994) interpretivist approach where the researcher is acknowledged as embedded in the research process and not a purely objective observer. One of the important frontiers for qualitative research is in the display of results. Miles and Huberman (1994) were of the view that research should be more structured rather than loose. This enables careful sample selection and saves time in the field.

3.3. Background on narrative inquiry

In the literature review I showed how narrative inquiry originates in the 1920s and 1930s. Early scholars drew attention to differences between the huge complexity of details in stories, and the relative simplicity of those very same story structures (Silverman, 2011). In the methodology section, I focus further in on the way texts can be analysed and examined. I also highlight specific narrative coding techniques.

Silverman (2011) showed that attempts to identify the relations between clauses and structures opened up the terrain for a generation of narrative scholars. The 1960s saw the emergence of the socio-linguistic approach, which provided a formal analytical structure. Propp (2012), for example, explored how fairy tales can be examined for the underlying structure of roles and the action embedded in the story. Dragons and witches could be seen as evil forces. Kings and chiefs could be seen as rulers. Daughters and wives could be seen as loved ones. The exact identity of the actor may change, but the roles were consistent across many stories. This suggested that there were potentially a finite set of elements and of sequences of elements. The crucial insight from Propp's work was that from a structural approach there was a distinction between the potentially extraordinary detail and rich complexity of a story and the simple underlying structure that was repeated in many ways (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004; Silverman, 2011).

Bakhtin (1981) hugely influenced the narrative branch of the social sciences. His work, and those who followed him, unveiled the analogies between discourse, life-story and autobiographical

memory. It led to the conceptualisation of the 'multivoiced' mind and the 'dialogical self' (Hermans, 2014). Bakhtin described how in the modern novel, what is distinctive is the intertextuality and the way in which every text derives and refers to further texts (Bakhtin, 1981). Every narrative self-account is itself "part of a life, embedded in a lived context of interaction and communication, intention and imagination, ambiguity and vagueness, there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations in which to tell it" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 7). Life, like the stories of it, always opens to more possibilities, both real and imagined. There are unfulfilled options and identities then, for all those living, as "the study of life narratives is not only wedded to actual and particular human lifeworlds but turns into a laboratory of possibilities for human identity construction" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 8).

There has therefore been a strong cultural thread to narrative inquiry. Debates on narrative inquiry have focused on whether there is a reality 'out there' and whether reality is socially constructed, fluid and impossible to grasp. Explorations of the discursively situated narrative often take prominence. As Freeman (2001) wrote "My story can never be wholly mine, alone, because I define and articulate my experience with, and among others through, the various narrative models, including literary genres, plot structures, metaphoric themes, and so on – my culture provides" (p. 287). But there were also alternative views that point to the considerable narrative freedom and space in how stories are told. Questions of how culture shaped self-narrating and to what degree were therefore important. For those discursively and semiotically oriented (often within the domain of narratology), narrative was an important mode of representation, among others, for representing 'reality' (White, 1984). Feminist scholars, particularly, were concerned with how people were represented. They focused on the value of subjective meaning and the agency of subjects being studied.

Narrative inquiry expanded rapidly across the social sciences. As mentioned in the literature review, researchers took a 'narrative turn' to understand the discursive complexity of an account. In this branch of social sciences, many researchers viewed any oral, written or visual text as a narrative. Narrative in this sense could occur in brief utterances or topical stories. It could occur in a long journey of life, or in political events and social change. Narrative could be seen in the context of monumental broad history, and in smaller autobiographical history. Narrative can also focus on extended speech acts about substantial and compelling elements of life. This latter element was often associated with stories or personal narratives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011).

3.4. Narrative coding

3.4.1. *General approaches to narrative coding*

As narrative inquiry has become more common, it has become less interested in defending its position and rationalising its value. Scholars are now doing the work of applying its methods (Freeman, 2001). Methods of narrative analysis should not be chosen randomly. They need to be linked to the specific questions and context that is being investigated (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). This study was part of the humanist orientation rather than the post-structural and discursive tradition. I was interested in the storyteller and their agency both within the story and in how they tell their story. I focused both on the meaning of language through themes, as well as the structure of it – although I did acknowledge they drew from cultural toolkits and were socially influenced in how they structured their stories.

Narrative research is difficult because, unlike many qualitative approaches, there is often no start or end point (Andrews et al., 2013). Silverman (2011) pointed to the particular value of narrative analysis in understanding context. Narrative analysis does not generally aim to construct formal theories that move beyond specific cases – although he pointed to how the small stories of everyday lives can be linked to big stories of discourse, power, influence and globalisation. There are universal rhythms to the human experience – birth and death, for example. There have been debates in the field on big versus small stories, transcript-based versus multi-media, language-structure versus language-meaning, and more agentic versus less agentic subjects. There have been frequent issues around power relations, discourse and subjectivity. Narrative inquiry has focused on content, themes and structure. Narrative inquiry can be located in the post-war rise of humanist approaches to sociology and psychology. But it can also be associated with post-structuralist and post-modern approaches. In the former tradition, there was often a focus on agentic storytellers and hearers. Narrative researchers have often explored the links between agency and narrative. In the latter traditions, the storyteller does not “tell the story, so much as she/he is told by it” (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 3).

Silverman (2011) describes three ways of analysing qualitative data: through content analysis, grounded theory, and Narrative Analysis (NA). For Silverman, NA offered a way to describe the structure of stories. It went deeper than a more simplistic coding of the data to explore the structure of a conversation and the ways in which a story can perform a range of actions (Silverman, 2011). NA used a constructionist approach examining ways in which narrative tellers construct a version of themselves in the narrative. Important elements of NA included: the function elements of the story play; the spheres of action; and the structures of subject and object.

Silverman (2011) suggested that scholars who want to do NA need to examine the content, the agents, the structure, the purpose, the setting and the genre.

Holstein and Gubrium (2011) suggested that one way to make sense of the theoretical sensibilities is the degree to which empirical and analytical emphasis was placed on the 'whats' as opposed to the 'hows' of narrative production (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 7). This is an important distinction that I refer back to.

In thematic analysis, the first and main emphasis has been on 'what' is told rather than on 'how' it is said. The focus was on the 'told' rather than the 'telling'. In this approach, researchers focused on the relationship between people's life-stories and the quality of their experiences or the relationship between everyday narratives and identity development. This approach has sometimes taken a therapeutic turn as the researcher becomes interested in how a change in the 'whats' of stories can change the personal experience of life.

Secondly, there have been those who have focused on the 'hows'. They have focused on what narratives *do* or *say*. They have been more concerned with how a story was structured, or what the overall purpose of telling a specific story was. Dialogic and performative approaches have been two of the approaches in narrative analysis that focus on 'hows'.

A third approach has related the story to its social environment. This approach has explored the relationship between the 'whats' and 'hows', *and the institutional context*. Stories are conditioned by contexts. Contexts provided the narrative toolkits used to shape accounts (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Holstein and Gubrium (2011) closed by stating that researchers need to consider the limits and benefits of theorising from narrative analysis and not be seduced by its popularity.

Riessman (2005) proposed a number of models of narrative analysis as a heuristic for understanding a range of approaches. Like Holstein and Gubrium (2011), she used the language of 'what' and 'how'. She first described *thematic analysis*. This involved looking at stories for themes in similar ways to the ways grounded theorists do. A typology of narratives by theme can be developed after investigators collect a number of stories. She argued that this approach can mimic objectivist modes of inquiry. The contexts of an utterance were not usually explored. Readers must assume that if everyone in the group uses a similar set of words, that they mean the same thing. But she pointed to the concern about what happened to the unspoken, to the deviants and to the ambiguities in this approach.

She then described *structural analysis*. Here the emphasis shifts to the telling (the 'hows') and the way the story is told. Although thematic analysis has been part of this approach, the focus has been

more on the form and the specific narrative devices that make a story. In this approach, language has been treated seriously beyond its content (Riessman, 2005). She pointed to the early work of Labov as the first to develop this method of narrative analysis. She states Labov's work as including the following elements of a narrative's structure: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating action, Evaluation, Resolution and the Coda.

She argued that structural analysis was not suitable for large numbers but was better suited for detailed case studies. Micro-analysis of a few cases can build theory that relates language and meaning in new ways. She cautioned that context and interactional factors can still be missed in this approach (Riessman, 2005).

Riessman (2005) thirdly summarises the method of *interactional analysis*. Here, the focus has been on the dialogic process between the listener and the storyteller. Interest here has included the thematic content and the narrative structure, but the emphasis shifts to the process of co-construction. This form of analysis is difficult to do for those not exposed to understanding the ways in which conversation takes place (Riessman, 2005).

Riessman (2005) finally described *performative analysis* where the focus shifted to the ways in which storytelling was understood as a performance by a self with a past who is seeking to achieve something with the story – to persuade the audience in specific ways. The teller is doing something dramatic beyond telling a story. This method includes dramaturgic approaches or the exploration of narrative as praxis (as a form of social action). Although the dramaturgic approach originated with Goffman, this approach is further developing in NA. The approach was useful for analysing identity construction because it explored how tellers attempted to craft how they were known and how they constructed their identity in the performance. The performative approach has pointed to how readers are implicated in NA – perhaps interpreting a narrative differently (Riessman, 2003). In closing, Riessman (2005) pointed to the risk that NA has carried a danger of over-personalising the personal parts of the narrative. She cited her own work from 2002 that describes 'auto-ethnography' as a way in which researchers link their own research to their biography.

For Saldaña (2009), narrative coding and analysis have drawn from the literary, socio-linguistic, sociological, psychological and anthropological perspectives. The messages, morals and beliefs of the story have been seen as important rather than the specific events. Saldaña (2009) differentiated between paradigmatic and narrative cognition. Paradigmatic cognition included approaches such as grounded theory. But narrative cognition focused more on individual and uniquely human action. Narrative analysis needed to include not just the psychological but also the sociological contexts of the stories. The big and the little elements of stories needed to be reflexively related rather than

seen as distinct. Extensive journaling by the researcher has been seen by some as crucial to the process of narrative inquiry.

Some researchers, such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000), believed the research process should involve a fluid inquiry rather than specific tactics and research strategies. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) particularly argued for the importance of sharing stories in storied ways rather than in terms of categories. Write-ups need to be multi-dimensional. It has been important in some approaches to leave the reader with provocative questions and an evocative closure rather than fixed answers (Saldaña, 2009).

Saldaña (2009) proposed that narrative coding schemes could include: Type, Genre, Purpose, Setting, Plot, Character, Characterisation, Form, Point of view, Elements and Spoken features. Saldaña (2009) emphasised that researchers needed to be aware of non-European canons, and there was a risk that linguistic structures, myths and underlying ways of self-expression could be misinterpreted without a nuanced and sophisticated multi-cultural approach. This is an especially useful point for me. It is important when reading texts in a South and Southern African context that the backgrounds of students are accounted for. They might blend Western, indigenous and local elements.

3.4.2. The temporal and evaluative nature of narrative

Many approaches to *the self* have described the self in static terms in the language of schemas and traits. But there has been another temporal view that considers how people can self-reflect on their existence and change. Gergen and Gergen (1997) argued that understanding how people narrated the self, could provide significant insight, not available in the static view. “One’s view of self in a given moment is fundamentally nonsensical unless it can be linked in some fashion with his or her past” (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, p. 162). They linked the temporal dimension to the evaluative dimension of life to develop a set of simple diagrams that illustrated a number of dimensions and patterns in the human experience. They built on ideas around time and its conceptualisation that have been shown to be crucial to properly understand autobiographical storytelling (Brockmeier, 2000; Brockmeier, 2001).

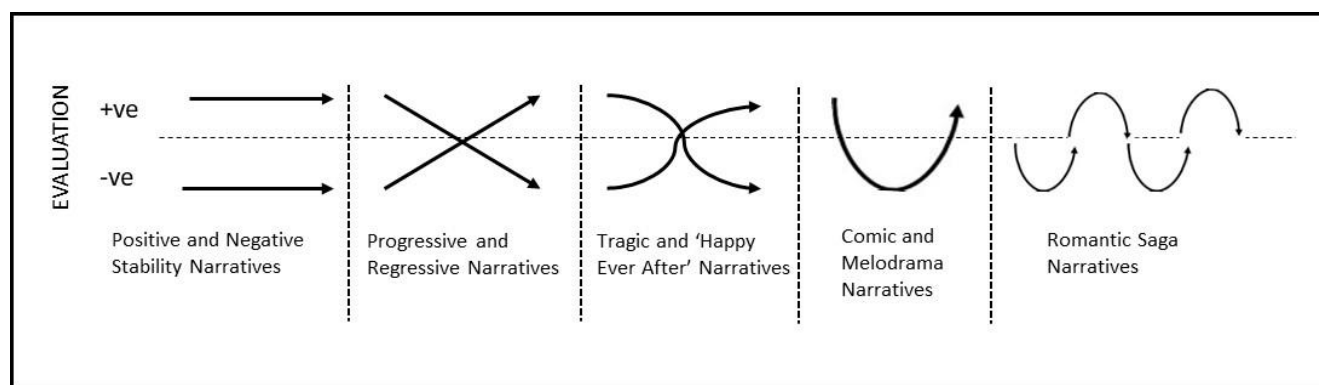


Figure 2: The temporal and evaluative nature of narrative from Gergen and Gergen (1997)

Gergen and Gergen (1997) described the above narrative patterns. In the positive and negative stability narratives, life proceeded in the same way in which it began. It could be positive or negative. In progressive and regressive narratives, life got better or declined more or less consistently. The tragic and happily-ever-after narratives are well known by an audience – in the tragic narrative, the person fell from grace, while in the happily-ever-after narrative, the actor found themselves taking advantage of an opportunity of being granted good fortune that leads to a long-running better life. The comic or melodrama narrative involved a tragic demise followed by good fortune which returns the actor to their good life. The silent movies or romantic comedies have often had someone meeting, falling in love, then being separated only to get together at the end. Then the romantic saga narrative was a story of ups and downs in the ‘hurly burly’ of life.

Narrative continuity was essential to allow for others to predict behaviour and relate to the person – and for a person to have some sense of themselves in the world. It would seem to be universally

better if narratives demonstrated an improving situation, yet, a decline may demonstrate where energy needs to be expended and insight gained in order to move upward again (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). It is worth noting that none of the above narrative forms engage the audience – because of their predictability. Narrative engagement then seems to be linked to an unknown outcome.

3.4.3. Dialogical Narrative Analysis

Another approach to narrative analysis is Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) (Frank, 2011). This approach has seen stories as artful representations of lives where the storyteller was always responding to an audience, whether imagined or present. Frank (2011) provided a range of questions that are important in DNA. He was interested in the multiple voices present in a speaker, in the ‘why’ someone selects a story, and in the stakes the storyteller has for telling the story at a specific time. He was particularly interested in how the storyteller was ‘holding one’s own’ in the act of storytelling. What he meant was the ways in which the storyteller was sustaining their identity in response to what might threaten or diminish it. He was interested in how stories created group identity and build boundaries.

Frank (2011) went below the surface to understand the artful representation of important elements of the life of the storyteller. He argued that the methodological commitment to DNA needed to understand how stories are never one’s own but artful representation of strands of stories of others in the context. Research should not aim at discovering some truth that the storytellers missed (through, for example, repression or false consciousness), but to witness the stories so they can hear each other and become a dialogue. Stories have their own lives. They need humans in order to be told. Frank reflected that his best work has been *when stories select him*. This does not mean it is purely intuitive. DNA does depend on experience and judgment. But analysis of stories emerged in attempts to write – the research report was not post-analysis – but was iterative with analysis.

The dialogical analyst freely admitted that the collection could have been assembled and assorted in multiple ways – yielding different analysis. The report is not the last word – but good DNA should open up new insight and representation. Analysis can begin with the question of resources – what resources shape the story that is told? And what resources shape what is heard? What narrative resources were not being used and what might these enable? Who was included in the stories’ ‘we’ and ‘they’? How did stories teach people about who they are and who they might become? This was narrative identity. And it was limited and enabled by the stock of story expressions available (Frank, 2011).

Lastly, Frank (2011) was interested in what was at stake. Stories contain vulnerability as people seek to locate and defend their space in the world. There needed to be a balance of internal subjectivity

and external limit. Human *being* is constructed by the resources available to tell our story, as well as the stories that are told *about people like us*. For Frank (2011), research was the start of a conversation rather than the end of one. Just because there were a finite number of stories did not mean that this was the end of the storytelling. For Frank, it was important to come back to what animated a project in the beginning. Analysis should open up the possibility of storytellers hearing themselves and expanding people's sense of response-ability (Bakhtin, 1981).

My sense is that the stance of DNA can be connected to Mills' sense of sociological imagination – to connect personal troubles with societal concerns (Mills, 2000). At some point the researcher must get close enough to the bodies of the researched – to the 'fires of action'. Frank suggested the researcher should be widely inclusive of a range of stories and open to which ones may be the most interesting. The closure of story selection should be practical rather than a matter of principle (Frank, 2011).

For Frank (2011), stories had genre, complicating action, resolution and evaluation. They had a start (an abstract) and an end (coda). What multiple voices could be heard in any single speaker's voice? How did these voices merge and how do they contest one another? How were people telling stories to explore who they might become? But ultimately, there remained a need to organise the stories. Issues of both practicality and intent are important. Frank described the value of a typology approach. For Frank what is crucial is whether a typology enables people to "hold their own in circumstances of vulnerability" (Frank, 2011, p. 15).

3.4.4. Alternative Narrative Analysis Approaches

Linguistics and narrative analysis

I want to highlight a few different approaches to narrative analysis. These approaches contextualise the approaches in this study but are not specifically the approach taken here. Therefore, I summarise them very briefly here. Rivkin and Ryan (2004) described how culture could be understood like language as having a set structure. Structure was both a skeleton and a genetic code. It brought stability and coherence in any cultural system. Words have been understood as consisting of two sides – the sound of the word (the signifier) and what is signified (the ideational component). By the 1960s, this approach, known as structuralism, was the dominant current in French intellectual life. Post-structuralism's latter critique of structuralism was that its structures were socially produced and subjected to biases and misinterpretation. In this sense, structuralist claims to truth came to be seen as one claim, among others. Foucault (2019) pointed to the power of discourse to shape knowledge and perception. Knowledge, and subjectivity itself, was always subject to power relations within which knowledge and the self are embedded. The issue of discourse is important in this approach, as

“a coherent group of assumptions and language practices that applies to one region of knowledge or expresses the beliefs of a social group, or articulates rules and ideals regarding kinds of behaviour” (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 54).

Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy in the narrative analysis tradition has been linked to work on identity claims (Saldaña, 2009). Dramaturgical coding has approached narratives as a ‘social drama’. In this approach, life has been perceived as a performance with the humans as a cast of characters. Transcripts are then a monologue, soliloquy or a dialogue. Codes apply the terms and conventions of characters including participant-actor objectives; conflicts or obstacles encountered by the participant-actor, which prevents him or her from achieving the objectives; participant-actor tactics or strategies to deal with the conflicts or obstacles; participant-actor attitudes to the setting, others and the conflict; emotions experienced by the actor-participants; and subtexts or the unspoken thoughts and hidden ways of managing impressions. Dramaturgy was seen by Saldaña (2009) as a useful approach in interpreting action in case studies, and especially with narrative or arts-based presentation forms. The storied data could be divided into scenes, which may include plot devices such as curtain-raising prologues and climaxes.

Motif coding

Motif coding is a methodology of coding that used previously developed index codes to classify types of folk tales, legends and myths – although it is not absolutely necessary to have pre-existing codes and they can emerge from the data. There are ‘types’ of myths (such as a ‘superhuman task’). Motifs are the smallest elements of a tale that have something unique about them. These include characters (such as fools, ogres or widows), significant objects (such as castles, nations or marriage) and significant incidents (such as a transformation or hunting). Motif coding has been seen as valuable when documents are free-standing and participant-centred (such as journal entries with a beginning, a middle and an end) (Saldaña, 2009).

Saldaña (2009) proposed that the codes that emerge could be theoretically linked to Bruner’s narrative universals, Campbell’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ or Jung’s work on archetypes, dreams and symbols. These could help give insight into the mythic properties of a narrative. This could provide a deep psychological meaning. Motif coding has been a creative and evocative method that oriented the mundane elements of life to their ‘epic’ qualities. The bullying boss can be seen as an ogre that needs banishing. Humans transform themselves when they let go of our problematic attitudes – in doing so, humans turn frogs into princes and witches into queens.

3.4.5. Agency, structure, communion and serendipity

An important concern within narrative inquiry has been with agency. Within sociology, agency has been contrasted with structure. Discourses around agency have a rich and varied history. A more-detailed account on this long discussion is by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Berger (1995) and Hubbard (2000) both studied life-stories using agency-structure dimensions. Saldaña (2009) suggested that it was worth considering the model of 'agency, structure, communion and serendipity'. This is a model in which actors narrate the forces that shape their lives (Lieblich, Zilber, & Tuval-Mashiach, 2008). The model is linked to the cultural repertoire of discourses available to narrators. The authors proposed that the model helps to understand the relationships between the four elements of agency, structure, communion and serendipity – as they are worked out through the subjective experience of the life-story narrators. They demonstrated the model through the experience of a women's life-story.

Lieblich, Zilber and Tuval-Mashiach (2008) proposed that when examining life-story, we are not dealing with the objective realm of what shapes a life, but rather with the subjective conditions of such forces. The questions that they suggested were: What drives the story forward from the perspective of the narrator? Does one present oneself as a free actor with agency and experience oneself as someone whose deeds, choices and preferences have determined one's situation? Is this person attributing much influence on others and to one's relationships within one's social network – what we term 'communion' – in the manner one's life turned out to be? Is he or she relating his or her life-story mainly as an outcome of randomness, luck or chance, which they term 'serendipity'? Or does one narrate one's life as being controlled by external circumstances such as one's social class, gender or historical period, namely, by social 'structure'? Actors invoke these concepts in their life-stories.

Lieblich et al. (2008) drew on Bruner's argument that personal identity was constructed from the available cultural stock of stories. Modern Western culture emphasised autonomous individual agency, for example. But cultures were not unitary and contained several options for narrating life, some dominant and others marginal (Lieblich et al., 2008). When people narrated their lives, they used culture as a 'toolkit' – they did not simply mirror cultural norms but adapted these norms to their own circumstances. In terms of the link between agency and communion, they drew especially on McAdams's research, and the established psychological discourse around personality, gender and human development. They also went back to the work of Bakan (1966) who theorised two basic modes of being: communion, the tendency to unite; and agency, the tendency to separate. This

focus on agency and communion has been a common theme in narrative analysis. Austin and Costabile (2017) also worked with these elements where agency referred to the desire for personal achievement and where communion referred to the need to maintain important relationships and to be part of the group.

McAdams (2001) also focused on agency and communion as two ways of being in the world, since “people’s life-stories differ with respect to the salience of agency and communion themes, and those differences are measurable” McAdams (2001, p. 1). McAdams’s (2001) paper outlined how to code for the salience of agency and communion. This method was identified as particularly helpful when analysing life-stories that include high points, low points, earliest memories and turning points (McAdams, 2001). He identified four agency themes: self-mastery; status/victory; achievement/responsibility; and empowerment. The four communion themes were: love/friendship; dialogue; caring/help; and unity/togetherness.

In exploring the links between agency and serendipity, Lieblich et al. (2008) referred to the ways in which the term ‘agency’ was understood in most common day-to-day thinking – we aim for something but due to chance, do not get it. Some things happen because we really work hard for it. Other things happen because of chance and because we happen to be at the right place at the right time. They then treated agency, structure, communion and serendipity not as parts of human reality, but as components of human experience – as constructed in narrative.

They placed structure and serendipity on a first existential level, and agency and communion as part of a second motivational level. This is illustrated in the figure below.

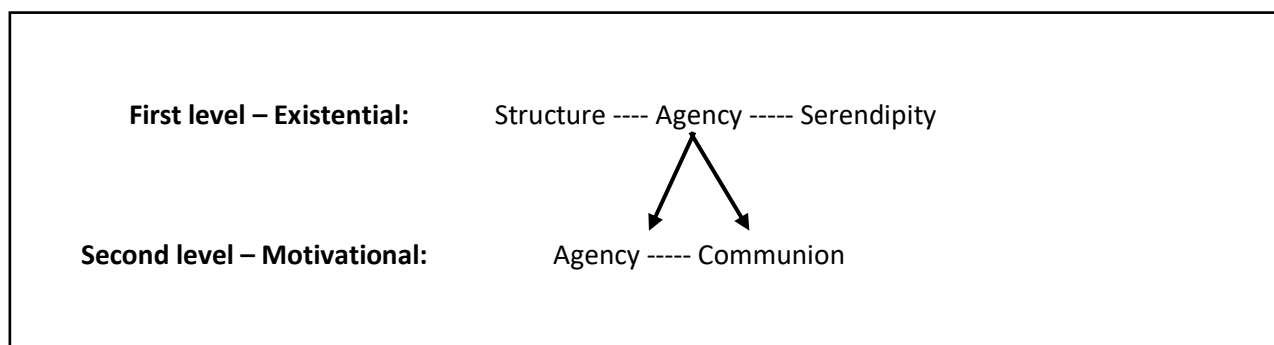


Figure 3: Agency, structure, communion and serendipity from Lieblich et al. (2008)

Lieblich et al. (2008) described a method for analysing a life-story that allowed insight into the inner world and forces operating. They argued that an agency-structure reading alone would have captured some of the sociological dimensions of institutional constraint but would have missed the interpersonal psychological elements captured by the agency and communion elements. However,

even these two ways of reading would have missed the role of chance and fate. These three lenses then provide a valuable way of approaching narrative.

There has been substantive evidence that reflecting on agency-oriented themes in one's life-story increases self-esteem and optimism. This is a result not generally found in reflections on relationships and socially connected themes. But Lieblich et al. (2008) showed that self-esteem and optimism can occur in communion-oriented stories where the stories generate a feeling of nostalgia. They asserted that agency (for example, individual achievement and success) and communal themes (for example, love) have been documented differently in autobiographies.

3.4.6. Life-course approaches

A related approach within sociology is the life-course approach. In the context of this study, I see this as a related 'sister' discipline from which insight can be gained but which is not the home discipline for my study. Life-course approaches have been inspired by Mill's call to understand how social forces change the contours of biography. Life-course approaches explore the ways in which lives are similarly based on shared experiences "reflecting a complex web of social forces peculiar to a historical time and place" (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008, p. 13). Life-course approaches have been celebrated as the most innovative research area in the social sciences (Mayer, 2009). In this paradigm, life-course is analysed as an outcome of both individual agency and cultural, institutional and structural conditions. Human lives are viewed in the context of collective contexts. Within this approach, there is a strong assumption that prior life-history impacts on later life. Often large series of cohorts are investigated. This is frequently an interdisciplinary approach as life-course is studied across life-domains (Mayer, 2009).

Life-course study is more of a paradigm than a theory. There is no checklist or set of specific concepts, rather it is a way of orienting oneself to the ways in which lives are embedded within historical contexts (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). Shanahan and Macmillan (2008) articulated six principles that can anchor the life-course paradigm. The first was that life-course is structured differently in time and place. The second was that social demands of new situations constrain role-related behaviours. The third was around linked lives and the ways in which the effects of social change depend on relationships with other people. The fourth related to agency and the ways in which people try to exert some control over their world. The fifth related to life-stage and the reality that the effects of a societal discontinuity will impact people differently depending on their age. And the sixth related to accentuation and the ways in which previous behaviours will be amplified by a social change. They also identified a number of concepts that are useful in describing the dynamic features of a person in their social context.

The life-course tradition has focused on sudden system change with a spotlight on the impact of historical contexts on life-course outcomes (known as period effects) (Mayer, 2009). One such approach explored the impact of the rapid transition from communism to capitalism in Eastern Europe (Eyal, Szelényi & Townsley, 1998). Other studies have explored the impact of the transformation of East Germany as it opened up to Western influence (Mayer, 2009). Questions have been raised, such as whether institutional imprints of the system of origin and the system of destination change lives radically? Or whether the old system is projected into the new era?

There has been debate among those who emphasised the constraints imposed by biology, psychology and physical influences that overwhelm inter-individual differences. The interaction of personal psychology and larger social transitions is a site of important exploration – a significant exploration that is underexplored. There have been explorations of the ways in which people respond innovatively to the societal pressures imposed during one's life-course and the ways groups shape the future (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). One such study on the transition of Eastern Germany to a market economy found that psychological characteristics – in this case levels of 'internal control' and 'fatalism' were moderated by the transition rather than shaping life-course. Only fatalism had a correlation with unemployment and neither had an impact on upward or downward mobility (Mayer, 2009).

3.4.7. The approach taken in this study

I have shown the wide variety of methods and angles that can be taken within the narrative inquiry approach. In this study I drew from Riessman's (2005) thematic analysis approach with crucial elements of structural analysis. In this sense I was initially concerned with the 'whats' but included important reference to the 'hows' around the way stories are told. I focused on the meaning of language with important connections to the structure of it. This was especially in the latter development of archetypal storylines (which I describe later in the findings). Drawing from Silverman's (2011) focus questions for narrative analysis, I was interested in the content, story structures and sequence, purposes of the story, story context and the story's culmination.

Informed by post-structural and discursive traditions, I acknowledge they draw from cultural toolkits and are socially influenced in how they structure their stories. But I was interested in the storyteller as a partly independent subject. I saw them as having agency in how they tell their story.

In parts of my analysis, I drew substantively on Gergen and Gergen (1997) in developing a multi-generational lifeline of 'ups and downs'. I paid attention to the 'setting' and in the latter part of the study to the 'plot' (Saldaña, 2009).

This study could be seen as an ‘inverted’ life-course study. Life-course studies have tended to focus on people who start life under similar conditions and then diverge. My group started life in different places and positions, yet all end up studying at the same school at a similar phase of their lives. Like Shanahan and Macmillan (2008), I was interested in ‘trajectory’ and ‘transition’, as well as ‘turning points’.

I drew heavily on McAdams (2001) and Lieblich et al. (2008) with regard to the themes of agency and communion. McAdams showed how “people’s life stories differ with respect to the salience of agency and communion themes, and those differences are measurable” McAdams (2001, p. 1). I coded in this study for a range of themes around this, including agency, structure, communion and serendipity (Lieblich et al. 2008).

It should become clear that there were substantive deductive components to the analysis and that I was informed by a wide range of existing narrative coding approaches. But I also approached the stories with an open mind and remained open to new codes and themes that surprised me. I had all these coding approaches in the back of my mind – but also wanted to see where this project *called me* ... In this sense I was intuitively and quite personally informed by Frank’s (2011) Dialogical Narrative Analysis. His sentiment informs much of this study – even if I do not specifically draw on all of the questions he poses. Like Frank, I hope that this report is not the last word – but rather that it opens up dialogue and ongoing conversations.

3.5. Selecting the study group

3.5.1. *Risks of 'double selection' bias*

There are important concerns around three selection risks. The first concerns the ways in which the authors selected what they chose to make visible in their essays. The second concerns how I then selected the essays to be studied. There is a third risk in terms of how the patterns and key findings themselves might reflect my own 'lens' on these issues and how I selected what to tell. In this section I address the first two concerns.

Firstly, I account for the risks of double selection by explaining exactly how the process worked. This allows for transparency. I provide details on the selection process, as well as the course context within which the essays were written. In the subsequent section I also provide personal reflexive diary entries to account for my own 'lens'. There is a skewing of the data by all of these dynamics. But I do not believe it is a) substantive enough to disregard the importance of the findings, and b) that, in and of itself, the skewing of the data does not represent something interesting.

In the findings (described later), the students wrote about 'education' and the impact of an educational focus in their families. It can be asked whether this educational theme emerges specifically because they are writing in an educational context. I do not believe this is true. They also wrote about religion, God and faith – the essays were not written in a religious institution. They wrote of the oppression their parents experienced during Apartheid and this is not a politics course. They wrote of severe family challenges and painful events and this is not a family counselling or psychology course. What they wrote is therefore not entirely shaped by the institutional context and is of interest beyond the course context.

This is not to say that the context did not skew what is written – I still believe that the context skews what they write. Michelson (2011, 2013) has shown how students reproduce ideologically laden story genres in the process of writing their stories in learning environments. From being part of this course for many years (and in the group here), I found that very few authors write about things that could be considered very private, highly painful, embarrassing or shameful, especially to themselves or those close to them. There were no examples of students writing about what they might consider deeply emotional and highly loaded. There are no stories of rape. There are no stories of explorations of queer sexual orientations. They do not mention their HIV status. They do not provide details on the betrayal of their partners. These are just a few examples of what might be written about. Statistically it is likely that our students experience these issues, but they were not in the stories.

They tended not to include painful events that they are going through now but seemed more open about painful events in the past. They also do not include events that would show them in a really bad way (cheating, lying, stealing, etc.). Out of interest, the books that I examined *do include* matters like these. They do include events of a more personal and emotionally loaded nature like rape, addiction and personal mistakes. The study's findings should be read in this light.

Questions of generalisability are important to answer in qualitative research. For the few writers who see qualitative research as purely descriptive, there is no problem with the lack of generalisability. Cases can be appreciated on their own merit for all their ordinariness and particularity (Silverman, 2011). But many other qualitative researchers resist this urge to be simply descriptive – and I am one of them. Qualitative research can provide generalisable explanations. But for findings to be generalisable, the selection of those being studied needs to be representative in some way. This could be to illustrate heterogeneity or commonality (Silverman, 2011).

I have tried where appropriate to develop an approach that can be helpful in some form of broader generalising. The selection of essays considers a mix of students that would not be unfamiliar in the MBA classroom, in the boardrooms of business, and the upper-middle classes of South and Southern African society. I have also included the examination of the five autobiographical books as a comparison set to be able to justify further generalisation outside of the student group. But I do not make bold claims to generalise widely at this stage. The findings would need to be confirmed by further analysis of a larger selection of authors. Nonetheless, these authors share intergenerational life-stories of a profound and important societal transition. It is hoped that examining and illustrating the patterns and differences in these stories can offer some important insights for understanding wider identity dynamics.

3.5.2. Selecting the group of essays to examine

Even after stating the above hopes for potentially important findings, I use the term ‘selecting’ rather than ‘sampling’ because I am cautious about generalising from the group studied at this stage (and the word ‘sampling’ sounds too much like I am trying to select a sample in order to generalise).

I now discuss the selection of essays to make some important points about MBA students in South Africa and to make connections with the middle-class and business professionals within South Africa. The selection process was guided by the proportions of students in the MBA class and by my own personal inclinations with regard to groups and themes that seemed interesting. I followed my own inclination for ‘balance’ and of what I found ‘interesting’. The selection criteria were not clear at the outset. But upon receiving permission to examine the essays, I needed to work out which ones to select. It made sense to use demographic data since this is the only visible dimension of the authors at the time of essay selection (specifically, age, race, gender and nationality). I outline how the 55 essays were selected below.

This study examined the narrative identity of a set of story authors who were executive MBA students at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) at the University of Pretoria. I am a member of the faculty at GIBS. In addition, I designed and led the course ‘Human Behaviour and Performance’ (an adapted Organisational Behaviour course) in which students were required to write their stories. These stories needed to be about how their identity has been shaped and their family histories going back two generations. The stories were submitted as an essay assignment for the course. As part of the assignment, students were asked to share their stories with one other student as part of an experience around ‘getting to know one another’, before being submitted. They were instructed to share only what they are comfortable with and the instruction was to keep what was shared confidential. Essays have been written by around 300 students each year for over ten years that the course has been taught.

I initially decided it was better to select essays from more recent years rather than those from earlier classes. This is because the assignment briefing has varied slightly over the years but has been identical over the most recent few years. The selection process involved initially sourcing an email list of all students who completed the MBA course from the 2016 and 2017 years. These students were approached via email after the completion of the course and once all additional requirements for the course were completed. The email stated clearly what the purpose of the research was.

They had the option to:

- Allow their essay to be used in the study, without their name being identified and ALLOWING quotes from their essays to be used for illustrative purposes.
- Participate in the study without their name being identified BUT ONLY ON CONDITION that no direct quotes from their essays are shared in the final report.
- Participate in the study but only with further clarifying information provided by the researcher.
- Decline to participate (non-response will be taken as a desire NOT to participate).

It was made clear to the students that their essays were not being marked for a second time – but that they were being analysed to understand broader patterns of identity change through the South African transition.

229 students gave permission for their essays to be part of the study. Of the 229 students who allowed their essays to be made available, 211 agreed under the terms that “I allow my essay to be used in the study, without my name being identified – ALLOWING quotes from the essay to be used for illustrative purposes”. 18 Students preferred that “I allow my essay to be used in the study without my name being identified – BUT ONLY ON CONDITION that no direct quotes from my essay are shared in the final report”. There were a number of students who were open to their essays being made available but wanted more information before doing so.

Because a large enough number of essays were made available, none of the essays of students who wanted more information were used in the study.

Initially, in the downloading and saving process, the selected essays had all identifiers removed. This included changing the name of the author (to a coded name), as well as removing the names of family members or friends. Any detailed locational information such as the street that one lived in or the specifics of a workplace were also removed.

In order to be able to link the individual life-stories more strongly with the societal transition, I wanted to select a group of essays from students who experienced a substantive part of the childhood before 1994. This is the year commonly used to demarcate the end of Apartheid. The first democratic elections in South Africa took place on 27 April 1994. I restricted my selection of essays to students born between 1981 and 1987. This was because there were a large enough number of students in this age range. This made them between 7 and 13 years old at the time of the first elections. Students would then be between the ages of 29 and 36 at the time of writing their essays.

As part of a pilot-coding process, a group of 10 essays were downloaded and printed. For this, the printed essays were coded using a pencil to highlight key themes. As mentioned, study followed a blended deductive and inductive orientation drawing from the literature discussed earlier. The literature review sensitised me to the importance of certain potential themes and ways of organising the data, but there were also themes and patterns that began to emerge quite quickly and 'obviously' that were not necessarily evident in the initial literature review. I decided to include these codes irrespective of their absence in the existing literature. Once these pilot essays were coded, a full and comprehensive coding process was developed using Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel is not used often for analysing qualitative data, but there is some prescriptive advice and documented success using the software package (Meyer & Avery, 2009; Swallow, Newton & Van Lottum, 2003).

I then reflected substantively on how to select a group of essays from the available group. It was entirely possible to do a deep dive into a narrow selection of say 10-20 essays. It was also possible to more briefly code a much larger selection – potentially upwards of 100 essays.

The inclination I had was that in lieu of the diversity of the essays and because they were not extremely long (mostly 5-6 pages), that it was necessary to code a moderately large selection while retaining the impulse to do deep and narrow examination rather than superficial analysis. Around 50 essays emerged as a number that captured the balance between breadth and depth.

Race and gender have been found to be the most salient dimensions of social identity in the workplace (Booyesen, 2013). My personal observation is that these outwardly visible identities are often salient in the MBA classroom in South Africa, and even more so on this course. It seemed productive to organise the sampling around these identities since this data was also available to me. Yet, from reading thousands of these essays over the years that I have taught this course, it was also clear to me that what was interesting about them was the ways in which they opened up potential insights into lives that go beyond simple categorisation. This tension was always with me.

That said, race and gender shape South Africa's history and this was evident in the pilot coding. The stories emerged from a deeply racialised context and this certainly shaped the lives that have been lived. Some form of race and gender-based selection was both practical and conceptually important.

Four racial classifications are still in use in South Africa and have shaped lives through the colonial and Apartheid period. These are Black African, White, Indian and Coloured. The scholarly literature on identity in South Africa often organises around these categories, so I followed this, while acknowledging the socially constructed nature of these same categories.

At the time, it also seemed to me that, together with the increasing importance of Black voices in the corporate world (and as the majority in the country), the number of essays selected for Black South Africans should be larger than those selected for each of the other race groups.

Then there was also the question of whether and how to select the essays of students who come from other African countries or even students from Europe, Asia or elsewhere. I made the choice to exclude students' essays if their families were not in any way connected with the continent and the country. There are not many of these students at GIBS. It might even be that none of the essays in the selection would even have met this criterion. But there were a number of essays made available from students who were born or grew up in the Southern Africa region but had lived in (or interacted with South Africa) in their childhood, tertiary studies or work lives. If I excluded these essays, important learnings could be lost. South Africa increasingly integrates into the economy of the continent and as migration shifts the nature of the demographics of the country, this group of Southern African students matters. I therefore made the decision to include them as one of the selected groups.

Then there was also the constraint in terms of the availability of essays for each of the now five different groups. Coloured students are a very small minority in the MBA class. Upon investigation, I only had four essays available from Coloured students in the 211 essays that were initially available for coding.

After considering all these dynamics, I decided to select 20 Black African essays, 10 White essays, 11 Indian essays, 4 Coloured essays and 10 essays for students from Southern Africa. This was done on a 47% male vs 53% female gender split. There was only one Coloured male essay, so the gender split for this group was one man and three women. This led to a small imbalance in the number of women versus men.

Two birthdates for essay authors were from 1981, stretching my initial proposed limit of 1982 – one was a Coloured person and one a Southern African (non-South African) male. Therefore, from the 211 essays that were available (on condition that names were not used but allowing for quotations), the selection of 55 essays were downloaded and form part of this study. The number of essays allowed for breadth and depth. The variety and commonality and the 'balance' of demographics *seemed right*. I hoped the essays would offer an interesting group of stories.

The first phase of the coding process involved completing an extensive coding table with an entire Excel sheet for each essay. As coding took place new codes emerged, especially through the coding of the first 20 essays. Where this happened, the prior essays were all recoded to ensure that any

relevant emerging codes were included. Where major insights and conclusions were developed, a second or third coding round was done around those issues to capture nuances and to ensure internal validity.

3.6. Essay writing as a performance

As mentioned above, I taught the MBA course at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), within which the students wrote their intergenerational life-stories (in 2016 and 2017). There is a proximity that I have to the students and the stories examined. I have been intimately associated with the course and have shaped the classroom environment within which the intergenerational life-stories were written. There are performative elements in the writing of these intergenerational life-stories (Goffman, 1978; Rawls, 1987). Research reflexivity was considered on my part as potentially valuable for enriching and interpreting the findings (Collins, 2017; Mason, 2002). Researcher reflexivity has become quite fashionable in the social sciences. It has been linked to the critique of objectivism and the critique of the 'gaze' of the researcher (Pillow, 2003) which is a long-standing theme in sociology. There have been risks that reflexivity has become a virtue without justification, especially when its definition and use are imprecise and undefined (Lynch, 2000). These critiques have raised important questions for the relationship between the researcher and the researched. How does the researcher shape the research process? Who do the stories that are being told belong to? Under what conditions can the researcher tell them? When is the use of reflexivity self-absorbed rather than creating new insight for the reader?

I considered these questions and many others (Bell, 1998; Finlay, 2002a, 2002b; Tatli, 2012). I decided to focus less on my own experience and more on ensuring I made a clear description of the classroom environment. This I believe is the crucial performative context within which to interpret the findings (Goffman, 1978).

In the course, the students visited Constitutional Hill, an Apartheid prison, and the site of the new South African constitutional court. This course included a dialogue about South Africa and its history (Isaacs, 1999). This was potential to be painful terrain for many of the students with experience of those events. There were salient racial dynamics in the classroom. This was heightened by tensions in the period around '#Feesmustfall' – even as these students are from an earlier generation.

Potentially for this reason I have gone back and forth on the role of 'race' in the selection of the group of essays to be studied. I saw race as a crucial socially constructed experience that was salient in the study *and* I have not wanted the discussion of race to flatten and essentialise a diversity of experiences that include but transcend race. This tension is present when I at times focus explicitly on race as a category and when I choose to look at other dimensions of experience and not situate the racial or gendered elements within it. For example, I show that some students write of the importance of having a religiously connected set of values around hard work and educational focus, but do not attempt to organise this by race or gender.

Three performative issues are critical to interpreting the findings.

Firstly, these stories needed to be about how their identity has been shaped and their family histories going back two generations. The authors were encouraged to examine their roots. They were also encouraged to write about their upbringing and the issues that shaped them. Then they were encouraged to write about their adult lives and the issues that face them now. It is not surprising then that the students wrote about their families or their identities or their histories. What is important are the ways they write about their identity and the themes that are associated with their families.

Secondly, the students were asked to share their stories with one other student as part of an experience around 'getting to know one another', before being submitted. They were instructed to share only what they are comfortable with and the instruction was to keep what was shared confidential. This means the stories were not only written for me, the lead faculty, but for sharing with others too. This means that some dimensions of their self and their stories will have been excluded because of what they might have perceived as inappropriateness. This type of exclusion is common in all studies.

Finally, the students were given a mark for the assignment as either 'complete' (when done adequately) or 'incomplete' (if not submitted or if not engaged substantially). This placed a certain pressure on them to do the essay well and to meet the page count (5-6 pages) and the request for the students to undertake the assignment with integrity.

These three performative dimensions do not detract from the details in the patterns analysed but the findings should be interpreted within this classroom context.

3.7. Ethical clearance and conflicts of interest

Ethical clearance was secured in the normal ways within the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. But additional steps were taken to manage this conflict of interest. Firstly, additional ethical clearance was secured from the Dean of the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) to study students in the process of a required MBA course. Then the proposal and research project were approved by the GIBS ethics committee.

The main protective step was that students were only asked after the completion of the course whether they would be comfortable with their essays being available for analysis. This ensured their student status was not compromised. They were approached through an email with an opt-in clause for them to signal their preferences and willingness to participate.

It was made clear to the students that their essays were not being marked for a second time – but that they were to be analysed to understand broader patterns of identity change through the South African transition.

Finally, all identifiers were removed before essays were stored, read and analysed. This ensured that student's data was not compromised, and that the researcher could not identify specific students with specific comments. The names that appear in the stories below are pseudonyms and in no way connect with the names of the actual students involved.

4. Findings from the Intergenerational Life-Stories

This study contributes to theorising around the self and especially narrative identity in the context of societal transition and change. The first contribution of the study is to add a South African/African perspective to the ongoing debate about the evolving nature of late modernity and the changing demands being placed on the self. This is in response to the call for a thickening of African self-writing and for a better understanding of late and vernacular modernities. Specifically, what kind of late modern identity pressures are salient in the South African transition?

By deploying narrative analysis, the second contribution of this study is to build localised nuanced understandings of the self through the narrative tradition. Specifically, is the vocabulary of narrative analysis adequate to account for local dynamics?

My third objective aimed to draw on the findings to make suggestions for the work of business schools and similar adult-learning institutional contexts. Specifically, what life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students' narrative identities in a wider context?

To answer these questions, I analysed the key themes and elements of the intergenerational life-stories of the authors. Within the narrative inquiry approach, the intergenerational life-stories were examined from a thematic approach (what is told) with elements of structural analysis (how the story is told) (Riessman, 2005). I combined deductive and inductive to do this. These empirical results are described here. This extensive section highlights: common themes, agency and structure dynamics, intergenerational lifelines, and interesting script elements. In conclusion, a set of six archetypal storylines were developed.

4.1. Coding categories (inductive, deductive and blended)

The following main themes and codes were identified. These come from a blend of an inductive reading of the 55 intergenerational stories and relevant deductive codes from a range of narrative analysis coding frameworks. I have outlined in the methodology how every life-story was coded for these themes and then sub-themes were identified where relevant. I do not summarise every one of these codes in the findings. Some of the themes associated with these codes are not reported on. This is because in the analysis they were rather used to develop insight into other themes and especially the latter identification of the six archetypal storylines.

4.1.1. Inductive codes

Role of education: This was an entirely inductive theme that emerged strongly in the data after reading a few stories. This was especially in describing the forces that shaped their grandparents, parents and their own lives. This is furthermore a structural issue in that many of the authors structured their own lives around where and how they were educated in providing a summary of their upbringing. The themes associated with this code became a key theme in the findings.

Role of religion: This was a theme that emerged strongly in the data. It was very clear after reading a few of the essays how many of the authors wrote about the role of religion in their lives, especially as a positive source of guiding values and disciplined focus. The themes associated with this code became a key theme in the findings.

Family and cultural socialisation: This theme emerged as I sought to account for the differing domains of forces that shape lives. One way to organise these forces is through separating the issues that have to do with large socio-structural pressures, such as the economy of national political framework and the forces and dynamics that shaped lives at more micro levels of analysis (in the family) and the meso level (in the sub-culture). This theme also allowed an organisation of the 'softer', more values-oriented 'cultural' content. This became a key theme in the identification of 'stated influences' as well as 'stated values'. These two themes supplemented the analysis and strengthened key conclusions on the important role of family, religion, education and shifting patterns of gender.

Economic context: In contrast to the organising theme above, the economic context allowed the stories to be summarised, examined and linked in the context of work and economic dynamics. Economic opportunity and hardship have major influences on lives. Economic context is not reported on in detail in the findings section. But the economic context was used to develop the archetypal storylines.

Barriers broken/hardships endured/gifts inherited/social changes witnessed: These themes emerged more through the observation that certain elements of the stories struck me as especially meaningful for me – in this sense they are shaped by my own lens on the stories analysed. These codes were used in the section on structure and agency. The themes associated with this code were also key in the identification of the archetypal storylines.

4.1.2. Deductive codes

Story settings: This was a deductive code that provided a useful starting point for the later analysis. This is reported on at the outset to give some context to the life-stories. It is also linked at different times to issues of place and geography.

Role of structure/agency/power/communion: These themes are linked to McAdams (2001) on agency and communion. They are also developed from work by Lieblich et al. (2008) who link agency to communion, then to structure and finally to serendipity. They are also associated with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) discussion of agency and structure. This is an important code, and their associated themes are reported on in their own section. The sub-themes were further clarified through the earlier theme on barriers broken/hardships endured/gifts inherited/social changes witnessed.

Script elements employed: This code sought to explore the way that the author employed interesting and culturally associated script elements. This is more of a focus on how stories are told and links to structural linguistic concerns (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004) and the 'telling' rather than the 'told' (Riessman, 2005). This coding form draws partly on Lieblich, Zilber and Tuval-Mashiach (2008) who affirm the culturally contingent nature of narrative but more specifically was also informed by Saldana's (2009) assertion that researchers need to be aware of non-European canons and there is a risk that linguistic structures, myths and underlying ways of self-expression are misinterpreted without a nuanced and sophisticated multi-cultural approach. The themes associated with this code are briefly reported in their own section. Interesting ideas emerge but limited conclusions are drawn at this stage.

4.1.3. Blended deductive-inductive codes

Some themes and codes identified occur at the interface of deductive approaches and my own sense of the salience of these themes and codes in the data. For example, they may have become salient in the data and only with further reading of the literature were developed into a code. Or the literature covered this lightly and yet it started to become critical in the analysis of the stories. I summarise these themes and codes from this blended top-down and bottom-up coding approach.

Intergenerational lifeline: This coding form emerged from Gergen and Gergen (1997) and Brockmeier (2000) who link the temporal dimension to the evaluative dimension of life to develop a set of patterns in the human experience. This is also consistent with Bruner (2001) who argues that Western autobiography is concerned with turning points. But this approach also emerged as valuable as it also allowed for a way of seeing lives across generations and understanding challenges and opportunities in a historic context. This approach also offered a way to explore multiple generations of people in a kind of intergenerational life-course approach (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). The themes and sub-themes associated with this code are substantively highlighted and are reported in their own section. These findings also formed a vital part of the important archetypal storylines that were developed.

Cross-boundary encounters: This code emerged from the broad literature on late modernity and the ways in which selves encounter cultural difference and navigate the challenges associated with this (Giddens, 1990). It also accounted for some of the very visible and observed life changes and contextual dynamics associated with the democratic transition. The themes and sub-themes associated with this code are substantively reported on in their own section. The sub-themes associated with this code were also key in the development of the later archetypal storylines.

Place and geography: This was a theme that emerged partly inductively but can also be linked to Archer (2007) and other work on the ways in which travel and urbanisation shape lives. Narrative analysis also points to how the context acts as a 'setting' that is important in stories (Silverman, 2011). The themes associated with this code are not reported on in their own section. They are instead connected to issues of structure and agency as well as to the setting for the stories. The themes here were also useful in understanding cross-boundary encounters. They were also used in the development of the archetypal storylines.

Major shaping experiences: Although this theme emerged initially through the open-ended reading of the narratives, it was consolidated by the further reading of work on narrative coding. *The themes associated with this code are not reported on in the findings. They were further developed and the themes and sub-themes are reported on under the sections on stated influences and stated values.*

Archetypal storylines: This code captured key dynamics that allowed one to 'see' the essential strands of stories. It also allowed for an understanding of many of the above codes and themes in relationship with one another. It developed into one of the major findings of this study. Drawing from narrative analysis, this code covers elements of what might be called the story summary or story plot. It is connected to many of the codes above as already mentioned. It was developed in the final stage of the coding and analysis to account for more essential core elements of stories that

cannot be broken down into themes. It is strongly linked to the idea of the 'how' and the 'form' in narrative analysis. This aligns with Riessman (2005) and with the suggestions of Silverman (2011) with regard to narrative analysis. The archetypal storylines are substantively reported on in their own section.

Researcher observations: When I noticed something that might be useful, I made a note of it as I went along coding the stories. This emerged as simply a way to capture some of my own experience of the essay and what I was struck by. The elements here were used to inform all of the analysis. It is not reported on in the findings below.

A summary of the themes and sub-themes associated with these codes is now provided below in line with the details above. I include quotations from the stories where relevant to highlight the points being made.

4.2. Story settings

It is appropriate to begin this narrative analysis with the settings in which the stories occur. The historic setting in this case was clearly located within the Apartheid and post-Apartheid period even if the storyteller came from outside the country. For many, this was a painful (often brutally so) troubling setting in which the stories that are written. This setting makes salient ethnic and racial experience. It also substantively shaped the trajectories of the lives of the authors and their families.

Apartheid was not itself the foreground nor did the democratic changes parallel the arc of the life-stories. Some authors wrote of these political issues more directly. Different race groups often experienced the setting from a different perspective. The authors most often foregrounded the action and events close to themselves – in their families, in their communities, in their schools, in their work-lives and ‘in’ themselves and their own psychological experience.

This (often brutal) setting had the potential for noble deeds and brave actions. As Dion wrote, *“I remember a story my grandfather told about the time they had to hide the Finance Minister’s (famous political activist) children from the police as they were looking for him”*.

But, more often, these stories carried themes more about victimhood and suffering. Busi wrote, *“I recall a few incidences that took place during the apartheid era. My grandmother’s sister, who also stayed with us, made and sold traditional beer. I remember policemen coming to my house numerous times and we would hide in the wardrobe, under the bed and so on. The policemen would come and search the house. We would hear loud noises and screams. One day, we found my grandmother’s beer all over the floor. Apparently, one of the policemen found it and kicked the drum that contained it. I remember my grandmother disappearing for a short while. It is only now after visiting Constitutional Hill that I realise she might have been jailed for making and selling traditional beer”*.

There were many alternative and different experiences of Apartheid. This is substantively because the different race groups selected come to the events in different ways. This was (after all) the intention of this period – to separate race groups and to ensure privilege for some and disadvantage for others. But even beyond the race of the authors, people tell of the influence of this setting in many different ways. There are stories of brave parents. There are stories of forced removals. There are stories of ethnic violence. There are stories of innocence and of being protected – especially among White, but also Coloured and Indian and sometimes Black South Africans.

There was a story, for example, of personal shame at the collaboration of one Black¹³ author's father with the Apartheid state. Nkosi courageously opens up to the shame of knowing her father was a policeman who collaborated with the Apartheid regime. This is something she has had to wrestle with: *"The police system used our people against ourselves to achieve their motives. This government was an oppressing government at the time. When I grew up, I eventually realised what my biological father used to do back in the days ... his actions are not something I am proud of. While everyone else was working or fighting against the Government, he was working with them to oppress our people. This made me see or realise he was a different person and his values were against my values. This made me not interested in knowing him any further as a person".*

This setting of Apartheid, democracy and earlier national independence (in the case of the stories from the region) was often a backdrop to the stories themselves. The setting influenced what is possible. Lwazi wrote of his father's education and political activities: *"My Father grew up in K and was educated in Marian Hill High School, a catholic mission boarding school. He performed well academically. After matriculating, he was accepted to the University of Zululand and through funding by X company and then with a mining company bursary, he studied Sociology and Psychology. As with most black university student youth of that day, he was actively involved in the black Consciousness Movement, was a member of the African National Congress (ANC) and other student political movements that stood against the oppressive Apartheid regime of the time. While at university, two of his close friends were arrested by the Security Branch for planning to leave the country to join the ANC in exile. His two friends were never seen again. During that same period, my father almost lost his life in one of the many student clashes, common at that time, against the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)."*

Yet sometimes the broader political setting was hardly mentioned, even if ever present, in this case in the workplace. Lesedi wrote about his mother: *"Due to her strong beliefs against injustices also stemming from her own tough upbringing, she joined a labour union and was later elected as the shop steward for her store ... As long as I can remember she had always been a workers' rights activist and did everything in her power to fight against workplace injustices and had to regularly represent her colleagues during disciplinary hearings. I remember attending the union meetings at the age of five and being exposed to the struggle songs – this exposure to the labour federations has*

¹³ On occasion I refer to the race of the author. This is done when the subsequent text portion is better interpreted with the additional information as in this case where the author's race enabled an understanding of the issue.

really shaped my view and consciousness to the social differences as well as the injustices that black¹⁴ people faced.”

For this cohort, the brutal elements of Apartheid were something their parents and grandparents experienced. Sometimes, as young children, they were protected from its most physical realities, but often influenced by its psychological realities and geographic proximity. This was evident in the case of Dds, a Coloured author: *“As Eldorado Park neighbours, we would see the tyres burning in Soweto when there were riots. The school would close for the day and they would tell us as children that the Black terrorists were coming to kill us. We were scared of them. When I lived in Eldorado Park, I looked at Black people as an inferior people. On the other side of the spectrum, we thought White people were more superior and our bosses.”*

¹⁴ I have kept the original use of black or Black or white or White or coloured or Coloured when the student has used these terms. I have therefore not edited their essays and terminology. Hence some inconsistency might be present on the use of capitals is present in the quotes – but not in my own narrative text where I have decided to capitalise all four historic South African race groups – Black, White, Indian and Coloured. I describe why in the literature review section 2.6.2 on identity and race in the South African context

4.3. Education (inductive)

One of the most evident themes across the stories was the theme of education (or its absence) in shaping lives. The salience of education as a key element of the life-story is evident in almost all the intergenerational stories analysed. Of the 55 stories analysed, 48 of them highlight the importance of education, either by explicitly mentioning its absence (and associated difficulties), or through its presence (and positive impacts). The parent generation (of the author) was often able to educate themselves breaking with an intergenerational norm (28 of the stories). Often one of the parents or grandparents of the author struggled against the odds to educate themselves. The authors write that it is through this education that the authors themselves have been able to advance. Yet, there was also the pain of parents (in 15 of the stories) who were prevented from being educated.

The table below shows how often a story included a discussion on the absence or presence of education. Almost an equal number of grandparents were denied education (7) as were able to educate themselves (8) mostly against considerable odds. In the author's parent's generation, many more stories described how they were able to educate themselves (28), although there was also a high number (15) of stories of parents who were prevented from achieving their potential.

One interesting idea is that many of the authors would not be in the MBA class were it not for the barriers broken and educational focus and achievements of previous generations. Almost any essay can be selected to illustrate many of these points.

Table 2: Stories that focus on education and whether it was attained or denied

	Pre-grandparents	Grand-parents	Parents	Upbringing	Adulthood
Total (focus on education)	0	15	43	30	3
Education attained	0	8	28	30	0
Education not attained	0	7	15	0	3

4.3.1. Education of grandparents

The following quotations illustrate the focus on education among the grandparent generation in the stories. Often grandparents were unable to study further due to political or economic circumstances. As Fazlyn wrote, *"Apartheid had an immense impact on my father's life. My grandfather decided to start his own business as the opportunities were limited within the formal working environment. Both him and my grandmother completed Std 8 and did not attain further education as they had to contribute to supporting their families"*.

Or, as Clive wrote, *"My dad's father died when he was in Standard 6. He was the youngest of three children and had two older sisters. He left school in Standard 8 to find a job in order to support his mom financially. He became a motor vehicle mechanic and also served as a mechanic during his compulsory national service years"*.

4.3.2. Education of parents

A parental focus on education or achievement of an education was very common across the stories. The following quotations illustrate this.

Dorah wrote, *"My father, an astute medical doctor and university lecturer, came from humble beginnings and tells tales of the challenges he faced in putting himself through medical school at Natal University. He speaks of how he used to study by candlelight, and of how one pair of shoes took him through many winters. He was one of three children raised on a farm in KZN"*.

These achievements were often the product of both societal and family dynamics. As Sachin wrote, *"Dad spoke fondly of how fortunate he was by being afforded the opportunity to receive a formal education up to his matriculation, an education that was a key contributor to him being able to secure his first job as a clerk in the local post office. ... Like my dad, mum was fortunate being the youngest child as her two sisters, in particular, did not permit her to work and provided her with the resources to complete her formal education and to matriculate. Mum told me stories of the difficulties she had to endure to get through school. There were days when she arrived at school with her uniform soaking from the rain as she had to travel to school by foot even in inclement weather conditions. She was a determined person and did not allow these impediments to prevent her from educating herself."*

Or as Lesley wrote, *"My mother was recognised as a bit of a child prodigy who taught herself to read and matriculated at the age of 16. Her father, who was a school principal, had been unable to complete his training at medical school because of his lack of funding. That, however, did not stop both him and my grandmother from being one of the first black people to graduate from the University of Natal with education qualifications. From the stories that are told, it is pretty obvious that education was a driving force in their home."*

And as Alisha wrote, about her parents, *"They worked extremely hard against all odds to educate themselves in their late 20s for a better life for themselves and their children. They understood the power of education in breaking their otherwise destined life of poverty and hardship."* Alisha talks of education as a benefit, but also a challenge in following others rather than self: *"My parents were extremely focused on education and were very influential in my academic and career choices. This*

was both limiting and empowering. It was limiting in that I believed I had to follow their plan, rather than come up with a plan myself."

4.3.3. Education in one's own upbringing

In their own upbringing many of the authors focused on education. Sometimes the author had a gift and talent for learning. Other times there were driven by their parent's values.

As Tumelo wrote, "I paid what was then R20 for school fees and I began my learning. Mrs X wrote in my first-ever report card that I was a natural thinker, a quick learner and had a lot of potential. I came 8th in class that term ... 8 was just a number, or so I thought, but my family was overjoyed, especially X. Comparing me with my other cousins who had also presented report cards, 8 was an achievement. I then endeavoured to do even better, just so I could experience that feeling of seeing the pride in X's eyes."

And as Joyce wrote, "At the age of 9, my mom sent elders from her family to fetch me from my grandfather's house. Moving to my mom's side of the family in G was refreshing. My grandfather (my mother's father) insisted on schooling. Farm schools back in Z were not effective and as a result, I had to repeat a standard in order to catch up with other children. Even my mother went off to complete her teaching diploma at the S College of Education. She later obtained a BA Degree from University of the North and subsequently a Master's Degree from the same institution. She became my beacon of hope as I witnessed how she transformed into a powerful figure in the communities around the G villages. I adored her strength as she took the burden of educating the rest of her family, something I have also started doing as I continue with the Ubuntu values we grew up with."

Rodney wrote, "My father was very intelligent, but due to a lack of means, he could not further his education. I think this was one of his biggest regrets in life and would perhaps explain his constant emphasis on education and the furthering of my studies. My mother was a qualified teacher, and taught as a nursery-school teacher for a few years in the local school. ... My father always said ad nauseam to me and my brother that he worked as hard and as long as he did, so that we would never have to work in that shop. He said that education was extremely important and that it would be our 'way out'."

And as Caroline wrote, "My father was taken out of formal education and studied through correspondence due to political unrest. Education helped him jump from the 'burning platform' into unlimited opportunities. My parents are both firm believers in education, which is one of the reasons I am pursuing my MBA. Our experience as a family aligns to a quote by Mandela presented on a

placard during the class's tour at Constitutional Hill: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'."

4.3.4. Parents and grandparents as teachers or academics

It is also common across the stories that grandparents were teachers, as Faith wrote, "My parents both came from fairly humble beginnings. My father lost his mother at a very tender age and as such my father has never really spoken about her. His father was a headmaster at a local primary school, which was fairly prestigious at the time."

Caroline describes the involvement of her family in educational roles, "In my home country, education was, and still is, viewed as the life-line from poverty. My maternal grandfather, the youngest of eight children who were left to fend for themselves, worked as a herd boy for missionaries to raise money to pay for his school fees. He later became a school inspector and store owner. My maternal grandmother was a teacher by profession, and she supported my grandfather when he was out of a job, schooling 7 children (5 girls and 2 boys), despite being mocked by fellow villagers for educating their girls."

Despite the challenges of life, it was often this role as an educator that inspired and motivated the authors to study further. As Lungelo wrote, "My parents got married while they were both training as teachers in 1986, the year in which I was born. I stayed with my grandmother soon after my birth because my mother had to be at college ... Life was painful. My mother was a very sad and frustrated parent with two kids she could barely afford. Being a teacher, she stressed the importance of education. Each time she paid school fees she would sit me down and tell me 'this is the only money I have; you must never forget that you are poor, and if you fail I don't have any money for you to repeat classes'."

A typical reflection of this focus on education comes from Judy. She wrote, "I was born on the X of November 1984 ... My father always jokingly says that my mother planned me and my sister's births for late in the year so that she could be back at school when the new year started. She was a primary school teacher and extremely devoted to her job. It was very important to her that we took our education seriously and performed well in school."

4.4. Religion (inductive)

Stories written emerge around action, change and choice. The stories include uncertainty. There was also a fairly common theme that provided continuity. This was the role of religion and faith (especially Christianity).

I initially organised all the text portions that referred to ‘family structure and dynamics’ together. And I did not further code the nuances and differences in structured way. When I returned to my initial coding and examined the stories, religion emerged as a highly salient nuance. It was written about as part of the dynamics of family life. It was often contained in paragraphs with writing on family values.

I was unsure how to approach the religious experience in the stories. At first, I wondered if God was an actor or an author of the stories. But I could not find more than a couple of text portions from the stories to illustrate God as an actor. Is God a saviour? Does God call out to people in their time of suffering? Is there a storyline with God at the centre? I could not find a clear drama and storyline around this.

I came to see religion and God’s influence as nurturing a set of norms and values that ran through multiple storylines. Religion is an institutional force shaping lives and driving forward a range of the undercurrents of these stories. Faith and one’s relationship with God are anchors and they guide through the turbulence and choices required in many of the moments encountered. Religiously associated values can be understood as a positive (as in normatively good) institutional set of guidelines for bettering oneself. Observing religious values on the part of families was often linked to upward mobility, education, good values, discipline and self-empowerment. It is a proposition emerging from this study that religious observance is experienced as a modernising force rather than a rebellious anti-modern (or even fundamentalist) identity niche. I will discuss this later.

Religion is especially evident as the authors describe their upbringing, but is also evident in the pre-grandparents’, grandparents’ and parents’ eras in a number of stories. Almost half the stories (25) mention the role of religion in the shaping of the childhood and upbringing of the authors. This is highlighted in the table below.

Table 3: The occurrence of religion as a theme in the stories

	Pre-grand-parent	Grand-parent	Parents	Up-bringing	Adult-hood
Religion (or God) highlighted as important	5	8	7	25	8

For example, in referring to his grandparents, Tumelo mentions his grandmother's religiosity and strong will: *"The Free State is where my roots and this story begin. My maternal grandmother was the eldest of five children ... She was a strong-willed, God-fearing, kind and gentle woman. Born and raised in the Free State village of QwaQwa"*.

Gabriel wrote, *"My grandparents were all Christians, as was the case for my parents. As a result, our family was raised in a Christian family and was the pillar that led my father to study theology and become an ordained Pastor in his mid-20s"*.

Religion is often associated with a way of being raised and the values that came through this. Faith wrote of her upbringing that: *"Growing up going to church every Sunday was not an option but rather a non-negotiable. Both my parents were active members of the Catholic church and made sure we were all involved in one way or another whether in choir, dancing or Sunday school. All my siblings went to Catholic boarding schools and though I am now a practising Pentecostal, I have an appreciation of the grounding we got as the nuns and teachers in these schools were very strict and made us work hard both in academics and day-to-day duties"*.

Lerato also wrote of her upbringing that: *"Both my parents had taught us to know and fear God as we were raised strictly under the Anglican church where we were all baptised and confirmed. Having two big families from both my paternal and maternal side, entrenched me with the gift of love, care, respect and Ubuntu. As both families were rich in farming, they shared their crops with other people in the community who couldn't afford to buy food and made sure that they didn't go to bed hungry."*

Caroline wrote, *"The Ubuntu philosophy of 'I am because you are, you are because we are' ... was the backbone that kept hope alive in both my families. This was expressed through Christianity and community living. My maternal grandfather clothed and fed 'comrades' who fought in the liberation struggle, the roots of his altruism being the love for his country and the belief in unison progression of all people."* Caroline later wrote, *"My story is not complete without exploring my foundation in Christianity and how that has influenced my core beliefs, and shaped me into who I am. My paternal and maternal families have strong roots in Christianity. The greatest lessons I have learnt are those*

that I have experienced as a testimony of my faith. Growing up I was taught the power of prayer and remaining steadfast in God. This saw me through my qualifying as a Chartered Accountant, an accomplishment to this day that I attribute to God's hand in my life."

For Gabriel, God is a support in the ups and downs of adult life: *"Some days were good and some were bad. I needed to comfort myself, motivate myself and encourage myself and the Christian values instilled in me at a much younger age started being the pillar for my strength. They strengthened my faith in God and it is the fuel that drives me when I cannot drive myself."*

Karabo wrote in a similar way about values and religion when writing about her mother, *"She was raised in a family where Catholicism, respect of elders, and love and care for neighbours was always a big part of their lives"*.

Writing of her mother, Sandra shows the role of religion in her recovery. In this story, religion as a stabilising set of norms and values can be a redemptive as well as a guiding influence. Sandra wrote, *"My mom lost sight of her history as her family was dysfunctional. Her childhood stories are of alcoholism, poverty, violence, abandonment and at times homelessness. My mom first experienced a stable home environment as a teenager, when her mother found religion and quit drinking."*

Most often religion is written about as a stabilising and powerful institution that shapes values. But in a few stories, God is an actor, and the finding of religion is a dramatic influencer of events. For example, Richard wrote, *"When looking back at my childhood there was a definite moment that changed my life's path and that was finding religion. Religion had never been part of my childhood, not even the typical Christmas and Easter outings, so I had little exposure to the notion of God. I joined a large, vibrant church at the age of 16 and was quickly consumed with God, the church and our youth group, going to multiple meetings, getting involved in leadership and in the band. Religion became a large driver in decision making and in priorities and remains so today."*

Along the lines above, in adulthood, Lesedi wrote, *"In 2005, I had a defining moment when I was 'born again' as a Christian and my life has changed completely ever since. My beliefs, traditions and customs (although not strong), as well as my identity were questioned. I started identifying myself as a Christian and my race mattered less. The Christian beliefs still form a strong basis for my values in life."*

4.5. Explicitly stated influences (inductive)

I examined the stories to identify what or who seemed to be the major influence on the life of the author. In terms of the influences, sometimes this was explicitly stated by the authors themselves. And at other times the influences were identified by the way the author focused or described the intricacies or emotions of the events. In terms of the common multiple occurring influences, the list below summarises these.

Table 4: The stated influences on authors' lives

Stated influences	Count
Mother (positive)	23
Mother (negative)	2
Father (positive)	16
Father (negative)	2
Family (positive)	6
Family (negative)	1
Grandparents (positive)	8
Wife (positive)	6
Husband (positive)	1
Divorce	6
Religion	8
Education	5
Poverty	3
Work	2
Crime	2
Travel	2

The above indicative figures illustrate the importance of the family system in shaping the lives of the authors. Mothers feature especially strongly as positive influences, although the positive influence of fathers is also substantively present. The role of influential women can be understood then as a powerful influence on the shaping of value systems simply because it is often under the guidance of women that children grow up. While this is true of many societies in which women are more at home (while men are at work), it is heightened by the ways in which the Apartheid economy separated men from their families. Grandparents also play an important role, especially while parents are working or studying. Again, this is probably not unusual across the world, but is heightened by the complexity of studying and working in a society like South Africa's, with Apartheid segregation and spatial planning – especially for Black African families.

As Busi wrote, *“I was born in March 1983 in Graaff-Reinet and raised by ‘indlovukazi’, i.e., my grandmother, mother and aunt. I stayed with my grandmother for several years while my mother was finishing her certificate at the teacher’s college.”*

Richard wrote of the inspiration that his mother was and of her focus on education and inclusion, *“My mother has always been one of my biggest role models. She devoted her life to teaching and from a young age she taught me to respect and help others. I believe this helped me to have empathy and a high tolerance for people with different backgrounds from mine.”*

The evidence for negative parental and family influence, as well as the negative impact of divorce is also something to note. Sachin experienced the challenges of divorce in his own marriage: *“After numerous failed attempts to fix our marriage, we reached an impasse and I filed for divorce and custody in October 2010. This was a difficult decision because family is paramount to me and this decision meant I was going to be breaking up my family ... This was the most difficult time in my life and I am certain if it was not for the support and strength that I drew from my mum and brother at the time, I would have definitely broken down.”*

In a small but interesting observation, authors who have wives sometimes write about them as having a substantive positive influence on their path. But authors who have husbands seldom write about their positive influence! This could simply be a case of a coincidence and mean nothing. It could also be indicative that men transform more in and through relationship. And it could be that men find it easier to talk about the positive impact of their partners than women do in lieu of gendered norms. More research would be needed to discern the implications of this.

4.6. Explicitly stated values (inductive)

In a similar way to the major influences, I captured the salient values. These can also be understood as what important values are carried forward (into the future) from the authors' experiences. It can also be understood as the gifts and wounds that emerge from the selected text portions of the stories. In coding this, I strongly focused on where the author actually explicitly stated what had been inherited, what values were important and what they 'stood on' going forward. I did not infer particular values from reading extensive sections of text or the whole story.

Below is a list of the common important explicitly stated values (with a count of at least 3 – the value was observed in at least three of the stories). Most stories had more than one value associated with the text, so these 'important values' should be seen as indicative of trends rather than numerically significant.

Table 5: Important observed values drawn from identified text portions

Important observed values	Count
Education	11
Family	8
Hard work	6
Resilience	3
Perfection	3
Pressure to succeed	3

The importance of education, family and hard work are the top three core themes that emerge in the analysis of important observed values. This affirms earlier findings centred around the prominent role of education in the background of the authors. Families who have prioritised education (often with a fierce intensity) leave a legacy of the value of education in the authors' lives.

Sachin's story is emblematic of many of the stronger themes above. He wrote, *"Our parents always encouraged us and afforded us with the opportunities that they never had. They cultivated confidence in us, placed great emphasis on importance of hard work, education and the fact that we alone are responsible for making our careers and lives a success."*

Busi wrote about the importance of education and hard work in her family, *"My family is respected and in a well-known community. It is renowned for being a family of proud and hardworking people. We have a long history of raising teachers, i.e., my grandmother, mother and most of my aunts were qualified teachers who were passionate about their work."*

As indicated in the previous section, these values emerge often through the maternal line. As Lerato wrote, *“I am grounded by my mom’s upbringing of self-discipline, determination, hard work and love for education. She is an amazing and inspiring woman – incredibly she raised and self-disciplined five kids and still maintained her daily job at the municipal council. She instilled in me to always believe in myself and to have confidence to make my dreams come true. I have always worked hard from primary school stage throughout high school.”*

The importance of family in this analysis also confirms earlier findings. The authors, as individuals pursuing their own lives, see themselves as embedded in family systems and value both their historic ancestral families and their own new families.

Four values are somewhat similar: hard work; resilience; perfection; and the pressure to succeed. The authors are doing an MBA at a leading business school while mostly working in high-pressure senior management roles. It is understandable that these values emerge. But it is still striking how strongly they surface among many other possibilities. There are interesting potential relationships between intergenerational life-paths, value systems and career choices.

4.7. Cross-boundary encounters (inductive-deductive)

A strong theme across the stories was the descriptions of moving from a limited narrow more ethnocentric worldview to encountering a more diverse world. It is perhaps understandable – that a course on navigating a more diverse world would trigger the author’s writing about this theme. This was evident over 30 times across the 55 stories. The experience of encountering this diverse world can be positive or negative. There is a range of different ways people experience cross-boundary encounters. The experiences of difference and encounters across boundaries were coded as:

- **Brutal:** Referring to physical and socio-structural damages from encounters with difference – this could include being forced to leave, not receiving opportunities that others received or being constrained by the structures of society.
- **Challenging:** Referring to negative psychological experiences that could range from mildly annoying to potentially traumatising through internal psychological wounds.
- **Expansive:** Referring to positive experiences of broadening and expanding one’s horizons or encountering the ‘other’ in positive and life-affirming ways.
- **Nuanced:** Referring to the ways in which encountering a diverse context was both positive and negative in nuanced ways.
- **Neutral:** Referring to those stories that did not carry substantive emotional weight and were neutral.
- **Prejudice in self/family:** Referring most often to an author’s upbringing and referring to the ways in which the author’s family of origin had prejudiced views (often centred around gender, race and religion).

In total the table below summarises the different experiences.

Table 6: The different experiences of encountering a diverse world across the life-stories

Code	Count
Brutal	33
Challenging	42
Expansive	79
Nuanced	19
Neutral	0
Prejudice in self/family	17

Adding together the challenging and brutal codes, the number of negative experiences is roughly equal to the number of positive experiences. But this varies widely by type of differences and by intergenerational period.

The differences encountered were coded for the type of diversity encountered. The following types were evident and coded for:

- Race: Referring to self-identified racial labels and how individuals encountered one another.
- Gender: Referring to the ways in which gender differences led to specific experiences.
- All-other: Referring to cross-difference encounters where it was not made explicit which elements of diversity were key to the encounter
- International travel: Referring to the ways in which international travel was experienced.
- Religion: Referring to religion generally and encounters that different religious individuals or groups experienced with one another.
- Ethnicity: Referring to the ways in which different ethnic or cultural individuals or groups encountered one another, including clan, tribe and broader cultural categories.
- Nationality: Referring to how one's nationality shaped encounters with other nationalities.
- Age: Referring to the ways in which differences between age groups were encountered.

The table below illustrates the number of times that reference was made to one of the categories of diversity above and in what way the issue was experienced.

Table 7: Diversity and the ways in which diversity types were encountered

	Race	Gender	Other	Inter-national travel	Religion	Ethnicity	Nationality	Age
Brutal	23	5	1	1	0	1	2	0
Challenging	25	8	3	2	1	2	1	0
Expansive	27	0	19	11	4	11	4	3
Nuanced	8	0	4	1	0	3	3	0
Neutral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prejudice in self/family	10	0	1	0	2	3	1	0
TOTAL	93	13	28	15	7	20	11	3

4.7.1. Race

It is clear from the table above that, purely numerically, issues of racial diversity are by far the most common form of difference described as encountered (93 events). This is understandable considering the history of South Africa. There were a high number of brutal and a high number of challenging encounters. This is also understandable considering South Africa's history. However, it should be noted that there are considerable positive stories told about racial interaction (27). In addition, many of the times in which 'diversity' in a general sense was referred to, it was used as a positive experience of growth and expansion (19 events). Gender is also a common and often challenging dynamic to navigate (8). Ethnicity is mostly referred to in positive ways – as is international travel.

One of the more dramatic illustrations of the ways in which diversity was written about can be observed when breaking down the figures by generational period. Encounters across race, for example, were documented as historically most often brutal or challenging in the grandparent era, while being more expansive or challenging in the adult era. This may speak to ways in which race has moved from an external socio-structural phenomenon that dominates lives to one that is more psycho-social. It could also be that the authors do not share the stories of recent events in the same way that they refer to events in the longer distant past. It could also be shaped by the writing of these stories within an MBA course – a structure that might make it easier to share substantive painful events that are in the far past rather than more recent. But it may also potentially show how race is both challenging and rewarding in how it is encountered in a democratic South Africa. Subtle forms of racism and prejudice can leave psychological scars, while positive encounters can generate learning and broadened mindsets.

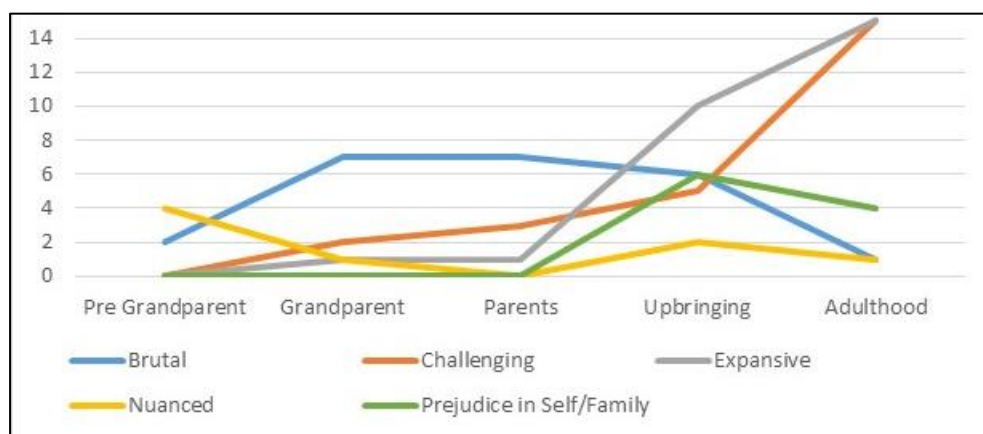


Figure 4: Encounters across race over time

Desmond wrote of the brutal difficulties experienced by his grandfather and mother, *"My mother's father was a farm worker all his life, working for a white farmer who rewarded him R30 per month with which he used to take care of his wife and many kids. According to my mother, life at the farm was extremely hard and sometimes dehumanising. The water that they had access to drink was from a small well in the yard of the farm owner. Afrikaans kids were allowed to swim in that water well despite the fact that people had to drink the same water. My mother is still suffering from some of the illnesses believed to be linked to drinking dirty water for prolonged periods of time."*

Nkosi wrote of the brutal laws of Apartheid: *"In the 1960s, my grandmother went to Cape Town to source employment for her children. She left all four of them with her sister to look after. During holidays they were not allowed to visit their mother without a permit to cross the Ciskei to Cape border. The permit for them to visit Cape Town had to be approved by the local district police, and the 'master' of the house where she worked at also had to approve the visit."*

Many of more recent (post-Apartheid) challenges associated with race are less brutal but substantively challenging. As Antony wrote, *"I began getting exposed to the work environment and slowly started understanding what racism is. ... Biases are prevalent in the workplace and many people do not even realise that they have these biases. Young Coloured men are easily categorised as thieves, alcoholics and fighters. This for a long time was a stumbling block for me because I felt people did not trust me. I slowly realised that I am also to blame for this insecurity and that not all people judged me before they met me."*

Antony wrote of the newness of it all and the changes encountered: *"I completed my primary schooling in Eldorado Park and my high school at a Model C school. It was not an Ivy League school but was a totally different environment for me. I can remember the first time going to a 'tuck-shop' where children bought a whole can of Coke, Simba chips and a pie, they even had their own special word for it, 'Tuk'. It was a 'wow' moment in my life, thinking about a whole 'groovy' (slang for can). At my previous school we did not have these 'luxuries'. It was a completely different world, I even had White friends. My parents broke many barriers for me, and I appreciate everything that they have done for me."*

In terms of positive and expansive encounters, for example Dorah, had positive encounters after moving to a suburban school: *"After moving to the suburbs and attending a private girls boarding school, the interaction among other girls from different nationalities and backgrounds taught me both acceptance and tolerance of cultural differences. We were often encouraged to say grace in different languages and celebrated one another's heritage through dressing up and relating stories. We were insulated from Apartheid and did not experience any discrimination."*

Lesedi also wrote of positive encounters: *“Working for Anglo Platinum exposed me to people from different backgrounds and beliefs in life. My colleagues included Xhosa speakers, Shangaan, Indians, English speakers, as well as Afrikaners. This was quite challenging but exciting at the same time. The greatest challenge was when I was promoted to the Quality Manager position and led a very diverse team. For the first time in my life I had a white person reporting to me. It came with all sorts of biases from my past, but I quickly had to learn that people are just the same regardless of their skin colour.”*

4.7.2. Gender/women’s encounters with patriarchy

Encounters across gender have gone from being largely ‘brutal’ and of a harsh oppressive socio-structural form (in parents’ and grandparents’ eras) to becoming non-evident in the stories of the author’s upbringing and then emerging again as ‘challenging’ in the workplace and in relationships of adult life.

This theme really refers to the way women experience a male-dominated world. I draw a conclusion in this regard that for these female authors, gender (and specifically being a woman) was a substantive structural constraint in previous generations. But women are now raised to believe they can be anything. As girls, growing up in families and during their schooling, they receive all the support that boys do. Gender is therefore less written as a limiting factor in women’s upraising. But women then write of encountering gender bias in university and especially in the workplace. It shows the ongoing realities of constraint that women write about functioning in. It also shows the importance of difficult challenging experiences and even brutal violent prejudice in their lives. This is a striking finding. On one level it is to be expected in a society like South Africa with high amounts of gendered violence, but on another it is the very contrast with women’s upbringing (as free) that it needs to be put in context with.

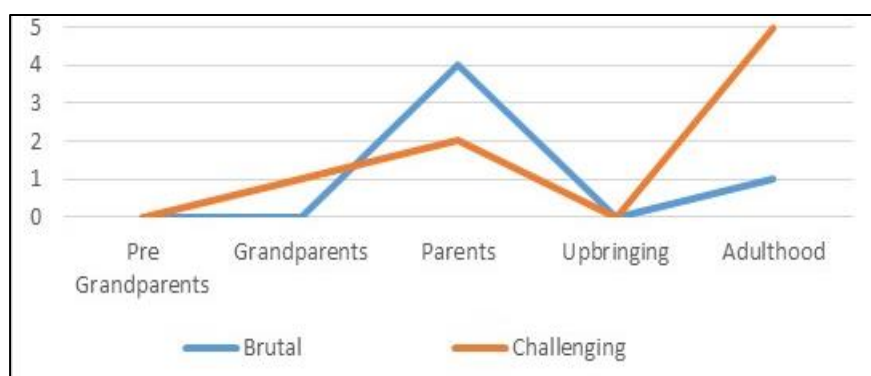


Figure 5: Encounters across gender over time

As Judy describes of her experiences of being a woman: *“I’ve never been part of the minority group in terms of culture and religion, however I did get a taste for what it feels like in terms of gender. Our*

engineering class had less than 20% females and we were sometimes faced with sexist behaviour. To name one incident, one of my design demonstrations didn't go well once, and when the lecturer asked me a question that I couldn't answer, his response was that I should stop relying on the guys in the class to do my work!"

Caroline wrote similarly that: *"Having grown up in a home where both boys and girls were equal, I was oblivious to the inequality of genders. To be fair, I only started experiencing the divide further on in my career. As my peers became wives and mothers, most of them quit or took less-demanding roles along the way, so that I became the only woman in most of my meetings. I started experiencing the fact that I had to work harder than men to be recognised, or continuously prove my capabilities with each project I took. I could never fit into the 'boys' club'. My perception that women and men were equal was not a reality in the 'real world'."*

4.7.3. Encounters with all differences – general patterns across time

In adulthood, a large number of stories referred to diverse encounters in positive terms (50) as opposed to challenging (23) and brutal (2). There is substantial difference in the stories in the ways these encounters impacted on lives. In describing their parent's experience, the authors described many more brutal encounters (14), less challenging encounters (6) and only a few positive encounters (3) across difference.

Difficulties remain highly evident. And there are a number of challenges. As Gugu wrote, *"I was fortunate to get a bursary through the university in my 3rd year of study and with my engineering degree I then pursued a career in the mining industry. I had never been as conscious of being a black woman as I was when I worked in that industry. As I progressed from a supervisory role to a management role, I found that I had to work extra hard to earn the respect that I deserved. It was bad enough that I was a black educated person, but being a woman made things even more difficult for everyone."*

Karima, a woman of Indian ancestry, speaks of her marriage to a White man: *"As a girl growing up in an Indian household, there were many expectations of how I should be and the mask that I should wear in order to meet the image of who I was supposed to be. In 2001, when I was 18, for the first time I was forced to question the perceptions that I had grown up with because I met my now husband who as it turned out is a white man. Seven years after the first democratic election, one would have thought that this would not have been a major issue, but the truth is that it was hard for both our families to accept it. Despite all the friction that it caused between me and my family, I believe that he was the first source of nutrition that was added to my soil. He has been a constant source of strength and nourishment for my mind and soul over the course of 16 years. This is also a*

source of pain and my heart breaks a little knowing that the world in which my children will grow up will still consider them to be members of a 'mixed-race' instead of members of a human race."

In summary, the authors write in their stories of a decline in the brutal experiences of cross-difference encounters. The graph below illustrates three categories of diversity summed up and then compared against different generational eras. It is clear that brutal incidents peak in the parental generation and then decline in the upbringing and adulthood of the author. Encounters across diversity in adulthood remain challenging (23), in spite of there being more positive expansive experiences (50).

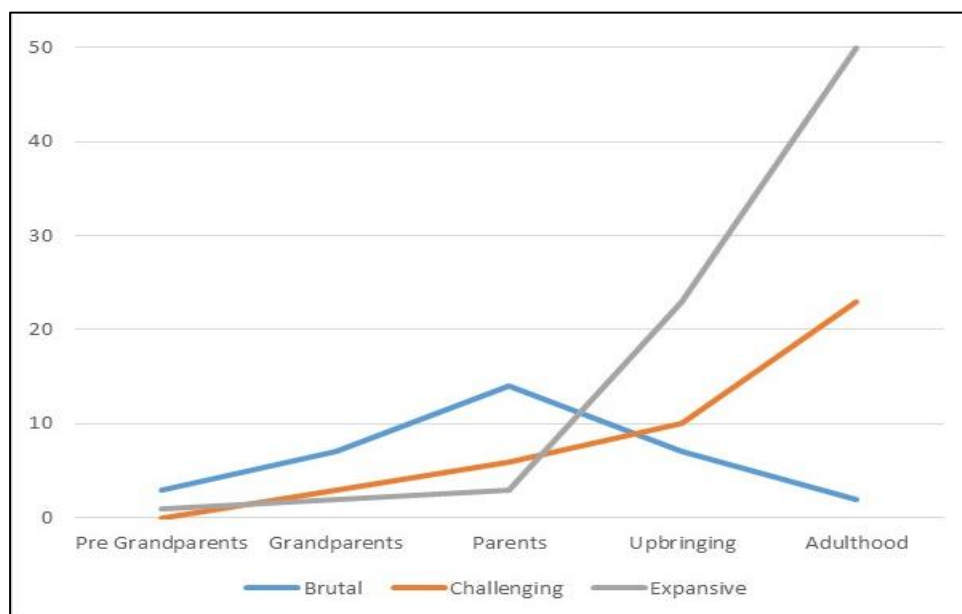


Figure 6: Changes in the experience of difference and diversity across generations

4.8. Intergenerational upward and downward life-paths (deductive)

Each story was coded for the key ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ encountered through an intergenerational period. ‘Ups’ included periods of economic progress, personal growth or family empowerment. ‘Downs’ included periods of family tragedy, societal oppression, poverty and personal failure.

These ups and downs were specifically organised into five time/generational periods. These are: pre-grandparent, grandparent, parent, upbringing and adulthood (post high school). This temporal organising frame was used across a number of codes in order to organise the stories.

This temporal organising frame was used across a number of codes in order to organise the stories:

- ↗ sign to indicate a family or individual for whom life was getting better
- ↘ sign to indicate a family or individual for whom life in general was getting worse
- → sign to indicate where life was consistent (not used to indicate that it was good or bad, just not changing)
- √ sign for a life that had substantive turbulence or dramatic ups and downs
- ≠ sign to signify a period of brave struggle without progress

Ups and downs can also take place in one of three domains as is illustrated below:

- Red refers to the societal domain
- Yellow to the family domain
- Blue to the personal domain

If there was an issue that overlapped two domains, then it could be:

- Green (a personal-family issue)
- Orange (a family-society issue)
- Purple (a personal-societal issue)

For example, a tragedy might befall the family – this would be a down ↘ and be coloured yellow. A national level war or set of prejudiced policies might shape the path of the family negatively – this would be negative ↘ and be coloured red. The hard work of the person writing the story might lead to a better life – this would be an up ↗ and be coloured purple.

As an example, Lesedi’s story and colour coding is summarised in the table below. His pre-grandparents and grandparents encountered difficult circumstances. His grandmother worked 12-hour shifts in a provincial hospital. His father had to quit school at a young age to look after his siblings. Both his parents struggled, particularly his mother through ups and downs. He comes from a

family without education – his mother was very bright but unfortunately had to look after her sister's children and could not continue her studies. She found work as a domestic worker. Lesedi moved to Alexandra township, which was very challenging, but he was able to attend a Model C school after the end of Apartheid and did well. His mother applied for many bursaries and he was able to get one and study at university, which substantially changed his life. Lesedi's life-story was coded for ups and downs and domain of the experience as shown below.

Table 8: Example of a life-story coded across generations from the coded data (Lesedi)

Pre-grandparents	Grandparents	Parents	Upbringing	Adulthood
Difficult times	A tough grandfather and brave grandmother	A mother who fought many battles to survive	Then a son who embraced the challenges and opportunities of change – and through his talents and opportunities in society was able to rise up	Life continues to progress
↘	↘	↘↘↗	↗↗	↗

This coding approach was adapted from Brockmeier (2000), Bruner (2001) and Gergen & Gergen (1997). The elements of these stories combined with the arrows and up/down coding was then given a narrative descriptor – an adjective or very brief descriptor that could describe some of the details of what was happening. These descriptors were: intergenerational struggle, intergenerational achievement, seizing opportunities, encountering the wider world, common ups-and-downs, tragedy, oppression, recovery, serious family troubles and unfathomable family troubles.

An overview of the stories simply in terms of ups, downs, struggles, ups *and* downs, and consistency is provided below. This excludes the generation that had the experience.

Table 9: Overview of upward and downward paths of generations across time

Overview of the data	Pre-grandparents	Grand-parents	Parent	Up-bringing	Adult-hood
Ups	4	13	25	28	34
Downs	3	13	12	23	6
Struggle	3	8	8	3	1
Turbulence	2	2	2	12	16
Side-move	0	2	5	1	0
No evidence	44	25	16	7	9

It is clear that most of the authors write very little substantive details about the generations before their grandparents. When they do, they describe ups, downs, struggles and turbulence. A far more significant portion write about their grandparents. Here, there is an equal spread of ups and downs with a large amount of struggle. When it comes to writing about their parents, the authors describe more upward mobility and positive experience. And then when reflecting on their own upbringing, there is a mix of positive and negative experiences with substantial turbulence. As adults, the authors write largely of positive experiences while describing some turbulence. I have already part-indicated explanations for this. It may be that authors are more honest about the dramatic events of their families' past and find it hard to open up about events that are painful in the present. It might be that really dramatic negative events can only be shared when one has 'got over' them. This would need further investigation.

Alongside the coding of stories in terms of upward and downward paths, stories were also coded for narrative descriptors that would summarise the elements detailed above in a more narrative form.

In terms of a summary of the narrative descriptors of the stories, the following table provides a summary.

Table 10: Narrative descriptors of generations' upward and downward paths

Strands of intergenerational life-stories	Count
Intergenerational struggle	24
Oppression	7
Intergenerational achievement	29
Seizing opportunities	17
Encountering the wider world	30
Serious family troubles	17
Unfathomable family troubles	3
Ups and downs of life	12
Tragedy	8
Recovery	5

These descriptors can be understood as the strands of intergenerational life-stories. Each story combines a number of them into the fabric of its tale. It is clear that many stories describe encountering the wider world in the context of intergenerational struggles and achievements. Many describe seizing the opportunities provided by life, as well as encountering serious ongoing family troubles (sometimes unfathomable in terms of pain and trauma) and navigating the more common ups and downs of life. There is also a description of painful tragedy and societal oppression (most often associated with race, gender and ethnicity).

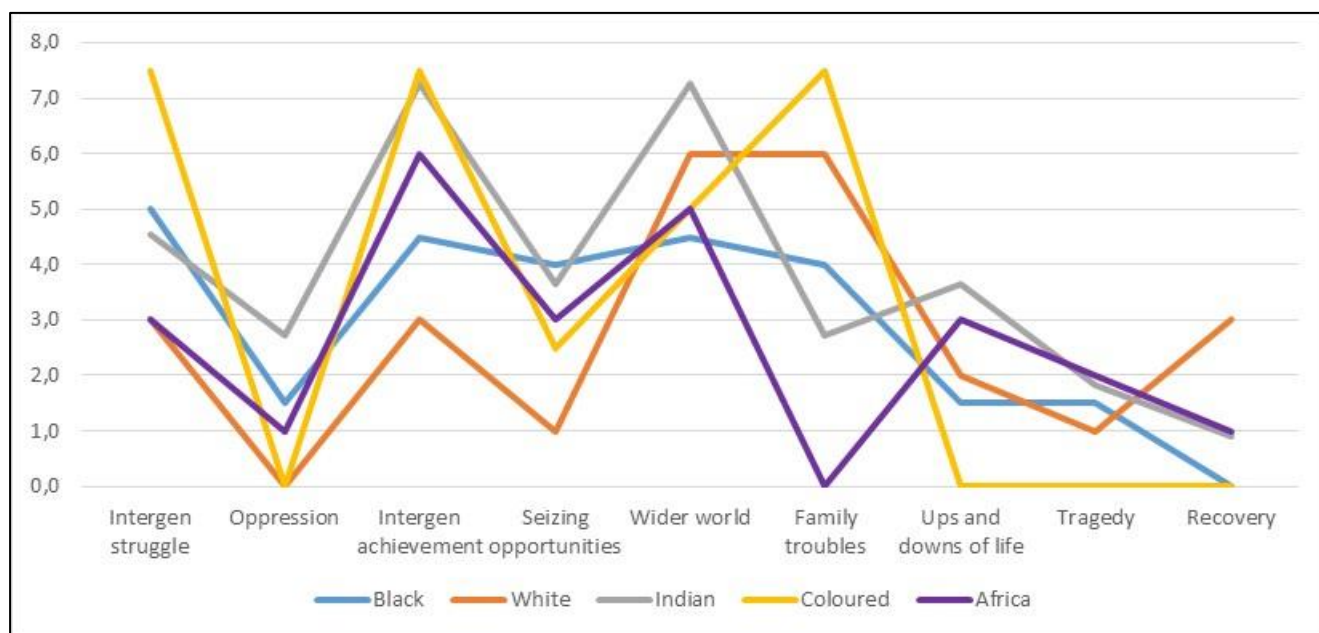


Figure 7: Normalised distribution of the frequency of narrative descriptors by race/region

I broke down these figures by race and region. And then I adjusted them to account for the larger group sizes in the selection – for example, 20 Black African authors were included in the study but only four Coloured authors. I adjusted the figures to illustrate the trends *as if* there had been ten authors in each race or regional group. I also combined serious and unfathomable family troubles into one category (family troubles). These figures should be read with caution since the group sizes are small, especially for Coloured authors (4 stories). I therefore do not focus at all on small differences, but rather highlight substantive differences which may prove to be important.

The first impression is that there is partly a pattern across lives no matter the race/regional of the author. By this I mean that the highs tend to be high for similar issues (to a lesser extent for family troubles where the most cross-race/nationality variances are present). There are *four peaks to the mountain range*. These are associated with higher frequencies for intergenerational struggle, intergenerational achievement, encounters with a wider world and family troubles. In the first *peak*, Coloured authors (all be it drawn from a very small selection of four stories) report high levels of intergenerational struggle. I do not read too much into this from only four authors. But there are ‘expected’ lower frequencies of intergenerational struggle and intergenerational achievement for White authors compared with the other groups. White authors tend to emphasise more frequently the presence of family troubles. All the groups commonly refer to high frequency experiences of encountering the wider world.

Indian and Black African authors report intergenerational struggle in about half of the stories written. In the second *peak*, there are also a number of stories of intergenerational achievement with Coloured and Indian authors reporting this for two-thirds of the stories. In the third *peak*, Indian and White authors report the most experiences of encountering a wider world in about two-thirds of the stories. Some of the frequencies would be expected in terms of race/nationality breakdowns but there are a number of nonetheless interesting observations in connecting the authors’ stories with expected societal trends.

Relatively more White and Indian South African authors emphasised their encounters with a more diverse wider world – perhaps indicating their prior isolation. And White South Africans highlight elements of recovery in proportionally larger numbers. White South African authors described no examples of group oppression, nor did any of the Coloured authors, although all groups described some experience of intergenerational struggle and achievement.

In terms of gender, there was little difference in the focus areas of male and female authors when it came to documenting the upward and downward paths of generations across time. This was the main observation. Women and men referred with more or less equal frequency to different narrative

descriptors of intergenerational lives across time – the exception was in the degree to which women focused somewhat more on the intergenerational struggle of their ancestors and made more frequent mention of the ups-and-downs of life. A few more men than women described family tragedy as well as personal recovery.

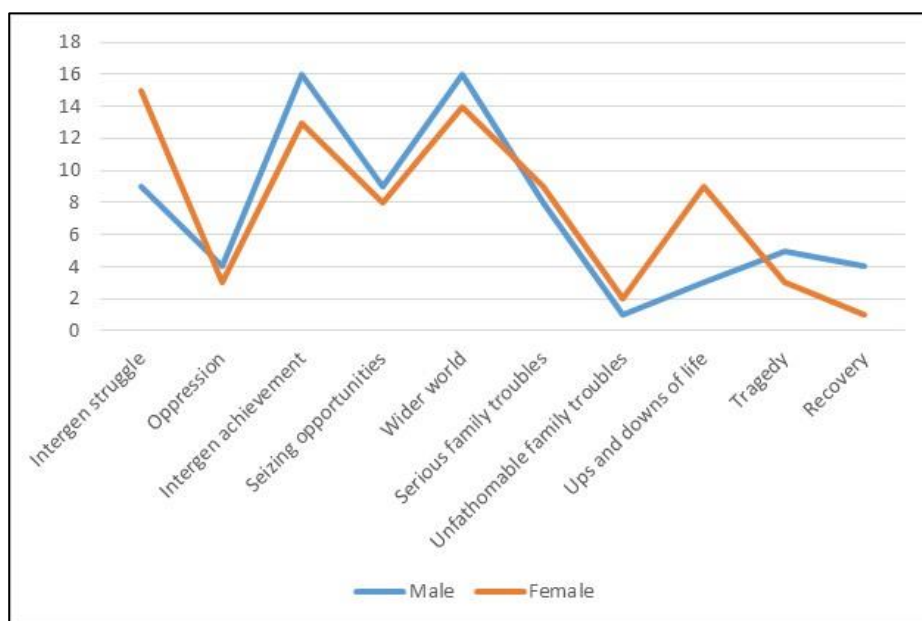


Figure 8: Gendered frequency of narrative descriptors

It is clear that authors wrote about their adult lives in ways that represented turbulence – the bad as well as the good. Observing the full high-level overview of upward and downward paths of lives across time, it is evident that domains in which the action of the story took place shifted from the family (in the author's upbringing) to the larger sphere of society and the more intimate sphere of the self (for the period of adulthood). This makes sense as the group studied was largely in their early 30s when authoring these stories. Many will not yet have had children or if they have children, they would mostly be young and their families relatively new. The shaping forces in the adulthood of the authors are the societal field and inside-the-self.

Only a few of the authors described the kinds of harsh struggles and oppression in their own lives compared to what their grandparents and parents encountered. I am tentative to draw firm conclusions on the implications of this. It might be that this generation is experiencing a better life than previous ones. Or it could be that authors tend to see long past family and ancestral experiences in starkly negative ways. It could also be that the authors do not want to share the immediate and recent negative experiences in a story with a peer in class – perhaps because the experiences are too personally painful and intimate to share with their classmates.

4.9. Agency and structure (deductive)

Sociological analysis has often been concerned with issues of agency and structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). I use the term ‘structure’ to refer to ways in which individual choices and actions are limited and enabled by collective social, cultural and economic institutions. Individuals also shape and mould the forces around them and navigate the world through their own choice – a phenomenon I see as *agency*. In conceptual sociological terms, structure and agency are complex phenomena that are heavily debated and intricately theorised (Berger, 1995; Hubbard, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Austin and Costabile (2017) cite work that has documented how agency (for example, individual achievement and success) and communal themes (for example, love) are documented differently in autobiographies. And they show how writing about these different themes can be correlated with experiences of self-esteem.

The scholars mentioned above have developed coding approaches that explore themes of structure and agency, and also included fate (as existential themes). They have also developed the agentic themes centred around individual agency and collective communion (as motivation themes). Drawing from these authors I coded the life-stories for:

- Structure: This refers to political forces, state policies, cultural constraints as well as geographic and economic limits and enablers.
- Chance: This refers to events that happened that were outside the control of the individuals in the story, but which were seemingly random and the result of bad luck or good fortune. This included, for example, sudden illness and car accidents.

I also coded for themes in which the individuals in the story carved conscious pathways outside or through the broader forces around them. Drawing from the scholarship in this area, I coded for:

- Agentic power: This referred to actions associated with individual autonomy, self-realisation and independence.
- Agentic communion: This referred to actions of connection, intimacy, social responsibility and love.

Halfway through the coding process, it became clear that a fifth code was needed. This was in order to describe the authors’ experience of the impact of God and faith. While some might view this as a subjective interpretation for other forces, this is not how the authors experienced it. So, the fifth code was added (and previous stories were also coded for it):

- God and faith: This referred to explicit references in the text where the author described how it was God's plan and/or how it was through God and faith that the positive outcomes were achieved. It can be noted that God is only a positive influence on lives.

I was interested in how these five codes allowed me to organise and explore the stories, less in terms of static themes such as the presence of education or religion as in the earlier themes, but more in terms of dynamic choices across time. These codes also allowed for an exploration of themes associated with a number of scholars of identity including Côté and Levine (2002), Erikson (1950/1993) and McAdams (1994) who emphasise identity development and issues of choice and agency over the life-course.

I now summarise key elements of the life-stories with reference to these five coding themes. Then I describe the common and cross-cutting ways in which these themes emerged. The key common interactions of structure, chance, agentic power, agentic communion and God-faith are described below. For example, it was common to see how the painful and oppressive structure of Apartheid required substantive agentic power and communion to overcome.

4.9.1. Encountering structure

As indicated above, in exploring these lives lived, the background setting was the oppressive influence of historic political systems. This was sometimes explicit in its visible and tragic brutality. But at most times its influence was implicit in the undercurrents that carry generations forward in time.

Parents and grandparents of many authors experienced the kinds of impacts reflected on by Caroline below. As Caroline wrote, *"The political atmosphere in the 1960s and 1970s shaped the consciousness of the black citizens in that generation, giving rise to resilience, great passion for freedom and heavy involvement in politics. The liberation struggle was a classic case of the 'burning platform', where normal citizens, regardless of gender, sacrificed their lives for the fight for freedom. Both my grandfathers, having been caught on the 'wrong' side of politics, were tortured for supporting the liberation struggle and served with prohibited immigration, which banned them for accessing urban areas for a stipulated timeframe. Consequently, my maternal and paternal grandfathers were banished to the rural areas and were unemployed for ten years and two years, respectively. My grandmothers reflected great tenacity during this time, by supporting their families through farming activities, sewing and other works of their hand."*

In an extract like this we see the ways in which larger oppressive forces of structure shape lives. It is also evident how individuals push with their own agency against these forces through direct activism

or through the carving out of space for their own lives. In the telling of the story above, some might say that people have no choice but to join the resistance. But I interpret this fragment of a story that Caroline's grandparents demonstrate substantive agentic power and agentic communion in the ways they worked to support their families.

Oppressive systems also operated around gender. This can be understood as structure working through culture. This was especially evident in some of the writings around grandparents' and parents' lives. As indicated earlier, it was less present in the upbringing of the authors. But it was present in the workplace.

Fanisa wrote of her grandparents that: *"A poignant moment was when I learnt that my grandfather refused to send all his girls to school due to fear that they would fall pregnant before they got married. Only my uncles were sent to school, only one finishing and the rest decided to look for jobs."*

And as Nkosi wrote of his mother as a role model: *"My mother was determined to succeed in her career. She applied to progress her studies in accounting and finance, and her application was rejected four times due to the colour of her skin and because she was a woman."*

Faith, for example, wrote, *"I find myself in a job where I have to work twice as hard to be seen as a woman, with double the workload, because of the brain drain and cost-cutting measures, all for the same pay. This all equates to an unhealthy social life as it means less time to spend with my family."* Later, she wrote, *"Taking a closer look at my story, I can't help but notice that there is a huge contradiction between my beliefs and what society has imposed on me. In as much as I believe working hard can yield much fruit, there is a limitation to the extent that I am fruitful as a result of the opportunities that are afforded to me by my society, such as whether I stand an equal chance to make it as everyone else around me."*

It is certainly not one-dimensional, but women do play a large role in shielding their children from the challenges of the world and orienting them to education. As Caroline wrote in the previous section: *"My grandmothers reflected great tenacity during this time, by supporting their families through farming activities, sewing and other works of their hand."*

4.9.2. Place

One of the more salient patterns, when considering the structural and more agentic elements of a life-story, is the role of place in structuring life and enabling/constraining agency. I use the term 'place' to refer to the overlapping physical realities of 'space' or geography combined with subjective interpretations or cultural dynamics associated with those geographies. Place has been shown to be an important context in the narrative tradition (Silverman, 2011), but I did not intensively summarise

the literature on place in the literature review. Place was found to shape stories. The authors were born in a specific place. The village in these stories was different to the town. The town was different to the city. One country was different to another. Places structured outcomes and provided structures against which people struggled. Places provided the opportunities that some authors and their families embraced to succeed.

But places also changed. And it was the choices (or forced requirement) to change places, to leave one's place and travel to another, that markedly disrupted and reoriented intergenerational paths. People in the stories were always changing places ... from the large disruptions of Indian migrants travelling as indentured labourers or traders, to the migrations from rural villages to towns and cities, to the movements from townships to suburbs.

Veroshni wrote, for example, *"My great-grandfather (my grandmother's father) ... (X) was a Brahmin, a businessman, a respected man in his community. He lived a modest, humble yet wealthy life. He heard the stories of a great life with opportunities for business and wealth in South Africa and decided to venture there with his mother and brothers as 'passenger Indians' in 1890."*

Place in South Africa, especially in the Colonial and then Apartheid period, was tied to race and to ethnicity. Apartheid spatial planning meant that space structured one's life opportunities. It could also be the site of violence. This is powerfully and painfully illustrated by Veroshni's story. By the 1940s, Veroshni's family had built a successful life in Durban and later generations prospered. Veroshni's grandfather ran a profitable business, but *"What came at the height of his business was the 1949 Durban riots. As stated in South African history, on the 14th and 15th of January, thousands of black South Africans took to the streets with makeshift weapons to destroy both property and persons in their wake. The forces of law at the time stood back somewhat helplessly as black people savagely marched forward towards the residential areas where it became an orgy of murder, arson, rape and looting which did not seem altogether without aim, purpose and direction. The consequent loss of life and property resulted in approximately 200 people dead, thousands injured and extensive damage to shops and homes."*

Places were where life began and where geography and culture bind what is possible. As Joyce wrote, for example, *"X village in the greater X region, south of X city, is a place I called home for a small period in my early life. I lived with my grandparents and a few of my cousins whose parents were working as nannies for white families in town. Our lives mainly centred around orange farms that extended over a 100-km radius from the market. When I was younger, we would work in farms, sorting oranges according to texture. Later in life, I learned that the best oranges we selected were being exported to European countries."* Stories like this have the potential to become defining

narratives of life and to shape one's approach to the world. Joyce also wrote, *"The majority of the people in the area were uneducated and worked in the orange farms. As I grew up, I knew I had to change my circumstances."*

Places are not only geographic in character, they are also psychological. I have previously shown Antony's experience living as a young man in Eldorado Park (a Coloured township). He and his friends would look across to Soweto (a Black township): *"We would see the tyres burning when there were riots. The school would close for the day and they would tell us as children that the Black terrorists were coming to kill us. We were scared of them. When I lived in Eldorado Park, I looked at Black people as an inferior people ..."*

Antony's upbringing was structured by this experience of place. It provided the backdrop to life. It was in opposition to this experience that he grew. His own agentic power was needed to carve out his own identity and attitudes in the face of historic prejudice and the racism. As he wrote later, *"Attending a multiracial school was the beginning of my transformation. I had White, Black, Indian and Asian friends. My teens and early adulthood were a happy time and I progressed steadily. Antony also wrote of the demise and negative changes that have happened in places that formed him, "The communities we lived in were safe havens for our parents because they could control our exposure to racism. It saddens me to see that the communities we come from and so cherish have become hubs of crime, drugs and human trafficking."*

There were other examples of how place mattered in the stories and especially the change of place. This movement of house and home was often one of the more dramatic influences on younger lives. These movements were historically associated with work requirements and economic needs. In the period of the authors' upbringing, it was often associated with economic progress, especially for Black, Indian and Coloured families. As Yusuf wrote, *"My parents, in 1978, decided that they wanted a different life; and still being very young, they moved to Laudium in Pretoria. Their first year was incredibly difficult, my father drove a bakery truck and whatever little he earned was needed to sustain them in the garage they rented to live in, to put food on the table and for him to complete his studies ... By 1984, when I was born, they had acquired a small house, a car and were professionals on the up. By 1991, when my sister was born, we had moved to Johannesburg and lived in a 1 000m² four-bedroom house in the south-east of Johannesburg."*

4.9.3. Education

A fierce focus on education and associated seizing of opportunity was another story pattern at the intersection of agency and structure. It was visible in the ways in which families organised to enable a talented child to study further. This was most often evident in the authors' lives, although it was

also salient in the some of the parent's upbringing. The structures that constrain were overcome by a fierce focus on education – often accompanied by firm values of discipline and focus. I use the term 'fierce' to indicate the effort needed. This pattern illustrated, for example, how authors, through their own hard work and agency were able to leverage the changes taking place in societies' structure to access better schools and bursaries for further education.

I have previously explained in detail how education was an important theme across 48 of the 55 stories. I showed earlier how, in the stories, almost an equal number of grandparents were denied education (7) as were able to educate themselves (8 – mostly against considerable odds). In the authors' parents' generation, many more stories described how the authors' parents were able to educate themselves (28), although there was also a high number (15) of stories of parents who were prevented from achieving their potential. In the stories of the authors own upbringing, educational opportunities opened up further.

In this pattern around structure and agency, I now highlight how education is leveraged to create change across time. I previously highlighted an example of this with Lerato. I repeat the quote here for ease of discussion. Lerato wrote, *"I am grounded by my mom's upbringing of self-discipline, determination, hard work and love for education. She is an amazing and inspiring woman – she incredibly raised and self-disciplined five kids and still maintained her daily job at the municipal council. She instilled in me to always believe in myself and to have confidence to make my dreams come true. I have always worked hard from primary school stage throughout high school. I was later awarded a bursary from X company to study Mining Engineering."*

Using the codes around structure and agency, this story excerpt can now be described as follows ... Lerato's mother leveraged her agentic communion to inspire and open doors in the structures of society for her daughter. Lerato was then able, through her own agentic power, to succeed at school. This positioned her for opportunities that opened up in the structure of society in the form of a bursary.

This positive story of agency and structure, and the leveraging of education, can be contrasted with the frustrations of previous generations. As Lesley wrote, *"Neither of my father's parents completed schooling beyond Standard 6 and 8 – and spent their lives as a machinist in a clothing factory and working on the docks. It was, however, my paternal grandmother who had the drive and ambition for her children to get a good education. Stories are told of how she would sit up through the night with my father and aunt when they were studying for exams because she felt that was all she could do to help them with their education. Although they were quite poor, my grandmother insisted that university fees and money for transport and textbooks had to be prioritised above food and clothing."*

Little wonder I ended up believing the same." This story can now be described like this ... The structures of society at the time prevented Lesley's parents from completing their schooling. The agentic communion of her grandmother opened space in the limits provided by the structures of society for the education of her children.

Clive was very determined to succeed, *"I was very driven to achieve financial independence and managed to obtain a bursary to study through my academic and sporting achievements ... I was the first in my family to attend university and complete a degree. Today, I am a professionally qualified management accountant. I am also the first in my family to own a house."* This story can now be described as follows ... Clive used his agentic power to study further and secure a bursary, which was an emerging structural opportunity. The changing structures of society around education opportunity allowed him to progress.

To summarise this section so far, I will state the following ... the structures of broader economic reality mixed with the structure of family life meant that some people in previous generations were not able to study further. Often this fuelled a deep determination (nurturing agentic communion and agentic power) in those constrained and subsequent generations who were fiercely focused on their education. Through agentic communion, these latter generations were able to create a different set of possibilities for their children, and through agentic power these children were able to seize the opportunities. Often the stories written show how the societal and structural changes enabled further study. In many cases, the coming of a democratic South Africa meant that Black, Coloured and Indian authors who studied hard (agentic power) and were provided with the right support by their families (agentic communion) could attend previously White Model C schools that were of a better quality (changing structures).

A number of authors wrote of the experiences of these Model C schools – which were sometimes positive and sometimes challenging. Jabu wrote of these difficulties and the fierce focus of his parents. He experienced the structures of prejudice and it was only through the supporting structures and genetic communion of the family that these issues did not derail a good education. The good education positioned Jabu structurally in a different place to leverage further opportunities. He wrote, that: *"Through all of this, we were never allowed to complain about anything at home when it came to schooling – my parents expected us to learn the requisite languages of instruction, participate in extramural activities and always find alternative explanations to incidents we felt were definitely racially motivated. I never understood the militant approach until I was much older. Our parents thoroughly understood the importance of a top-quality education and they (rightfully) believed that putting up with some discomfort for a decade to get it was a small price*

to pay. The reason we were always expected to find alternative explanations of racist incidents was a simple one – our parents didn't want us to get distracted from learning by whatever else would potentially be designed to detract from said learning."

4.9.4. Family

For a number of authors there was a deep appreciation for the values inherited and for the firm foundation that was laid for them by their families. Not all of course. Some authors come from broken and shattered homes. No one selects their own family. A family is living before one arrives as a baby and young child. Family therefore structures one's experience.

A few authors choose to deliberately and *agentially* embody and embrace the values that their families had cultivated. In their defining of what matters and what they value, these authors point to the importance of what is valued in their family of origin. Linking this to the investments made by many family members in their children and grandchildren's education, I believe there is value in connecting this observation with discussions of structure and agency. This finding supports those identity scholars who retain a focus on kin networks. These findings provide a nuanced counter-factual example that can enrich the scholarship on the diminished role of kin networks in late modernity. It seems that kin networks are one of the essential ways that authors see themselves. As Anil wrote of this relationship that, *"The idea of achievement and excelling in everything that I do played strongly towards my achievements during school, both on and off the field. My view of family and its importance in my life has resulted in my leaning on family during the good and bad times."*

Desmond wrote of his mother's influence, *"After my father's death, she never allowed anybody to disturb us during study time and she even, at times, went to the tuck shop herself to buy essentials instead of instructing me to go, just because I was studying. That was a very strong motivation for me to work hard at school."* In turn and in gratitude to his parents, Desmond wrote, *"I was able to build my mother a decent house and made sure I managed to better her life. I was able to pay for my little sister's tertiary education. My mother was right, education was indeed the best if not the only way to alleviate poverty in my family."*

Sachin wrote, *"Our parents always encouraged us and afforded us with the opportunities that they never had. They cultivated confidence in us, placed great emphasis on the importance of hard work and education, and the fact that we alone are responsible for making our careers and lives a success."*

4.9.5. Chance

There were a number of stories that were shaped by chance events or serendipity. These were almost always written around negative events, painful tragedies, and the experience of crime. Structure and chance intersect when authors experienced crime incidents. South Africa has a high crime rate – a structural reality emerging from complex causes associated with high levels of inequality, high levels of youth unemployment, and a historic pattern and exposure to violence. Yet, they also occur in a somewhat random fashion – anyone can become a victim. They are no different then, from illness or a car accident. Crime is therefore a mix of structures and chance.

Cheryl wrote, *“Toward the end of 2002, my dad passed away unexpectedly at the age of 55, leaving the family devastated. Three days after this event, my family experienced an armed robbery. The perpetrators entered our home and held the family hostage as they invaded our privacy. No one was physically injured, however, the emotional scare lingered on. Two weeks following my dad’s death and the robbery, I had to write my Grade 11 final exams. In order to complete the academic year, participation in the exams was compulsory. This was the defining moment when I realised that I had to suppress my emotions and focus on the goal at hand.”* Cheryl wrote of the chance events of crime and the constraints this presented. It was only through fierce resolve and agentic power that goals could be reached.

Dion wrote about how he developed prejudice following a serious experience of crime, *“I was angry. I was also scared, but I hid this under a veil of anger. I had shown weakness in not being able to act. I became numb overnight ... The power of the events that night completely changed my behaviour – an external force had changed the way I perceived people overnight.”* This is an example of how structure and chance interact around a crime incident to shape the attitudes of the author.

4.9.6. God and faith

As highlighted earlier in these findings, religion featured prominently as a theme in the stories written. In this section on agency and structure, I want to comment on God and faith less as a theme and more as a dynamic in the relationship of structure and agency. God and faith were not highly evident in the scholarly conversation around structure and agency. Yet, in a few of the stories, it was only through God or faith that positive consequences emerged. For example, structure in the text portion below was in the form of the economic recession and Caroline’s status as a foreigner. But God and Caroline’s faith helped her overcome these hurdles. Caroline wrote, *“Growing up, I was taught the power of prayer and remaining steadfast in God. This saw me through my qualifying as a Chartered Accountant, an accomplishment, to this day, I attribute to God’s hand on my life. After having lived and worked in South Africa for three years, my employment contract was not renewed*

due to the impact of the recession. My husband was my rock during this extremely dim and low period ... as much as I sought skills, I could not find alternative employment for three years, which was hindered by my foreigner status. I held onto my faith and God showed me He was my provider by giving me short-term contract jobs in Zimbabwe each time our provisions were coming to an end."

Johan was studying an MBA because of the work of God. He wrote, *"I returned to South Africa and continued working at X company for the next two years. I rose in the ranks rather quickly to report directly to the director. Unfortunately, X does not pay well, and my project is based upon making targets through cost-saving initiatives. I wanted to negotiate a percentage share of what I saved the company to increase my income, but was halted when God strangely said 'No, you should not do that, you should negotiate paying for your MBA'. I thought maybe I heard wrong and just left it there while talking to no one. Two weeks later my mother said out of the blue, 'Why don't you ask your company to pay for your MBA?'. This was the conversation I needed. I wrote the entrance exam, was accepted and sent the acceptance letter to my CEO while asking if we could discuss my future here at X. We literally had a meeting for five minutes when he agreed to pay for the two years."*

Gabriel wrote of navigating the ups and downs of life, *"Some days were good, and some were bad, I needed to comfort myself, motivate myself and encourage myself and the Christian values that were instilled in me at a much younger age, which started by being the pillar for my strength. It strengthened my faith in God, and it is the fuel that drives me when I cannot drive myself."*

Joyce grew up in poverty around the edge of orange farms. She was only able to leave the structures of poverty through the role of a 'God himself'. She wrote, *"When I look back, I often think it must have been a Higher Power (God Himself) that took me out of that farm life. My destiny was pre-destined to be different and I am thankful for that."* Joyce wrote later in her story that: *"It was during my years in the mines that I let go of my bottled-up anger. I started a journey of self-discovery, which was largely influenced by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour."*

It was clear from all the above quotations that God was an actor and force in some of the stories. The four initial codes emerging from the scholarship (structure, agentic power, communal agency and chance) provided a useful vocabulary for understanding the dynamics. But the further addition of God-faith as a code for understanding structure and agency dynamics proved useful.

4.9.7. Summary: structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, God and faith

In summary, the intergenerational life-stories analysed were shaped by oppressive historic structures. These structures included those associated with Apartheid, as well as changing democratic structures associated with more freedom and opportunity. The stories included

structures around sexism and discrimination against women. These often operated at the family level in previous generations and were now less present in families, but still present in the workplace (see the earlier section).

Against that broad setting, I highlighted that agency and structure interacted firstly through *place*. Place was one of the primary structures and one that defined elements of the stories that were told. Place, as mentioned, is understood as a blend of spatial realities with subjective and cultural experiences. Places both constrained and enabled action. The authors wrote of their places. They sometimes wrote poetically about them. Places were sometimes mystical ancestral places of tribe and clan. Lives in these stories were shaped by leaving places and going to new places. Leaving a place was one of the more dramatic disruptions in the authors' lives. Places were left behind because of work needs and often in these stories because of class mobility in the context of a changing democratic South Africa.

Secondly, agency and structure also interacted in the way that the authors' families struggled with agentic power and agentic communion to help their children seize emerging structural opportunities in terms of *education*. When these children respond positively to this direction, as many of the authors did, the children were able to seize new emerging structural opportunities associated with the democratic era. Bursaries and Model C schools are the emerging structures that enable children from economically disadvantaged families to use their agentic power to access new opportunities.

Thirdly, *families* in these stories were often enabling structures with deep empowering and structuring value systems. Many authors exercised a blend of agentic power and agentic community in creating their own relationship with this positive family structure. Many chose to embrace substantial portions of their family legacy in debt and gratitude to the barriers broken and new opportunities created by their parents. In doing this, one generation uses its communal agency to create new structural opportunities for the next.

Many authors come from enabling families. Some families and family members are super enabling, even heroic examples of humankind. These authors, in selecting their own path often choose to remain close to their family's values. They choose through what I call family-agency to build consciously on the foundation left by their parents and grandparents. This is an important observation. It suggests that the authors see themselves as interconnected in a long line of influential people going back to their parents and/or grandparents and occasionally even further back. There are potentially important applications for this insight in a business school context. This finding situates the authors in a longer 'story'. The plot of an author's story comes to situate them at a business school not only through their own life-journey, but through a longer journey of

intergenerational communal agency, structural change and agentic power. This embeddedness of individual stories within larger family and community stories are crucial to 'see' in order to properly understand the plots that students are seeking to make complete. Writing in terms of an analogy of a tree, they choose to graft their lives onto the family like solid strong branches embedded to the stable trunk.

But families were also sometimes toxic, painful, broken and shattered structures. Alcoholism. Abuse. Financial mismanagement. Sexism. Betrayal. Murder. Rejection. Psychotic illness. All of these occurred in the family system. These authors often had to find themselves and their own values through agentic power. Using the same analogy of the tree, they need to find new soil in which to grow their own tree. Or they have to graft their branch onto another trunk and a new family. Living as the inheritor of a family legacy was not necessarily easy. Financial demands can constrain individual economic progress. There are those few authors who wish they could live with less family commitment. But they are pulled back into their family system by tragedy and suffering. They have no choice but to help, and it constrains their opportunities and their future.

Fourthly, in terms of patterns that were observed in the relationship between structure and agency it was clear that *chance* plays a role. This was often written about in negative terms. Chance could be tragic! Tiny children die in swimming pools. Pregnant women have miscarriages. Parents and grandparents get ill and die. Criminal incidents and home invasions shatter the confidence of authors, leaving them angry and psychologically scarred. All of these were experienced in these stories.

And fifthly, in all of this was the consistent presence in many of the stories of *God and faith*. This was not adequately covered in the existing deductive themes in the narrative tradition. God and faith could be in the disciplined church-going Christian, or it could be emphasised in the Islamic or Hindi value system in which the author was raised ... and for which the authors are generally grateful. It also occurred through the choice, often in young adulthood, to turn towards God in searching for healing, guidance and help in navigating the pains and uncertainties of life.

4.10. Interesting script forms (deductive)

I thematically grouped and then analysed the text elements of different stories where I could identify and/or label an element of the script presentation or form that stood out as different and interesting in some way. The literature has highlighted the importance of different literary styles in different cultural contexts. I was especially interested in the variety of narrative styles used to introduce the author and the lives being narrated as this was immediately evident. Although on some occasions interesting script forms and ways of positioning stories emerged as the stories unfolded, rather than right at the beginning. This focus on script forms was with the understanding that there is something important not just in *what* authors write but also in *how* they write. The difference between the *whats* and the *hows* was highlighted in the methodology.

In day-to-day interactions in contemporary South Africa, it might be common to introduce oneself, “I am (name). I live (place). I am (profession)”. This approach was not common although an example is Lwazi who used this script style to write, *“My name is Lwazi, a 30 year old black male living in Gauteng. I've been married for two years to W. We're expecting our first child in May this year. I am a chemical engineer by profession and currently manage a power production and demineralisation facility at x company. ”*

The structure of the essay pushed the student authors to start with their ‘roots’ and their history. There were four main ways in which the authors introduced themselves. These were:

- Micro-geographic
- Proximate ancestral
- Far-ancestral
- Royalty-linked

The first two script forms correspond to more orthodox ways of introducing one’s story in a western sense. It will be styles that most international readers of this study will be very familiar with. Far-ancestral and royalty-linked script forms have a particularly interesting connection to the African context – and for this reason I elaborate a little more on them.

4.10.1. Micro-geographic

Authors using this script form might introduce themselves like this, “I was born on X street” or “I was born in X town”.

These authors wrote about their birth and where they grew up in small ordinary geographic terms.

Clive uses this approach when he writes that, *"My Story began in 1984 in Empangeni, northern Kwa-Zulu Natal, where I was born."* The scale of this style of introduction was often more at the village level or the town. For example, Joyce began her story with the village. It is *place* that locates her life-story: *"X village ... is a place I called home for a small period in my early life. I lived with my grandparents and a few of my cousins whose parents were working as nannies for white families ... Our lives mainly centred around orange farms that extended over a 100-km radius from the ... market."*

Dion introduced his story, *"St. Augustine's hospital, it's the x of x 1986 and a heavily pregnant M is about to give birth to a set of twins. My name is Dion ..."*. Abie stated that, *"The fifth product of my parent's unions, I was born in the early hours of Monday, the 22nd of November 1982 at the L General Hospital in M, Zambia, with my father in the twilight stages of submitting his Masters of Education thesis."*

The micro-elements of geography were a way of expressing the origins of the story. I do not elaborate here on this script style. I believe it is a relatively common global and will seem to the international or western reader a 'logical way' of presenting one's background.

4.10.2. Proximate-ancestral

A second way of expressing one's story - and one that will be familiar to non-African and international scholars, was what I labelled the Proximate-ancestral. This is a script style that located the origins of the story of one's family and one's life in the immediate family – especially parents and grandparents.

Mary for example introduced her story by stating, *"My dad x is one of three children, all nine years apart. They grew up in a small town in the Freestate called Zaston. His father (Oupa x) also grew up in this town. Oupa x was one of 12 children and started his working life at the post office at the age of 17. He worked there until the day that he retired"*.

Dorah starts with a definition of her name and links this with her parents' desire for her in response to their earlier lives... *"My name is Dorah, a Zulu name meaning increase, prosperity, abundance; conceivably my parent's desire for me as a response to their earlier lives."*

Lungelo began her story by stating that, *"Originally from the Transkei, South Africa, a well renowned Xhosa agriculturalist, my great-grandfather migrated to the Kingdom of Swaziland as a young man. In Swaziland he married his first wife and together they had children one of which was my grandfather. My grandfather had eight children of which my father was the first-born male child."*

Abie started his story by stating that, *"My name is Abie, aged 34, the fifth born child and second son of (father) and (mother). Both of my parents were seasoned educators in their professional life."*

As with the micro-geographic script style, I do not elaborate here on the Proximate-ancestral except to use it as to contrast with the two styles that now follow. The two formats that follow stand out as interesting for their more African character. The first is the 'Far-ancestral' script that was quite common – present in around a fifth of the stories. The second is 'Royalty-linked' which was less common in explicit statements of royalty connectedness, but which was also implicitly present in the many of the Far-ancestral scripts.

4.10.3. Far-ancestral

This was an interesting script introduction in the context of this study. These authors (around a fifth of the total) began their life-stories with a longer sense of history and of stories of their ancestors. A number of them started with a traditional praise greeting or ancestral backdrop. This was a kind of mythic setting for their story. It was a potential way of organising time, community, mythic heroes, hardship and belonging. It could be interpreted in a number of ways.

Leaning into race as an organising factor, among Black authors there were number of ways that this introduction style was used. Many used an African praise poem format. Others narrated a more linear but still culturally embedded format to telling of ancestral lineage. These are documented below.

Some White authors also introduced their stories with ancestral and national lineages. But these tended to be written in a more objective descriptive form. While Indian authors who reached back in time, most often started with the generation that left India and the arrival in South Africa (often in the mid to late 1800s).

Lerato introduces her story by orienting it in the tradition of her ancestors' people, the Bakgatla. She wrote at the outset that: *"Bakgatla have origins from areas of Botswana when Botswana split into several tribes ... Bangwaketsi, Barolong, Batlhaping, Bahuretse, Bakgatla, etc. Bakgatla, led by legendary Mokgatle, later settled along the Magaliesberg where they further split into four groups. Motsha, the progenitor of Bakgatla ba Motsha, led the first group presently known as Bakgatla ba Motsha, which finally settled in areas of Moretele. The second group under Kau settled in Mmakau as Bakgatla ba Mmakau. The third group settled in Rustenburg under the chief Kgafela as Bakgatla ba Kgafela. The last group settled in Mathibestad as Bakgatla ba Moseitlha, which also settled in Moretele. Moseitlha, Kgafela and Mmakau (all women) are all children of chief Matshego through the*

three respective wives. From Mosetlha, we had Makanye, Mmushi, Setshedi, Malebye, Nchaupe. From Mmakau (the third daughter of Chief Matshego) ..."

This introduction continued. But the quoted text illustrates the powerful detailed links to ancestral family members. It also shows the poetic form. This form of story introduction and ancestral positioning is infrequent but not unusual among Black authors. It occurs six times across the group of 30 Black authors.

Busi wrote another good example of this style using landscape and clan. She wrote, *"My story stems from the mountains and rivers of the Eastern Cape where my maternal roots are from the Mthunzi clan, deep in the desert plains of the karoo and my paternal roots are from the Cethe clan from South Africa's coldest town which is also close to the country's only ski resort"*.

Karabo links her Far-ancestral lineage poetically in a style of praise poetry common across South and Southern Africa. She wrote, *"We are a direct line of Nthethe and Morapeli, likened to milk that sours from a cow's udder before it hits the bucket. We recognise only one Chief ..."*.

With the White students who used this orientation, it was found on only one occasion out of ten stories. In Johan's introduction: *"Stepping back into history, the history of South Africa is unique and colourful with greatness and tragedy alike shaping our country and people to what we are today. Regarded as the father of the whites, Jan van Riebeeck came to South Africa in 1652. Various Europeans followed as settlers searching for a new beginning. According to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1902), the history of settlers is best described as follows: Take a community of Dutchmen of the type of those who defended themselves for 50 years against all the power of Spain at a time when Spain was the greatest power in the world. Intermix with them a strain of those inflexible French Huguenots, who gave up their name and left their country forever at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes ... The bloodline that runs through my veins are, as any white South African, a mixture of various nationalities and races ..."*

It is notable that this was from what appears to be an Afrikaans author rather than an English-speaking White South African. This may be because of the narrative arc of Afrikaner identity in South Africa that is communal and emotionally laden.

When Indian authors go back into the deeper historical context, they understandably tended to start with the generation that left India. Alisha's introduction was typical in this sense. She wrote, *"My historical roots start in the 1900s when both my maternal and paternal set of great-grandfathers travelled to Durban, South Africa from Madras, India. They arrived on a ship called The Trurro. In Durban, they worked as indentured sugar farm labourers for British estate owners. They chose not to*

return to India and migrated to Johannesburg instead, settling in Vrededorp. There they met and married ..."

This style of Far-ancestral poetic introduction represents a somewhat unique African contribution to narrative identity – this will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.10.4. Royalty-linked

Another form of potentially more Afro-centric storytelling was the positioning of the self in the context of a royal lineage. This occurred explicitly in less stories than the Far-ancestral introduction. But it was an implicit feature of a small number of Black author's stories.

Gugu wrote, for example, that she connects her family history to the royal family, *"... My great-grandfather is from the royal family of the S's situated in a village ... near Ladysmith. My social identity is therefore with the Zulu nation ... my grandmother ... She was also from the royal family of the Zulus and aunt to the current King Goodwill Zwelithini Zulu."*

A number of authors more explicitly related their value systems to these previous generations. Caroline wrote similarly, but in a substantively shorter form that: *"I am a great-granddaughter of Kanemangodi, Asiti, Francis, Jessi, Gozo, Mbuya Munengami, Gazimbi and Masviba, who left me a legacy which I proudly uphold."* Caroline's telling is interesting because it affirms an earlier finding around the role of values across generations. This upholding of a legacy confirms findings around the commitments owed to previous generations and the continuity of values and loyalties over time.

Two further examples are Elizabeth and Beauty. Elizabeth stated that, *"My grandfather ... is the fourth direct descendant of Kgosi (King) Sekhukhune the first. King Sekhukhune has been described as a warrior king by President Thabo Mbeki in his poem, 'I am an African' ... "* Beauty wrote, *"Now how do I rewrite my story. I am the great-great grandchild of a chief, the grand child of an immigrant worker, a daughter, a sister, an engineer, a black African female, a friend, a student, an employee and an orphan"*. This in my interpretation is a claim to matter. It is a statement of responsibility and potential influence emerging from greatness and struggle in previous generations.

Lindiwe wrote a strong example of a Royalty-linked script. Her writing ties to identity and values in the present. She makes the following claim at the outset of her story, *"Hard work, faith, intelligence, family and independence as a woman, are core values that shape and influence my life"*. She then stated in the next sentence her ancestral links to place and to royalty when she wrote, *"Four generations ago my great, great grandfather was an elder by the name of Chief C who governed the village of (village name) ..."*. Then she follows this with a pronouncement of certain values, *"We are called the famous ones who sweated. Charumbira 'Ziya' mbi. "*

These are a few of the more prominent examples in the fifty-five essays so it is not possible to comment further or to highlight additional nuances. This is best left for further study.

4.10.5. Summary: interesting script forms (deductive)

The two interesting script elements (for the purposes of this study) of 'far-ancestral' and 'royalty-linked' scripts make claims to traditions outside of the contemporary international context. They both make claims to longer histories than those prescribed in the essay requirements (as instructed by the faculty of the course). In this sense they point to something important in the narrative identities of the authors. It is not yet clear what role these approaches might play in one's identity. But one option is that they are claims to specific group belonging that gives a sense of distinction in a cosmopolitan urban context and the managerial context of a business school. They potentially help the person orient themselves as somewhat unusual and important. It could also point to ways in which different personality types or value-orientations orient the authors in time. For Black students, it may also be a claim to something authentically African as opposed to Western. These issues are discussed later.

4.11. Archetypal storylines (inductive-deductive)

4.11.1. Background

In this crucial final section of the 'findings', I bring the entire analysis together by developing storylines that collect much of what has been summarised. This approach is consistent with narrative inquiry and analysis where the complexity of different stories can often be simplified into a few story elements. During the coding process I was conscious of the literature on how stories can be seen as having common qualities with archetypal story characters and plots. As I examined the stories again and again, I began to see similar patterns across them that could not be isolated into themes or writing styles or some other element that broke up part of the story. I began to seriously consider the essence of large parts of the story as whole.

One storyline initially stood out. This was the storyline consisting of previous generations working and/or educating themselves, often through difficult circumstances, in a way that left a positive intergenerational legacy for the author to take forward. A relatively high number of the stories focused on the difficulties of life and the hardships endured, especially by previous generations. They discuss the hardship but also include how this hardship had set up a platform for the later generations. This can be linked to many of the themes identified earlier. I had inductively coded many of these stories for common elements, which I called, 'burdens carried', 'barriers broken', 'gifts inherited' and 'changes witnessed'. These codes seemed to be linked to this particular story of intergenerational achievement.

I coded text sections as 'burdens carried' when the author referred to the hardships and difficulties of lives lived especially of previous generations. This was often economic but occasionally included psychological burdens. I coded as 'barriers broken' when the stories indicated a shift in the life conditions of a family or individual. This could include an education received or economic circumstances improved – it also included shifts in cultural practices, step changes in shared routines, or the breaking of societal structural barriers in which lives are embedded. I then coded as 'gifts inherited' the appreciative perspective from the subsequent generation who were able to build on the previous generation's efforts and who did not have to struggle in quite the same way. This next generation grew up in a situation in which there is a new positive status quo. I began to see that these three themes of 'burdens carried', 'barriers broken' and 'gifts inherited' could be woven into a single storyline beyond the stand-alone themes.

In the spirit of narrative inquiry, I began to conceptualise a metaphorical symbolic storyline that could capture this. The storyline and story metaphor for intergenerational achievement that began to form was of someone carrying a bag of large heavy stones up a mountain. The stones are the

hardships of life. These could be in any domain, including economic difficulties, health problems, psychological troubles or social/political oppression (although they are most commonly economic in these stories). On the top of the mountain this person uses these stones to build the foundation that will be the beginning of a house for their children and family. Now, the next generation does not have to carry burdens in the same way, since the foundation of the home is built. They can build the house on that foundation. Their life-position is improved (although many new difficulties may still be faced). I called this more holistic coding category ‘archetypal storylines’¹⁵, and the first archetypal storylines I called ‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain’.

‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain’ is a powerful way of understanding how many of these intergenerational life-stories were written. It did not occur in all stories, nor was it always such a neat storyline. But components of it were common. Following this realisation, I read all the stories to explore the way this one unfolded and to find quotations and text portions that illustrated this.

It was clear that some of the other themes and elements summarised earlier could also be written as more integrative archetypal storylines beyond their separate parts. It was evident that as generations struggled and sought to leave their children better off, there were often sweeping socio-political changes taking place in the country or context in which they lived. These were often, in the South African context, intimately connected with the end of Apartheid and the advent of democracy. In the case of authors from the broader Southern African region, these changes were associated with independence and post-liberation political challenges. These were coded under the thematic analysis as ‘changes witnessed’. This theme of ‘changes witnessed’ strongly connects with the themes previously illustrated in ‘encountering a wider world’. The storyline that captured this was around someone, most often the author, growing up in a limited culturally isolated community. Either in their schooling, in university or through work, they leave this isolated ethnocentric place and confront a wider world of diverse people and perspectives. I gave this second archetypal storyline the name, ‘Leaving the village for the city’.

Now, with two storylines clearly identified, I began to explore what other storylines there might be present as ways to tie together the different elements of the authors’ stories. The next storyline that emerged as important was around the more personal difficulties of family life and the substantive pains and problems of family. This included mentally ill parents, alcoholic fathers, difficult divorces and even the terrible impact of a family murder. The archetypal storyline I started to imagine here

¹⁵ I use the term ‘archetypal’ as indicative of something typical. It could also refer to a prototype or common pattern. I have not used the term with reference or connection to Jungian theory. The imagery I develop with the six story lines may or may not be connected with more ancestral human imagery – that is beyond the scope of this work.

was of the author struggling to find solid ground and having to make a life for themselves with little good guidance. I titled this third identified archetypal storyline, 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea'.

I then coded and counted these storylines and developed the table below.

Table 11: Initial coding count for the three initial storylines

Storyline	Count
Building a foundation on the top of the mountain	41
Leaving the village for the city	42
Unstable boat in a stormy sea	18

Following the initial identification of these three storylines, I then revisited all the life-stories and coded them for these storylines to confirm their presence, while also coding inductively for other storylines that I may have missed. I uncovered three further storylines that did not fit neatly into the first three archetypal ones.

The fourth storyline identified was complementary to the one of 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain'... this was the storyline I titled, 'Breaking free from chains'. This archetypal storyline tells the story of someone who comes from poverty or some form of destitution. It is a 'rags to riches' story. In this storyline the authors are often the first in their family history to 'make it'. Growing up in poverty and breaking free from it often occurs through education and personal striving against great odds. There is sometimes childhood and teenage embarrassment in this storyline as the authors become ashamed of their poverty. There was often a sense of not being *enough*. But there was also a growing sense of being able, through sheer commitment and fierce focus, to change one's circumstances. This absence, both material and psychological, operated like a prison. It is from this place that these authors escape. This storyline occurred 22 times across the entire group of stories.

The fifth storyline I then identified as a corollary to the one of 'Leaving the village for the city'... it was around building a life when always mixed-up and cross-cultural – right from the start of one's life. I titled this storyline, 'Living on the border'. This storyline occurred 20 times in the life-stories. Often the author wrote about the role of differences within and across families and cultures in their early lives and upbringing. This included both the barriers to other family members associated with religion, ethnicity or race (6 times) or about the general 'mixed-up-ness' and sense of connection with diversity (9 times) or about both barriers and connection (5 times). This storyline was often

associated with some form of substantive reflection on belonging and finding oneself in a diverse world.

The final sixth storyline that was clear in the second round of this coding process was the role of painful chance events or tragedies in shaping lives and the stories of them. Tragedies included accidental death, illness, loss of work or painful incident from which the impact was hard to recover. I have mentioned these under 'chance' earlier. I named this story, 'Knife to the heart'. This can eventually be a redemption story of hope, but not always. This storyline occurred 20 times.

I debated with myself whether the storyline associated with a range of ordinary challenges and life's ups and downs constituted a storyline. In the end I decided against it. Although it is evident in many stories, it seemed too generic to be labelled as a storyline as such. I decided it was true that all lives consist of ups and downs ... in which case it does not constitute something unique and interesting at this point.

There were also some common elements I did not code as a storyline but rather saw as something that cuts across all of them. I have already highlighted in numerous ways the manner in which religious values and guidance played a strong role in the lives of grandparents, parents and the upbringing of the authors. It occurs in direct substantive ways in 19 of the life-stories. Religion often operated (as described earlier) as a positive guide to values and behaviour in facing the complexity of the world. Many life-stories were anchored in traditional roots of community and custom in a specific group of people. I saw this more as indicative of a 'way of being' and a 'way of beginning'. It seems to indicate a value set and position to the world rather than as a storyline. It shaped how authors saw themselves. There was also the relatively common thread of a happy protected childhood. This occurred for some families in the joys of playing as kids in the garden or in a communally organised street or rural community. It is a telling of a simpler and joyful blessed time. In the end I saw this as a setting rather than a storyline.

I amended the initial three major archetypal storylines to therefore include the three additional ones. Upon final reflection, I was not clear whether these should actually be called storylines or plots in the context of narrative inquiry. I also labelled them as archetypal story complications. In the end I stuck with archetypal storylines because it is a label that was conceptually easy to grasp and work with. The full list of storylines is in the table below:

Table 12: Final coding count for the six final archetypal storylines

Storyline	Count
Leaving the village for the city	42
Building a foundation on the top of the mountain	41
Breaking free from chains	21
Living on the border	20
Knife to the heart	20
Unstable boat in a stormy sea	18

The above storylines are presented in the order according to which appeared more often.

4.11.2. The meta-story: The Seeker and his Six Companions

I decided to create short metaphorical vignettes to illustrate these stories. While this is an unusual way to represent the data and the findings of this study it is consistent with the spirit of narrative inquiry. And then to show with text portions how these storylines were written. As I did so, I also wrote a meta-storyline called: The Seeker and his Six Companions. This meta-storyline is further inspired by narrative inquiry. In presenting the meta-story and the other stories I orient the results more strongly in elements of the narrative tradition. This tradition sees the researcher as the storyteller, and the research report or journal article as a story. I was also reminded of the statement that while psychology is a garden, literary studies are a wilderness (Albright, 1994). There are ways of examining these stories that are orderly, analytical and thematic – like a garden. The meta-story of the Seeker and his Six Companions opens the garden to a little of the wilderness.

The meta-story, ‘The Seeker and his Six Companions’, is told below, followed without too much explanation by the six storylines themselves and a short explanation with text sections from the stories illustrating the storyline elements.

A seeker was walking along a path one early morning. The seeker was searching for something truthful and important, searching for something beautiful that he could not quite describe but that drew him forward.

After a while, the seeker came to a busy bustling city square where they met a young woman. The seeker greeted the young woman and asked, “How did you come to be here?”

“I grew up in that small village across the river. You can see that it is so small. I knew so little then. One day I left my village and crossed the bridge into the city, and I have been here ever since,” she answered. “This is such a wide and complex place with so much to learn but also so many challenges to overcome.”

“Please walk with me a little,” said the seeker. “There is something important in your story and I would like to hear more.” The woman who had left the village to go to the city kindly joined the seeker.

The seeker walked on and soon came across a man on the top of a mountain with a wide view. They greeted each other. And the seeker asked, “How did you come to be here?” The young man told the seeker, “I only have this view because my grandparents and parents overcame so much pain. The times they lived were different from today. Every day they suffered as they carried the stones up from the valley below. Through their hardship they used the stones to build the foundation of a home on the top of this hill. My family and I now live here with this expansive view. We owe it to them.”

“Please will you walk a little with us,” said the seeker. The man on the top of the mountain kindly joined the seeker and the woman. Together they walked on, sharing their life-stories.

The small group next came across a woman working hard in the hot sun to build herself a little house. The seeker watched as the woman worked. He greeted the woman and asked where she learned to build. “I taught myself,” she said wearily and silently looking nervously at the strangers. “It has been a struggle to uplift myself and break free from poverty,” she shared, “but I now have the chance to build a small but important home for myself and hopefully my family.”

“Do you have a moment to take a break and walk a little with us?” the seeker asked the woman. “Yes”, she shared, somewhat cautiously. She then joined them on their journey.

The group walked for a while through the now hot midday sun. They came to the border of the country they were walking through. At the border they found a man living there. The seeker and the group greeted the man: “Do you know the way to cross the border?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied the border-dweller. “I grew up among the people on both sides. I am a man of both worlds. If you allow me, I will show you the way across the border.” The grateful group walked onward with him.

The seeker and the growing, now quite noisy, group walked and talked. As the afternoon passed, they came across a man walking slowly in the same direction to them. He seemed to be wounded in his chest as he held his hands over his heart and there was blood on his shirt. The group offered to help the man walk the road ahead. “There are many of us, and you seem hurt. Can we help you? We can help to carry you on the path you are on,” said the seeker. The wounded man smiled. He joined the group and was grateful for the help.

The now growing group then came to an ocean and by the ocean a sailor was building a boat. The seeker greeted the sailor and asked, “How did you come to be here?”

“I nearly drowned many times in this small boat. You can see it has holes in it and is very unstable. One day a storm turned the boat upside down. I nearly died in the cold water. But through forces in the heavens and through my own strength, I swam to shore. Now I am trying to build a new stronger more stable boat for me to sail the seas.”

“That is such a powerful story,” said the seeker. “Please will you walk a little with us?” The boat-builder kindly joined the group.

The seeker, the village-to-city-traveller, the man-on-the-top-of-the-mountain, the chain-breaking woman, the border-dweller, the wounded-man and the boat-builder walked slowly into the setting sun together. They felt a warm bond even as little was now spoken. They started the day as strangers. Now they feel like much beloved old friends.

4.11.3. Storyline 1: Leaving the village for the city

A young girl is raised in an isolated village by the community. All she knows is this small world. There is a river just beyond the boundaries of the village. She has never crossed the river. Across the river is the city. In the city all kinds of different people gather. They come from different villages to live, to learn and to trade. On her side of the river, everyone is similar. On the other side, everyone is different. Life can be tough in the

village. There are droughts and floods. And families have their painful experiences. But there is a shared culture and shared connection.

As the young girl becomes a young woman, her parents encourage her to leave home and cross the river. She walks for the first time across the bridge and into town. There she mixes with all the people on the other side. This is exciting and also nerve wracking. She meets wonderful people who expand her mind. She also encounters prejudice in herself - and in others. She has to struggle to find her own place in the busy diverse town - learning and growing into a more expansive version of herself.

This story of the village girl is a metaphorical storyline of authors who are raised in a somewhat protected world, among their *own people*. The authors writing these storylines tell of only knowing that early confined stability. It is the story of a sense of initial belonging in a community of origin. By leaving this ethnocentric world, the authors come to see the scale and scope of the world beyond. This tends to happen when they attend a different school or go to university. It also happens when they are working away from home or travelling overseas. The experience is mostly expansive and enriching. But it is also often challenging as they encounter prejudice against themselves (or sometimes in themselves).

This storyline was common in the upbringing and/or adulthood of the stories selected. But earlier generations also experienced it. For example, Dion wrote of his great-grandparents and the caste system: *"My great-grandparents were fixed by the ripe old age of 16, and they had no say in the matter. Indian families were (and some are still today) dominated by the patriarchs. The predominant factor that was discussed when merging two families through marriage was the issue of where each family was situated on the caste system, essentially this was stereotyping within the Indian community. The caste system is a categorisation of people based on your social standing in society."*

Dion then wrote of his family, two generations later, 'leaving the village and crossing the river': *"My brother and I were born in Durban but soon moved to Johannesburg. We lived in the X ... follow the sunset and when you think you've gone too far, carry on driving. We were too young to know it, but South Africa was still segregated by race. We then moved to Lenasia where we started school. The very next year our parents sent us to X school, a predominantly white school. Two years later, we moved to the northern suburbs where we have been living for close on 20 years."*

This leaving of the village and encounter with the wider world often takes place when leaving home and attending university. Sandra wrote, *"I studied at the University of X and, after graduating, started work as an article clerk at X. In university and at the company I made contact with people from different cultures, ethics, ages, races and sexual orientations, and became aware of the sheltered manner in which I was raised. Through the friendships I built, I was able to experience their different perceptions of our world and this really opened up my mind. In this regard, the prejudices*

my lesbian friend experienced, as well as the impact on xenophobia on my best friend, a Ghanaian, had a profound impact in opening my mind to the ugliness in our society."

Richard wrote, *"Living in post-Apartheid South Africa, race will always affect how we see the world. It was during my teenage years that I learnt about the realities of what our country had been through and is still going through. It was difficult for me to relate to the past as I had always been sheltered from the harsh realities of Apartheid. My father was employed in Government service, both before and after 1994, and was one of the last White males employed at the Department of Health in Pietermaritzburg when he retired. Through him I saw some of the effects of BEE with managers with little to no experience being promoted above him. When leaving the church and applying for financial sector work, I also encountered many jobs that I was not eligible for because of my skin colour. I have also seen the other side of the same coin with my wife, who is a coloured woman and is in demand because of the same system that makes my career progress difficult."*

For women, the encounters in the city can be sites of sexism. This is frequently in the workplace. As Judy also wrote later in her story, *"I've never been part of the minority group in terms of culture and religion, however I did get a taste for what it feels like in terms of gender. Our engineering class had less than 20% females and we were sometimes faced with sexist behaviour. To name one incident, one of my design demonstrations didn't go well once and when the lecturer asked me a question that I couldn't answer, his response was that I should stop relying on the guys in the class to do my work!"*

Lerato wrote of her experience of being a woman and going to university to study in a traditionally male-oriented field: *"I was awarded a bursary ... to study Mining Engineering at the University of X in 2006. Being independent helped me to grow and develop a lot as I spent all my life with Batswana in Tswana communities. I had a lot of stereotypes towards people of different tribes, culture and backgrounds ... The school of mines faculty is one of most diverse within the university which helped me to unlearn most of my stereotypes and get to understand different people without being judgmental."*

Judy wrote of the kind of nuanced version of leaving the village for the city. She was always part of a family-focused micro-world of a transformed South Africa. This was her hopeful village. But as South Africa transitioned away from Apartheid, and the first democratic elections took place, she encountered high levels of White fear and racism, and she learned the details of the discrimination in the townships – this was her case of leaving the village for the city. She wrote, *"Shortly before the 1994 elections, a private school opened ... that was exclusively for whites. This divided the white community into two. People stopped greeting each other and we weren't allowed to play with the private school kids. I used to go and visit a farm every Friday after school with a friend, X, whose*

parents then moved her to the private school. The visits became less frequent until they eventually stopped completely ... ‘You know you’re going to sit next to a black kid in class if you stay in that school, right?’, my friend asked me once. In my family I was very sheltered from politics and racism ... After the 1994 elections, the Government schools were opened to all races and a few Xhosa kids from the local township came to our school. I shared a room with one of the black girls, in hostel. We used to lie awake long after lights out and she would tell me about her family ... and some of the horrible things she’d seen in the township. This was the first time I got a glimpse of the gross discrimination of Apartheid.”

The storyline of ‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain and ‘Leaving the village for the city’ are related. It is often because of new economic opportunity, gifted by previous generational hard work, that authors can leave the village and seek broader worlds. In this sense, the ‘leaving’ of the village is not just a metaphor for encountering a more diverse world, but also often of encountering a wealthier world.

There are stories of people literally moving from the village to the township, and from the township to the suburbs. This storyline captures many dimensions of the leaving behind of one’s original home. In doing so, the authors have to navigate new terrain. As Busi wrote, *“In 2007, it was difficult and risky for me as the youngest of three girls coming from an impoverish background in the Eastern Cape to leave home and start a new life in Johannesburg. I believed that Johannesburg had more to offer me with regard to my career aspirations. So, I moved and have accomplished a lot since coming here as I’m now a senior manager at an investment holding company and I also serve as a non-executive director on a few portfolio company boards.”*

And as Lesedi wrote, *“Schooling for me was quite easy and I did very well academically. Some of my defining moments were winning the Science Olympiad in Grade 7 and I later went on to start high school at Hoerskool X. This was a culture shock that really questioned everything that I believed to be true about white people. We were the first English-speaking class at the school in 1997. We had to face the evil that we had been hearing about since we were young, and I actually faced discrimination firsthand. The first two years were hell to say the least, but I had to push on as it was a very good school. The following three years were to be the greatest years of my high school and I made some of the best friendships ever. In these years I got to learn about social cohesion and tolerance, and how patriotic Afrikaners are. I was the only black person in the school.”*

Anil wrote, *“As I exposed myself to the many diverse people within society, I found that the views I held were broken down, and more inclusive, accepting and loving connections were achieved. I have elected not to go into any relationship with pre-conceived ideas of what a person is like or the likely*

outcome of any interaction. I have become more open to experiencing the good and the bad that is within each of us, and I have learnt so much of the society I live in."

4.11.4. Storyline 2: Building a foundation on the top of the mountain

The man and a woman lived in poverty on a stone-filled dusty field at the bottom of a mountain. But every day they would carry giant stones up to the top of the mountain. When the storms came, the stones would be washed back down the mountain. Sometimes thieves would take the stones away. But they would start again and carry the stones back up to the top of the mountain again. They suffered greatly trying to carry those stones up to the top.

The couple passed away And one of their children continued their work by carrying the stones to the top of the mountain. As the couple aged and came to the end of their lives, they arranged the stones into the foundation for a house. After many years of work, they also died. Now their son lives on top of the mountain. He has a beautiful view.

As mentioned, this was one of the two most common archetypal storylines in the authors' stories. As indicated above, it emerged from extensive inductive coding of story sections into themes of 'burdens carried', 'barriers broken' and 'gifts inherited'. It was also very clear in the intergenerational upwards and downward life-paths that were coded.

The stones are a metaphor for the hardships of life. These could be in any domain – most often in the authors' stories these were about economic difficulties, but also included health problems, psychological troubles or social/political oppression. The mountain is a metaphor for life-position improvements. The children live a better life than their parents or grandparents due to the hardships endured, the good choices made and the hard work of those generations. It is a story of indebtedness and obligation to previous generations. It is also a story of changes in socio-economic and political conditions that allowed for the building of a better life. Touching on race, it was common among Black and Indian authors' stories, although it can be found in any intergenerational family story at some point in time. A few examples below illustrate this storyline.

Enoch's story is emblematic of this underlying structure. His grandfather was able to educate his children (including Enoch's father), even though he never had an education himself: *"My grandfather's source of income and livelihood was farming. He was able to put his children through school, and taught them the value of education, something he regretted not getting himself."* He was able to do this despite losing his wife (Enoch's grandmother). Enoch's grandfather carried the rocks that became the foundation of the family house. Enoch's father was able to forge an outstanding legal career right up to the Supreme Court. He was able to build a house on the foundation left by his father – Enoch's grandfather. *"In my biased view, my father is a very humble unassuming man. He began his career as a teacher in the rural town ... As much as he loved teaching, he believed it was never meant to be his only profession and decided to study towards getting a qualification in Law."*

Through distance-learning, he was finally able to attain a Law certificate. He moved from teaching to being a court interpreter with a view to moving towards a larger profession in Law. He was stationed in a town called X where he met my mother. He continued his studies towards an LLB Law degree, which he successfully completed. He was then promoted to the post of Magistrate and moved up the ranks to being a Judge of the High Court and he retired from his career while serving on the Supreme Court Bench.” Enoch’s father was able to achieve all this while also carrying his own burdens after the loss of his mother while he was still young. *“My grandmother passed away while my father was young, and my grandfather remarried a woman who was never good to my father and his sisters.”*

All of this would not have been possible without the changes that were taking place at the same time in the political, social and economic domains. Enoch is a Black Zimbabwean man. Substantial changes in Zimbabwe took place with the coming of Independence in 1980, a few years before Enoch’s birth. These dramatic political changes brought both opportunity and instability as ethnic and racial tensions continued in the newly independent era. Although economic and political conditions were challenging, it would certainly not have been possible for Enoch’s father to achieve what he had prior to independence.

In moving up the hill, Enoch’s connection to the family’s rural roots changed. His rural home (and family) is now a place that is visited. There remains an intimate connection, but there are a set of new relationships and new routines that must be navigated. As Enoch wrote, *“Having cousins who came to live with us from the rural areas meant I was able to appreciate that some of the things I valued, and thought were standard were far from being that. My parents ensured that we went to visit my maternal grandmother every other school holiday and spent at least a weekend with her in the rural areas. This exposed my siblings and me to another side of life that, despite not having all the amenities we were used to, they were still genuinely happy.”*

Other authors embrace similar story elements, where the foundation and the house built are both a metaphor for economic success, and also a metaphor for embedding stability, including psychosocial stability, which can be the foundation and inspiration for the family going forward.

Sandra wrote of her mother’s very painful and difficult upbringing, *“My mother’s childhood stories are of alcoholism, poverty, violence, abandonment and at times homelessness. She first experienced a stable home environment as a teenager when she found religion and quit drinking. Due to her upbringing, my mom set out to break the cycle and create a very stable home for us.”* Sandra’s father was able to build a foundation and a home from the limited but positive inheritance from his father, *“My dad did not share a home with his father, but he was still a very present parent, whom my father felt he could rely on when in need of the odd treat or a new pair of shoes, etc. I believe this ability to*

depend on his father shaped my dad as a parent – he is steadfast, and we depend on him without any hesitation. It has taught me the value of being a reliable person who people can depend on.”

Sometimes foundation and home-building are undertaken cautiously and conservatively in response to experiences of the volatility and instability of life. Richard’s father, for example, grew up literally living in the dog’s kennel, because of the instability caused by his father’s (Richard’s grandfather) drinking. Richard wrote, *“My father has always been extremely cautious with money, having grown up with very little he has been a diligent saver, choosing to live well within his means. He is cautious by nature and spent over 30 years working for the Department of Health in Pietermaritzburg. We had a running joke in the ten years leading up to his retirement – at any point if you asked him ‘how long’, he would give you a countdown to the second of how long he had to go until he retired. I’m not sure he was ever passionate about his work, calling it a paid jail sentence for as long as I can remember.”*

As mentioned, ‘house-building’ on the mountain is a metaphor for economic opportunity and for psycho-social stability. It can also be seen in forms of stable value setting, as Sandra wrote in her story, *“I knew my gran as a very religious lady with a great love for children. Although they were poor, I saw that she would never turn away anyone in need and would not hesitate to share what little she had when called upon to do so, even if it was to her own detriment. This level of uncalculating selflessness is something I aspire to.”*

Sachin wrote of the journey ‘up the hill’ out of poverty in the following way: *“My paternal grandparents were born and raised in Newcastle. I understand that they endured a life predominantly characterised by hardship, which could be attributed to their illiteracy, large family and the nonexistence of material opportunities for Indians at the time ... My grandmother was a homemaker, and my grandfather earned his livelihood from farm labours and the selling of animal hides. This very limited earning capability, coupled with the many children to feed and clothe, meant that they had to live the majority of their lives in a home built of mud and tin. Dad spoke fondly of how fortunate he was by being afforded the opportunity to receive a formal education up to his matriculation.”*

Sachin’s father was able to uplift himself through education from the help of his brother. Sachin wrote how he was able to do this, *“My father spoke especially fondly of one of his brothers who through hard work and the cultivation of strong friendships within the community was able to achieve some success and earn a decent living by securing better employment and later starting his own precast business. This brother served as a pillar of strength and a great form of moral and financial support for my father.”* He wrote later on of his mother, *“Mum told me stories of the difficulties she had to endure to get through school. There were days when she arrived at school with*

her uniform soaking from the rain as she had to travel to school by foot even in inclement weather conditions. She was a determined person and did not allow these impediments to prevent her from educating herself."

Sachin emphasises the importance of what his parents achieved writing: *"Our parents always encouraged us and afforded us with the opportunities that they never had. They cultivated confidence in us, placed great emphasis on the importance of hard work, education and the fact that we alone are responsible for making our careers and lives a success."*

4.11.5. Storyline 3: Breaking free from chains

One night, a woman escaped from a cruel prison where, as a young girl, she had been unfairly locked up for life. She ran and ran until she found herself in a small town where nobody knew her. There she found work. She worked extremely hard and put money away under her bed every day.

After 20 years she was able to buy a plot of land. There she built a house for herself. In many ways her life has dramatically changed for the better. Some nights she dreams of having a family that she raises joyfully. But other nights she has nightmares of returning to the prison from where she came.

This is the storyline of moving out of poverty. It is the storyline of being the first generation to really 'make it' in one's schooling and professional life. It is also a story of giving back to one's family and having to support them at a young age, sometimes through buying them a home or through contributing financially to the home expenses. It is a storyline of discipline and focus and often of strong academic abilities. It is a storyline of wanting to get away from the previous life that one's parents or grandparents lived. It is a story of encountering a wealthy world and having to navigate it without family or friends who can intimately understand the experience. It is somewhat a storyline involving 'making it happen' with one's own abilities and set of values, as well as with the support of others.

I mentioned earlier how Tumelo wrote, *"I came 8th in class that term ... my family was overjoyed, especially X ... I then endeavoured to do even better, just so I could experience that feeling of seeing the pride in X's eyes Mrs and Mr X saw this potential and asked if I would like to go to a Model C school. The year was 1991, and the following year, black kids would be allowed to enter white schools for the first time ... In a few years, I would become the first black prefect at that school."*

Mary wrote, *"The main theme from my story is sink or swim. There was never time to float or just paddle lightly. It has shaped me into a 'go-getter' personality, but it has also contributed to my inability to reflect and spend time on my own. I hate to be alone, and I'm constantly looking for people to tell me I'm good enough, pretty enough, thin enough. I think to a large extent, by doing this course ... My dad and I had to live off my earnings as a waitress and other part-time jobs for a long*

time. In matric, I was fortunate enough to be awarded an x bursary to go and study Chemistry. I was doing very well at school, studying is a great escape mechanism, but had it not been for the bursary, I would not have been able to go and study. Although it helped ease the financial situation to a certain extent, it was not enough, and I still had to juggle some part-time jobs in-between studying full time. It was sink or swim, and I did not have time to think or process other things."

Yusuf wrote, "When I was in Grade 11, the burden of travelling became too heavy and I decided to live in a flat by myself, after just turning 16 years old. Having learnt all the skills to cope on my own from my mother, including cooking and cleaning, the transition was seamless. This allowed me to support my mother by looking after my little sister and, at times, my sickly father while she travelled extensively for her work ... After my 21st birthday, I decided to start work as a Finance Admin Clerk to support myself and reduce all financial burdens on my parents with regard to me. All I required of them was a roof over my head and a warm meal. It was at this point that my life mirrored that of my parents. I now had to wake up at 5am every morning to take a bus to work to be there by 8am."

Anika wrote, "When I completed my degree, I moved to Johannesburg. I saw the move as a means to break free of the life I had lived ... and to experience the world. I had been accepted to the graduate programme at X bank – their graduate programme is considered highly exclusive, so this further broke down some of the barriers I built around myself."

4.11.6. Storyline 4: Living on the border

A boy grows up living on the border between two countries. He spends some days playing with the kids from one country, and other days playing with kids on the other side. Through this he learns to adapt and be flexible depending on the circumstances in which he finds himself. It is sometimes confusing because the kids from one side don't know or like the kids from the other side.

The boy does not fit in. This is really hard. But it is also exciting as he learns about the differences of the world and feels like he can interact freely across the land. As he grows up there is a deep questioning. He is from both countries, but he is also from neither, "Who am I and where do I belong?" he asks himself.

This is the story of growing up with an early sense of difference and diversity. It occurs when the authors grow up in families of duality and multiplicity of identities. These could be around religion, ethnicity or value systems. This is an empowering storyline of knowing deep within how to connect across difference. But it is also a troubling storyline of the challenge of finding who oneself really is. It is evident among Coloured South African stories. It can also be a story of the painful separation of family, the rejection of extended family and of part of one's history and the struggles around that.

Jabu wrote, "I learned over the years to survive in environments where I wasn't a member of the dominant culture – a Zulu boy who has learned all about the customs of the Basotho, the etiquette of

the English and the life philosophies of the Afrikaners. I've learned how to adapt seamlessly in new environments with new people. Although this is great, it also makes me susceptible to fall prey to perceptions and prejudices that I have because of the overconfidence that's bound to come with a colourful upbringing – I believe that I'm quite the expert when it comes to people of other cultures and other races, because not only have I seen their best and worst, I've had to immerse myself in their cultures just to survive."

As Lesley wrote, "Being a 'coloured' person, one's identity is necessarily complex – no less so in the case in my life. My maternal grandfather is the product of a relationship between a white Scottish Jew, who came to South Africa in pursuit of his fortune. He started a sugar cane farm on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal and took a Zulu woman as his common-law wife."

As Fazlyn wrote, "My father being Muslim, and my mother Christian had a polarising effect on my upbringing as I had to practise both faiths. I attended Christian schools from nursery school as these were the only Model C schools at the time allowing children of colour. It was rather confusing for me to be true to either faith and I felt more comfortable with Christianity due to predominantly being raised this way by my grandparents and having attended Christian schools. Overall, my perception about life was to be open minded, due to my upbringing. Everything wasn't always black and white, and I learnt to take everyone's views into account."

Enoch wrote, "Growing up in a humble middle-class family with parents who valued relationships with extended family, our home always had an extended family member staying with us. My parents put a number of my cousins through school and ensured that we never lacked anything ... This diversity from a very early age meant I was able to appreciate that we do not all think alike ... My parents ensured that we went to visit my maternal grandmother every other school holiday and spent at least a weekend with her in the rural areas. This exposed my siblings and me to another side of life – despite not having all the amenities we were used to, we still had people around us who were genuinely happy."

As Lesedi wrote, "Traditionally, X is my rightful surname, but I never had the chance to use it. This heavily affected my identity. I am unable to identify with my ancestors from my grandfather's side, and I later grew up not seeing the importance of tradition and significance of surnames in my life. In a black culture, one's clan name is very important. However, since I do not know who the X are, it has never been a critical aspect of my life and my identity."

4.11.7. Storyline 5: Knife to the heart

A man walks along a beautiful mountain path. Life is good. Suddenly a robber jumps in front of him. The robber threatens the man. In the fight that results, the robber stabs the man in the chest. The robber runs away. But the man is left with a knife wound close to his heart. There is blood and severe pain. The man falls into a coma.

He wakes up a few hours later, close to death. He begins to walk slowly to the nearby town where there is a hospital. Every step is excruciating. He is fortunately met by a group of old friends walking along the path. They help him to the hospital. The man survives but the wounds only partly heal. The man lives his life with a wounded heart and a scarred chest.

This is the story of loss and pain that disrupts a path and leaves the person with scars and wounds.

Bad things happen to good people. Paths are interrupted by extremely challenging events.

Tumelo wrote, for example, *"My life has been marred by challenges and obstacles I've had to overcome. I grew up as 'papa's boy', he was who I called out to when I was hungry, he was my nurturer, protector and hero. The year was 1989 when papa was diagnosed with cancer ... Papa passed away a few months before my 6th birthday. All I remember is the green clothing my mother had to wear for what seemed like an eternity. This was the tradition for a grieving widow to go through a time of mourning. The funeral was held where he was born, fitting that it should be his resting place. For papa's boy, at that age, all was very confusing. Why did he leave me? Why so soon? Was he coming back?"*

Mary wrote, *"My brother was diagnosed with testicular cancer when he was in Grade 12. He was a brilliant rugby player and had been chosen for the Under 19 Springbok team just weeks before. At that stage, the cancer had already started spreading to his lungs and other organs. My mother was living in an old age home, my dad had taken on a second job to cover the additional expenses, and I left varsity for a few months to look after my brother who was undergoing chemotherapy. My life came to a standstill. I spent hours watching my brother with drips in his arm, losing his hair and puking."*

Dion shared some of the pains in the family history, *"Both my sets of grandparents had five children, although my dad lost his brother to a swimming pool incident, this has had a lasting impact on my dad, naturally so, I almost lost my brother, and I couldn't begin to comprehend that."*

Dion also later wrote in the story around a different painful traumatic incident that shaped life after that. *"It was an ordinary night until the alarm rang and rang and rang. I eventually woke up and saw a man with a gun down the passage. He didn't see me, so I picked up my bat and decided to wait for him in my room. Then I realised that if I didn't knock him out or kill him, he'd probably kill me. So, I put the bat down and just waited for him and eventually he came for me. The first thing he asked for*

was my phone to check for dialled numbers. He checked to see if I had phoned the police, and if I had he was going to shoot me. He then dragged me down the hall, at which point he put the gun against my head. I can still feel the metal against my skull. I thought he was going to pull the trigger.”

Sachin wrote, “My son ... was born on X and he is the light of my life. My marriage to his mum was a difficult one, filled with unhappiness, stress, fights and arguments. After numerous failed attempts to fix our marriage, we reached an impasse and I filed for divorce and custody in October 2010. This was a difficult decision because family is paramount to me and this decision meant I was going to be breaking up my family ... It was the most difficult time in my life, and I am certain that had it not been for the support and strength that I drew from my mum and brother at the time, I would have definitely broken down.”

Fazlyn wrote, “I got married with the intent that I didn’t want to repeat the mistakes of my parents’ failed marriage, and that I would be open and honest, be loving, do more than expected, be superwoman and most of all have a plan, so we wouldn’t fail. We did everything right, we planned, we were financially stable, but God’s plan sometimes doesn’t match ours and we suffered a miscarriage in the first year of marriage which threw us both for a loop. We never recovered from this and since then have been more separate than ever.”

Sometimes this storyline emerges from family troubles. Bheki wrote, for example, that “My upbringing was a challenging one because my parents divorced when I was five years old. I still remember vividly the first five years or so that we had a lovely family and normal life as one would expect ... But then having to move out of the house with my mother and my younger brother to where she comes from was the most painful and unforgettable experience. There was not enough space for all of us, and we had to compete with cousins for every available thing on offer ...”

Gabriel lost his mother at a young age and he needed to take on the challenges of being an adult before his time. But he also found spaces to be a child: “Losing my mother at a young age made me more responsible. Without a maid, I had to watch the time whenever I went to play. I had to think about supper, laundry, lunch that I had to prepare. My friends didn’t have to deal with such things, and it made me realise that nothing should be taken for granted in life. When I went to boarding school, it made me feel normal like other kids and I was able to forget about my adult duties at home during the holidays.”

4.11.8. Storyline 6: Unstable boat in a stormy sea

A boy grows up living on a damaged houseboat on the ocean. The boat leaks and is unstable. It rocks wildly with any storm. The boy cannot do anything except spend all his

time balancing the boat. The boat falls over often, and the boy spends his days recovering every time it happens.

One day in a big storm the boat breaks. The boy falls into the cold and scary water. And he is washed away. As he gasps for air, not sure if he will survive, he looks for something to hold onto – he grabs hold of what is left of the boat and manages to swim to the shore. There he begins, slowly and steadily, to build a new boat, mixing new wood and old wood. He spends many years building a boat that will be stable and strong, and in which he can again set sail across the stormy sea.

This is the story of growing up in a family where there are serious problems. Rather than family being a solid and stable foundation, these authors experience an insecure and unstable beginning. Rather than the home being a refuge from *the storms* and challenges of the world, it is the home that is *stormy* and challenging. This could be because a family member has addiction issues, mental illness or is medically ill. It is the story of alcoholism. It is the story of car accidents. It is the story of divorce. It is the story of money being wasted. It is the story of poor choices on the part of parents and grandparents.

It is acknowledged that many family boats are stable shelters from the storm or do not fit neatly into a stable/unstable dichotomy. This is the story of those elements of home life that leave complex wounds through much of later life. It is in *this mess* that some children grow up. Knowing nothing else, they must come to see the elements of insanity. As they become adults and grow into themselves, they must leave *the unstable boat behind*. They may take some of their family with them. But they must also find a new crew and build their own stable boat that will protect them going forward.

Peter's story contains much of this storyline. He wrote, using the metaphor of a tree to describe the family difficulties he encountered: *"My life-story is that of a tree growing in barren soil. It was grafted to a healthy tree in order to grow together into a new bigger tree. While that may sound harsh, my roots, my family, was not a healthy one and it is one that I have tried to distance myself from in order to become the person I want to be. I would describe myself as a 'self-made' person, having taken all the learnings from my family and actively engaged with myself to create a life for myself that I am proud of."*

Peter wrote of his parents' marriage, *"During the course of their eight-year marriage, my mother suffered many abuses, physical, sexual and emotional, all at the hands of my father. During her marriage to the sadist who is my father, she had two children, myself and a younger sister who died in a mysterious cot death, the circumstances around which I will never receive answers."*

Anne wrote of her childhood, *"Our lives had stabilised by the time I got to high school, the excessive leisure days became less frequent, my mother began to enjoy her job, my brother felt less insecure*

and we were in a fairly happy routine. Then, sadly, things began to destabilise again due to my step-mother's erratic behaviour brought on by improperly regulated depression and alcohol abuse. These years were difficult as it was an emotional roller coaster of extreme ups and severe downs; I recall one instance where the police were called in to calm a situation in which my step-mother fired a gun at my father. It was during this time that my grandmother played an integral part behind the scenes in providing my brother and me with at least one stable refuge at her home."

The storyline of unstable family boats is also sometimes present in previous generations. Alisha alluded to some challenges and wrote, *"My grandmothers were best friends, who worked as seamstresses in a clothing factory earning R5/week. They were always involved in community projects together, helping others despite their own dire home situations. They were both widowed at a young age as both my grandfathers died of alcoholism in their early 40s, like most of their friends. My grandfathers exacerbated the poverty situation that my grandmothers and their children found themselves in, burdening them with their addictions, abuse and problems as unproductive members of society."*

Richard described this kind of story. He wrote, *"My father was one of three children and there was never enough space for their family. When he was two years old, his family was living in a one-bedroom, servants' quarters where he slept in the dog kennel with their dog. Even though he grew up in a family with two modest salaries, their money was spent on frequent outings to the bar, often not leaving enough for necessities. My grandmother decided that enough was enough and separated from my grandfather, and for this period my father was sent to live in an orphanage for six months. My grandparents reconciled for their children's sake and remained together until their children were out of home, at which point my grandmother then left my grandfather for good."*

Boats can be rocked, and holes hammered into them accidentally by chance or intentionally by family members. Fanisa wrote that her mother's direction was shaped by prejudice and culture: *"My mother lost her husband when she was in her early 20s, and at that time she only had two kids – my brothers. Losing a husband at an early age should not be the end of your life in my culture (Xitsonga), and should not result in instability for your children. However, she was supposed to get married unofficially to one of her late husband's brothers, and I found out during my early 20s why this never happened – the mother-in-law no longer wanted my mother to be part of her family, citing that my mother came from a poor family. As a result, she moved back to my maternal grandmother with her kids."*

It can also be hard to talk about these rocky unstable family boats. Fanisa mentions more about this later in her story: *"As I grew older, I started not feeling comfortable about who my real father was,*

and I never spoke about it with anyone – not even with my sister. It was not kept a secret as I could tell that older people in my family knew about it. What I found interesting was that both my sister and I were referred to as my mother's 'late' husband's children, although he had passed away before we were born. We both use the same surname as my brothers. I did not like the idea of being a half-sister to my cousins, and of not being the official child. I felt a sense of guilt, and my confidence was negatively affected. The situation was sensitive – you could not just talk about it. When my biological father died, I was at varsity and I tried really hard not to show any pain. I can talk to a stranger about deep secrets, but I struggle to open up to family members and relatives."

Lungelo wrote, "Immediately after my father's death, his siblings started threatening to kill us as well. I recall one night we were all sleeping in my mother's bedroom, and they came and demanded that my mother sacrifice one of us, myself or my brother, failing which we were all going to be killed. They tried several ways to break in, but fortunately they failed each time they tried."

Rocky boats can come about often through divorce. For example, Bheki wrote, "My upbringing was a challenging one because my parents divorced when I was five years old. I still remember vividly the early years where we had a lovely family and normal life as one would expect ... But then having to move out of the house with my mother and my younger brother to where she comes from was the most painful and unforgettable experience. There was not enough space for all of us, and we had to compete with cousins for every available thing on offer"

Sandra wrote that her mother's family was a difficult one, "My mom lost sight of her history as her family was dysfunctional. Her childhood stories are of alcoholism, poverty, violence, abandonment and, at times, homelessness. Her first experience of a stable home environment was as a teenager when her mother found religion and she quit drinking."

4.11.9. A sub-plot in the unstable boat storyline: the grandmother provides stability

There is often someone in the family who provides support. While there are many good men throughout the stories, it would be missing a key element if I were not to write about the women ... and the archetypal grandmother. Some of these women provide a 'life raft' for those who might just need a little extra support or for those drowning in the sea.

Lungelo wrote, for example, of the support provided by grandmothers, "My parents got married while they were both training as teachers in 1986, the year in which I was born. I stayed with my grandmother soon after birth because my mother had to be at college. Christmas at my grandparents' place was always a big celebration with everyone coming in, including the neighbours."

Fanisa wrote, *"It was in my early 20s when I started to analyse my life, as a result of that I found myself under immense pressure. I was at Wits University studying to become a medical doctor. It was the first time that I was separated from my mother and grandmother – my parents. You are probably surprised that I refer to my mother and my maternal grandmother as my parents; I guess this is why I have a story to tell, so allow me to tell you my story!"*

Fanisa then wrote, *"My grandmother moved out of the big family after her husband's death. The house she built is where I was raised, together with my brothers and sisters. My grandmother had to sell traditional beer to make ends meet; she took care of us until she died in 2014 at the age of 105. She was sick for a long time, and we did not want her to die – we spent a lot of money to preserve her life as we felt like we owed her our lives. My mother spent most of her life selling fruit to learners at a school in Soweto to support her kids."*

Sometimes the role of grandmothers is in the gentle stories of love and support in the content of quotidian events. Lindiwe wrote, *"Coming from a close family of six, my cousins and I often refer to each other as brothers and sisters. This is as the result of how our grandmother, a beautiful Swati, disciplined us when our parents would leave us with her so they could 'go party'."*

For Karabo: *"I was born in 1987 at X, and was raised by my grandmother for a year and a half, and then by my brothers who looked after me until 1997 when my mother returned from her secondment in the X district ... We were raised to care for each other and help each other as a family whenever it was necessary. We were also raised to strive for success, to do well at school and always be independent in that one must always be able to take care of oneself. This was also something that my grandmother and father had always reinforced."*

Jabu wrote reflectively on grandparents, *"The first few years of my life followed a similar narrative as so many of my fellow Black South Africans. I was raised by my first mother, affectionately known as gogo (granny). I never quite understood nor appreciated the gravity of why so many of us lived away from our parents, but many years later I now marvel and appreciate even more how with such a tough hand dealt, our families not only made the logistics work, but at no point did we ever need to question how much we were loved. My (maternal) grandmother raised several of us at a time – the children of her children, the children of her nephews and nieces, and even the children of some of her neighbours."*

4.11.10. *Lost and untold stories*

In closing, I am intimately aware that there are dozens of unknown stories that cast a substantive silent shadow across the storylines. As might be expected, with the passing of generations, in many

cases only fragments of past lives remain. Yet, these lives were, as all human lives are, filled with all the scale and enormity of human experience. There was often a sense of pain and loss from the authors as this reality was acknowledged.

Sandra, a Coloured woman, wrote, *"My family history is characterised by many unknowns, mainly due to the attitudes of the elderly that dictated that what children were not told, they did not have the freedom to ask about. Therefore, I believe that the stories of earlier generations have become lost as many of them, especially the emotionally significant ones, were never retold."*

While Antony wrote, *"My grandmother who survived the struggle is 89 years old and was born and raised in Johannesburg. I asked her why our history is so blurred and why we do not know much about her parents and their parents. She explained that the culture during those years was so militarised that it was improper for a child to ask 'Big People' questions. She says in hindsight, she regrets not asking where she came from, and it saddens her that she cannot answer me when I ask her where I come from?"*

An example would also be this strand from Dion's story: *"I never got to really meet my dad's father. By the time my brother and I were old enough to know what was going on he had already had seven strokes which rendered him wheelchair-bound and mute."* I am left wondering, who might his grandfather have been? What might his insights and his experience have illuminated for later generations?

These losses are not inconsequential simply because they are absent. In fact, it is their absence that shapes questions, thoughts and exploration. Lesedi wrote of loss and how this impacts identity, *"The history available about my family roots only goes two generations back. The only piece of information about my great-grandparents is that my father's grandmother was a traditional healer and was well-known in her community ... Unfortunately, she had a family that was not stable, and her children were not raised in the same household as she was. As a result, she was raised by her cousins. My grandfather on the other hand originates from the Vaal area and there is no information about his parents and siblings at all" ...* Because of these dynamics Lesedi wrote later that: *"Traditionally, X is my rightful surname, but I never had the chance to use it. This heavily affected my identity. I am unable to identify with my ancestors from my grandfather's side and I later grew up not seeing the importance of tradition and significance of surnames in my life. In a black culture, one's clan name is very important. However, since I do not know who the X are, it has never been a critical aspect of my life and my identity."*

Sometimes authors chose not to go to the places that are too big and complex and emotional. The intensity of an experience is not elaborated on. Busi wrote, *"My parents divorced when I was about six years old. My mother taught at a Government school in Graaff-Reinet until retirement in 2008. She passed away in 2012 due to a both my sets of a stroke. My father went back to Molteno to continue working as a policeman, which he did until he committed suicide when I was in Standard 1."* This is all that is written about the suicide.

5. Key Findings to Autobiography in the Public Domain

5.1. Identifying books to analyse

I have identified a number of key findings from the thematic and narrative analysis of 55 life-stories of MBA students. In order to increase the potential for broader generalisation beyond the study group, I further analysed five books by South Africans who deliberately set their life-stories against the democratic transition experienced in the country. The intention in doing this was to extend the validity of arguments made from these stories. I was interested in this part of the study in how the findings from these students aligned (or did not align) with autobiographical work in the public domain.

In analysing the books, I focused on what I considered to be the major findings so far. I was firstly interested in potential links with the themes of educational focus, religion and cross-boundary encounters. Secondly, I was interested in how structure and agency interacted in the books and whether the patterns identified in the MBA essays occurred in similar or different ways. Thirdly, I was interested in whether the six major storylines identified in stories of these students could provide a useful way of describing the storylines in the five books.

I initially had a number of books in mind as I undertook this part of the study. But I wanted to ensure that the books sourced were not too subjectively influenced by my own preferences. In order to avoid this, I visited two major branches of the main book retailer in South Africa (*Exclusive Books*) and asked them to suggest books that were autobiographical in nature and focused on South African life-stories through the democratic transition. In addition to the advice from the store, I looked through the shelves covering South African and broader African memoir, biography and autobiography. I bought a number of books that seemed potentially relevant.

I also searched through the first 800 search results on the *Exclusive Books* online platform and searched extensively with multiple word-combinations through Amazon.com. Then I looked through the selection of new memoir and self-storytelling published recently by Jacana Media, one of South Africa's leading publishers of memoir and autobiography.

There were only a few books from authors born in the exact age-range as the authors of the MBA life-stories (people with birth dates between 1982 and 1987). But there were a sufficient number of autobiographical books from *around* the same period of study. I moderately extended the age-range for source material, while attempting to keep the focus on authors whose journey from childhood to adulthood overlapped with the end of Apartheid and the South African democratic transition. This is

a fuzzy domain in the sense that I had to make a somewhat subjective cut-off line by examining both the period covered by the author and what they wrote about in their life-stories.

There were some clear boundaries though. For example, I excluded, for reasons of lying outside of the age-range (on the old side), the memoir of Mark Gevisser, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*. I also excluded Jacob Dlamini's crucial and provocative work *Native Nostalgia* because it was also too far outside the age-range (Dlamini was born in 1972), but also because it focused purposively (in a similar way to Fred Khumalo's *Touch my Blood*) on the Apartheid townships of the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, the important arguments that Dlamini makes were interesting in the context of my study. Firstly, that even under conditions of oppression, people can and do live joyfully. Secondly, that lives are rich and nuanced and cannot be flattened to the simple story of liberation. And thirdly, that the discipline and order of the Apartheid regime can be looked upon fondly as time passes when set against the experienced lawlessness of the new South Africa.

On the younger side of the age range, I excluded Malaika wa Azania's *Memoirs of a Born Free: Reflections on the Rainbow Nation*. She was born in 1991 and, although she wrote as someone living through the transition, the title itself shifted from the focus of this study, which is on the experiences of the transition rather than only on the newly democratic nation. There is a vibrant and extensive new set of writing from a variety of younger authors about their experience in the democratic South Africa. Many of these books focus on specific life issues or subjects. Ideally, I did not want to analyse stories that had an external focus on issues such as sport, the media, music or politics. I wanted books that focused directly on the author's own personal life-journey.

Another book I excluded was Redi Tlhabi's *Endings & Beginnings: A Story of Healing*. This is a powerful inquiry into the life of Mabegzo, a violent gangster with whom she had a very close friendship at the age of 11. Tlhabi's subject is Mabegzo and the Soweto of her childhood. The book does not substantively focus on her own life and its formation. Within the stretched date-range, I similarly excluded sports and business autobiography because of the focus of these books on the career elements of the stories rather than the more intimate personal experience of the author. I also excluded personal accounts of particular tragedies for similar reasons – these books focus on an issue outside of the author rather than the formation of the author themselves.

It was also evident that almost all of the available autobiographical writing on self-formation and South Africa's transition experience has been from a Black African perspective. I could find no self-focused books by White, Coloured or Indian South Africans born in (or close to) the time period of this study (born between 1982-1987). The only work not strictly *Coloured*, but somewhat Black and somewhat Coloured, was Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*.

Because of his Black South African mother and White Swiss-German father, he might be considered Coloured (and was raised as such), but he has had a different racial experience to many Coloured South Africans whose mixed ancestry goes back many generations. It is positive that Black South Africans are so strongly adding their voices. And it makes sense that they would have important contributions to make and are adding important details to the texture of the literary landscape. But it was also limiting. I wondered why these other voices were not speaking in the public domain. This certainly constrained this part of the study – but suggests interesting questions going forward for identify and belonging.

With all this in mind, I managed to identify five autobiographical books published between 2015 and 2018. These books are listed below.

5.1.1. I Ran for My Life: My Story

This book by Kabelo Mabelane and Nechama Brodie, was published in 2015. Mabelane was born around 1977 and he writes about his upbringing in Pimville and Diepkloof in Soweto with his parents and grandparents. He describes his mother, a studious teacher, and his strict, loving and alcoholic father. Mabelane was able, through his parent's financial support and his solid academic results to obtain a bursary to attend private schools where he integrated easily with the mainly White kids and played rugby. His story focuses on his musical success with TKZee and then his solo career. Against the backdrop of his training and running of the Comrades Ultra Marathon, he describes his descent into a hazy violent drug addiction. It is a story of recovery and redemption against the backdrop of a newly integrating nation. But it is also very personal and self-aware.

5.1.2. Always Another Country: A Memoir of Exile and Home

This book is by Sisonke Msimang, published in 2017. Msimang was born in exile in Zambia around 1975 and had to move county often with her working mother and freedom fighter 'guerrilla' father. It is this 'exile' that frames her experience of being intimately South African and, yet far away. She describes her rape at age seven. And then subsequent encounters with violent men. Her story explores being Black in America and then in South Africa. It includes her family's return to South Africa and her sharp painful experience of racism but also of collective responses to it. It raises issues and questions around the Black middle-class experience, loyalty to a nation, ideology, and love across race. This book was considered a 'New York Times Staff Favorite of 2018', one of 'CBC Best International Nonfiction of 2018' and one of the 'Globe 100 Favourite Books of 2018' (Amazon.com, 2019).

5.1.3. *And Then Mama Said: Words that set my life alight*

Written by Tumi Morake, this book was published in 2018. Morake was born around 1981. She is a comedian, actress, writer and radio host. She describes her life-story through her upbringing in Mafikeng (now Mahikeng) and Thaba 'Nchu and her father's work in the underground liberation movement and its impact on her family. She talks of the challenges of her mother's bipolar disorder. She shares the story of her rape as a teenager. She describes her early career, performing in White male bars, culminating in a highly personal and challenging period at *Jacaranda FM* in which she was racially targeted for her comments on the wounds of race in a democratic South Africa.

5.1.4. *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*

This book, by Trevor Noah, was published in 2016. Noah was born in 1984 to a Swiss-German absent father and a Xhosa South African mother. His book is an autobiographical comedy that consists of a number of personal reflections on his childhood. It includes vignettes on being beaten by his mother, multiple church visits, sex across the colour line, living as a child under Apartheid, his parents' unusual relationship and being raised Coloured. It includes humorous and poignant anecdotes around his mother, grandmother, school friends and girlfriends. It is a work of social observation. It is an intergenerational life-story set against the country's transition. And it is a work of small, wonderful moments – black cats in the township, Valentine's Day, the tuck shop. Of the five books I analysed, Noah's is the most widely acknowledged. It was one of *The New York Times's* bestsellers. It was named one of the books of the year by *The New York Times* and National Public Radio. It is rated 97% on Google and 4.8/5 by readers through Barnes and Noble.

5.1.5. *Becoming Him: A Trans Memoir of Triumph*

Published in 2018, this book was written by Landa Mabenge. Born around 1981, he wrote personally about being born with the gender identity of a boy, but in a girl's body. He is forced to leave his home at age 11 and live his childhood life in an abusive home – a life of isolation and shame. He is able to study at the University of Cape Town where he finds his own path to reconcile his female birth-body and who he really is, a Xhosa man. This is a story of attempted suicide, alcoholism, friendship and ultimately self-acceptance. The book is a painful yet uplifting narrative of the complexity of non-binary sexuality and the challenges of living at the frontier of South Africa's evolving understandings of sex and gender. Mabenge was the first South African to have his female-to-male transition surgery paid for by a medical aid.

These five books were written from a wide variety of perspectives on the Black experience. Mabalane is a Kwaito musician from Soweto who attended an elite private school. Msimang was born in Zambia, the daughter of an exiled South African freedom fighter and a Swazi student growing

up in Zambia, Canada, Kenya and the United States. Morake is from the former homeland of Bophuthatswana and moves between more urban and rural settings before her drama studies and career in Johannesburg. Noah is from Soweto and is a well-known, high-profile international comedian and the host of *The Daily Show* in the United States. Mabenge, aware from a young age of his transgender identity, is from the dusty streets of Mthatha and an abusive family in Port Elizabeth, and he studied and lived in Cape Town.

5.2. Common themes

The first part of this analysis of the books focuses on how the major themes of education, religion and cross-boundary encounters were (or were not) illustrated in the books.

5.2.1. Education

I found in the examination of the 55 essays that a fierce devotion to education was strongly evident in the value system of the parents and/or grandparents of many of the authors. 28 of the life-stories mentioned their parent's educational achievements. 30 mentioned the focus on education in their own upbringing.

Morake's book shows some of this focus in her own upbringing, but in contradictory ways. She wrote, for example, *"When I did not want to go to school, she [her mother] would happily write me a letter explaining my absence"* (Morake, 2018, p. 19). This should be contextualised by her mother's diagnosis with manic depression. Morake also wrote, *"I knuckled down and got through matric, which was purely due to the glory of God. I had no adult supervision for the most part, with my mom being in and out of hospital so obtaining those school results and even showing up at school literally came from me"* (Morake, 2018, p. 32). This seems to indicate a lack of fierce focus on education on the part of her mother, yet, at a later stage in the book, she wrote of her deep gratitude during her studies for the sacrifices her single mother had made to get her through school and university.

Mabalane (Mabalane & Brodie, 2015) emphasises the educational focus of parents, especially his mother. She is focused on her own education and in doing this is a role model. His mother was a teacher who was always studying and trying to further herself academically and so was privy to educational opportunities and would take him to private schools on the weekends. It was through this that he received a full bursary to an elite private school. He also mentions being the product of hard disciplined fathering where shoes must be polished.

Msimang (2017) seems to come to education less as a determined sacrifice, and more a naturally occurring implicit process. She always studied at excellent schools with diverse students in Nairobi, Canada and then the United States. There is this sense that it is simply what is done. Her mother was probably a role model with her own educational focus. Education is ever present, yet not in the fierce disciplined way that it is in Mabalane's story. For Msimang, achieving academically just seems to be the way things are done.

Mabenge (2018) wrote of his mother (who is actually his biological aunt), who tries to get him into a private school when he is in Grade 6. However, it is not possible, so he is sent to Port Elizabeth to a Model C school and raised by his abusive biological mother and father. School is not the theme of

this story. Although it is a place where Mabenge can be somewhat free, the story focuses on the violent and abusive home environment and the complexity of being a boy and then a man in a women's body. But even his abusive father believes that "no child of his will ever be denied the opportunity to study" (Mabenge, 2018, p. 80).

In summary then, the books show that the educational focus of parents (in their own lives and the upbringing of their children) is a general pattern in the books. This aligns strongly with the 55 MBA life-stories examined. But the analysis also shows this to be a nuanced focus area. It can be taken for granted and a silent backdrop, like Msimang. Or it can be a fierce focus of parents and part of the story, like Mabalane. In all the cases the authors move from a Black world to a White one in the educational setting. As with the findings of these life-stories, this is often expansive but is also constraining. Mabenge (2018) wrote of stories that *"lie unspoken, the sacrificial lambs of a streamlined education system that opened the gateway for many black students to study at Model-C schools"* (p 65).

5.2.2. Religion

During my research on the life-stories, I found that nearly half mentioned the role of religion in shaping their upbringing. This could of course be written with the inverse framing – that more than half did not mention religion. Through these intergenerational life-stories, I came to see religion as an institutional force representing a set of norms and values that shaped lives in the direction of discipline, self-control, education and achievement. I was interested in whether these patterns were evident in the five books.

Msimang, Mabenge and Morake's books show little evidence for this finding. When religion is mentioned by Msimang, it is only to highlight that she was looked down on for not going to church. She imagines people commenting on the religiously pious critics: *"It was not clear what the organising principle was that kept their household together: it was not God, nor was it family or tradition"* (Msimang, 2017, p. 13). For Msimang, it was not religion that guided achievement and moral choices, it was politics and Black-African liberation ideology. There is no mention of religion or Christianity or God in her own life – religion does not appear to be an important element.

For Mabenge, religion is not a constructive and helpful institution. It is not a major part of his story. But the church denies his core identity. It is more through his own efforts and the opening up of new educational opportunities in the democratic country that his success is forged.

For Morake, rather than religion guiding her actions, it is a more personal God that she occasionally turns to. Her mother appears as a rebellious humorous sexually free non-church-attending woman

(again needs to be contextualised by manic depression diagnosis). Morake mentions her own brief experiences of marriage counselling in the Catholic tradition. God is only very occasionally present in her life, but she wrote of God coming first (on one occasion) and of her conversations with God (on another occasion) to *“tell Him that He had got me started on this journey and would need to keep that torch on for me, because the darkness was shaking me up a little”*. She locates some of her value system in her eldest aunt who *“was the black sheep of the family, a tiny, no-nonsense woman who ran away from home and had zero fucks to give. She was the smoker, the loudmouth”* (Morake, 2018, p. 45). But the above statement is made more nuanced by her explicit attribution of her values to her aunts who were controversial, prayerful, conservative and loving. Religion appears to be a contradictory and nuanced force that is as much a negative as a positive.

Mabalane’s story is somewhat aligned with the finding of the importance of religion, but more in his own adult life. He wrote of his mother’s Methodist affiliation but wrote, *“we weren’t what you would call a church going family”* (Mabalane, 2015, p. 109). His grandmother undertook a transformation away from her previous life and ended up dedicated to reading the Bible. Mabalane wrote of her inner transformation when she cut her cigarettes in half to chop off the snake’s head! Later Mabalane, as an adult with a drug addiction, is brought back to God through his own troubles and pain. It is a redemptive humbling experience in a very influential evangelical mega church (Rhema Bible Church). He wrote, *“It’s not about getting better first and then coming to God. It’s about coming to God as you are, and He makes you better ... From a spiritual perspective, I really believe I got delivered from alcohol, from addiction, from smoking”* (Mabalane & Brodie, 2015, p. 112).

Noah’s book is a strong solid example of the role of religion in many of the students’ stories. As a child he attends three church services on Sunday. The first book he learns to read is the Bible. He states that his whole family was religious, and his mother was strongly Christian. One of his main opening stories in the book concerns the strong role of Jesus and Satan in his formative upbringing.

In summary, religion can be a common institutional force driving success and discipline in life-stories (as evidenced by the 55 stories analysed) and by the role of religion in Noah’s upbringing. But the books show that other non-religious value systems can also carry people into education and discipline and achievement. Religion can structure the focus and love of a mother, as in Noah’s book. It can redeem, as in the case of Mabalane. It can be contradictory, as in the case of Morake. But it can also constrain, deny and limit, as in the case of Mabenge. Or it can be absent, as in the case of Msimang. Religion matters. But it is not a simple positive force in the books.

5.2.3. Cross-boundary encounters

I identified both positive and negative encounters across difference in the life-stories. I coded positive encounters across difference and diversity as *expansive*. I coded negative encounters of difference and diversity as *brutal* (when they involved structural constraint and violence) and *challenging* (when they involved interpersonal and psychological prejudice). The key findings from the essays were that stories of *brutal* structural encounters across difference are strongly evident in previous generations but had somewhat declined in more recent times. I also found that the authors themselves encountered difference in both positive *expansive* and negative *challenging* ways. I made claims then for nuance in understanding cross-difference encounters in the South African democratic era and in the broader lives of the authors. This was across the categories of race, gender, class and culture. I was interested in whether this reflected the reality of the authors in the books.

Mabalane has largely positive *expansive* encounters across race and class lines as he moves from school to school and begins to mix with White children from wealthier backgrounds. While his parents experienced the *brutal* past of Apartheid, his encounters across race and class were occasionally *challenging*, but with many more *expansive* moments. His time at high school was largely positive with cross-racial teacher encounters and friendships formed. He also wrote of an *expansive* student exchange in the United States. He further wrote of very positive professional, athletic and church encounters across race. Few examples of racism are described and when they occur, he deals with them easily and politely as opportunities to educate the ignorant.

Two of the three women whose books I examined were raped in their childhood and write about it openly. One when she was seven. One when she was 15. Such *brutal* encounters between men and women were not written about in the lives of the student authors. I suggest this is not because it has not happened to the students, but more likely because of self-censorship. An MBA class exercise is not seen as a safe enough environment to share something like this. This is a stark reminder that women living in contemporary South Africa do not only experience the more *challenging* dimensions of gender-prejudice but continue to be at risk of *brutal* violent sexual assault by men. The experience of rape in the books sharpens the key finding in the essays that for many women, being a woman in society remains highly *challenging* even as young girls are increasingly raised by their fathers and mothers to believe they can be anything.

Msimang wrote of many incidents of cross-cultural *challenge*. These occur at the interface of nationality (exiled South African versus Zambian), class (Middle class versus Underclass), political ideology (Reformist versus Revolutionary) and race (Black versus White). Her book is largely an account of these *challenging* experiences. While difference is possibly liberating for Msimang, it is the tensions and fractures across difference that she generally wrote about. She wrote for example,

"If I were given five minutes with my younger self – that little girl who cried every time it was time to leave for another country – I would hold her tight and not say a word. I would just be still and have her feel my beating heart, a thud to echo her own. I would do this in the hopes that the solidarity of who I am today may serve as some sort of reassurance" (Msimang, 2017, p. 5). She wrote of a number of encounters of *challenging* racism, including being called an 'African monkey' and witnessing a dignified African man having a glass of water thrown on him. This is across her childhood and in her return to South Africa. She emerges from these experiences understandably angry, describing how she differs from her peers and parents in her more militant revolutionary approach to race relations. As she wrote about her time at university in the US, *"I decide that neither Africans, nor the 'good whites', are worth spending time with. The Africans are just trying to get their degrees and find jobs so they can hold up the hopes and dreams of their villages or their parents. They are busy with their toothy grins, beaming for white Americans who want to talk about their summers spent volunteering in Bujumbura"* (Msimang, 2017, p. 156). This form of hard-edged racial separatism was later challenged by the *expansive* marriage to her beloved white Australian husband.

Morake experiences boundaries as *brutal*, *challenging* and *expansive*. She is raped as a teenager. She moves between the rural world of Thaba 'Nchu and the more urban realities of Mafikeng and encounters the *challenges* and *expansive* differences between these worlds. She witnesses a *brutal* murderous rampage by the AWB in Bophuthatswana. But many years later she manages to describe the *expansive* diversity of her peer group, *"Our wedding was a picture of the wealth of friends Mpho and I had made in our seven-year relationship: Muslim, Jewish, Christian, white, black, American, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Liberian, Zambian. It probably looked like a meeting of the UN"* (Morake, 2018, p. 75). It is this *expansive* experience, and even the *expansive* experience of cutting her teeth in comedy at a White male bar that leads her to take on the highly *challenging* experience of co-hosting the main morning radio show on Jacaranda FM. She wrote, *"Jacaranda and I were a beautiful love story waiting to happen. Pity it ended in a Greek tragedy"* (Morake, 2018, p. 131). Morake wrote of her unwillingness to compromise on the uncomfortable truth that resulted in a vicious racial backlash to her views leading to her painful departure from the morning show and the radio station.

Noah's encounters across difference are a strong focus of his book. If I were to give the book one theme, this would be it – *difference* and how it plays out in painful and humorous ways across his upbringing. His mother is from the *brutal* area of Apartheid. His upbringing is *challenging* and *expansive*. He wrote, *"As a kid I understood that people were different colours, but in my head white and black and brown were types of chocolate. Dad was white chocolate, mom was the dark chocolate, and I was the milk chocolate. But we were all just chocolate"* (Noah, 2016, p. 65). He was seen as White in some contexts and treated favourably but did not realise this was a race thing. He

first discovers race in high school at break time. He found this ‘insane’ as he began to see the ways that groups moved in ‘colour patterns’. He moves from the ‘A’ class to the ‘B’ class in order to be with his people, the Black kids, writing that *“I’d rather be held back with people I liked than move ahead with people I didn’t know”* (Noah, 2016, p. 72). His mother moved to neighbourhoods where they would fit in more or live in better suburbs. He became the only Black kid around. This is often exhilarating as Noah finds his way through the different race and ethnic groups. And he navigates the highly unequal world caught between his friends from the wrong side of the tracks and his eventual life path on the other. This is Noah’s story – of growing up in this diverse hard and unfair world but eventually ending up on the good side of the unfair world around him.

Noah ends his book with the story of violence against his mother. His stepfather abused his mother. He was nine years old when *“... out of nowhere, like a clap of thunder when there were no clouds, crack! He smacked her across the face. She ricocheted off the wall. And collapsed like a ton of bricks”* (Noah, 2016, p. 303). There is no justice at the police station. There is further violence. Noah himself is beaten too. It is a painful but by now familiar tale – ending with the shooting of his mother by her husband. She jumps in front of her family taking a bullet in the buttocks. He then shoots her in the head but the gun misfires and locks up. And although he tries multiple times to kill her, Noah’s mother is able to run away. He gets in one more shot, which hits her in the back of the head. Somehow, she survives.

For Mabenge, his experience of gender and the non-binary prejudice in the society is *brutal*. The movement from one family to another and from Mthatha to Port Elizabeth is also *brutal* as he is abused by what he calls ‘The Father’ and ‘The Mother’. Race is positively and *expansively* experienced through school, university and then especially the psychological support needed to heal his wounds, and in the medical support for his transition. He mentions no negative experience of being Black. It is to White people that he turns for *expansive* acceptance and guidance.

In summary, the analysis of the five books reveals further evidence for both expansive and challenging encounters across race. It reveals nuanced issues across nationality and ethnicity. It reveals that gender relations remain brutally violent for women. Women, while oft-times protected by their mothers and fathers in the home, face the real risk of physical sexual violence.

The findings from the essays are strengthened and made even more salient by the examination of cross-boundary encounters in the five books.

5.3. Agency and structure

Drawing on a number of prior theoretical concepts and my own inductive codes, I coded the life-stories for: structure, chance, agentic power, communal agency, and God and faith. In the findings from the 55 students in the group, I showed how structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, and God and faith interact. I found that lives are forged in national (Apartheid and democracy) and global structures. I also showed how norms and cultures structure lives and especially sexism and gender liberation and prejudice (often through family and community). I showed that family-level gender prejudice is declining (in the way girls are raised), but that it remains strong outside the home. This is evidenced by the frequency of documented incidents. I showed the critical role of place and geography in structuring what is possible and the special importance of changing places and geographies, and the expansive and challenging realities that this opens up.

In the life-stories I showed how families can act powerfully in 'family agency' (my own code but building on McAdams (2001), especially in opening educational possibilities. I found that one generation of a family can use its communal agency (sometimes heroically and sometimes tragically) to create new structural opportunities and constraints for the next. In short, families matter. Bursaries and Model-C school opportunities are structural. They enable children from economically disadvantaged families to access new opportunities when their families support this pursuit with communal agency. Some authors explicitly orient themselves almost backwards in time, through this communal connection to stay close to their family values (like deliberately embedding branches on a tree). I also show that while families can be positive agentic actors, they can also be destructive ones (through rape, abuse, financial mismanagement, sexism, murder, psychotic illness, etc.). In these cases, authors must leave the family structure and must use their own individual agentic power to build their own autonomy, forge a new life (by finding new soil in which to grow) or by continuously finding ways to relate more healthily to their family of origin.

In the 55 lives examined, I showed how chance events occur and these are often told as negative tragic experiences. I found that people die in accidents and from rapid illness and that these shape life-paths. There are violent crime scars and wounds. I also showed how religion, faith and God act positively to heal and help to navigate the world. I now discuss how these themes occur in the five books.

I showed in the life-stories that gender remains a powerful structuring force in lives. This is even more starkly evident in the books through the sexual violence that personally scarred the two women authors and the transgender man (and not the cis-gender men). But an important nuance that emerges in the books is the loosening of gender as a psycho-cultural constraint on choice and behaviour. Life for women remains dangerous, but they face career choices as widely open as men.

Morake can enter the male world of comedy to perform and succeed. Even for Mabenge (whose family is a depressing betrayal of what a family should be) in the end, his 92-year-old grandmother comes to love and accept him as a transgender man and his medical aid agrees to pay for his surgery.

I argued in the discussion of the 55 essays that place and location are a nexus of forces that structure stories. The village is different to the town. The town is different from the city. One country is different from another. Each of these places structure on what stories can and cannot be told. Places provide opportunities and constraints. I also showed in the examination of the stories that people change places, and this opens up new chapters in the life-story. Changing places and geographies markedly disrupts and reorients intergenerational paths. This is true across the books too. Morake moves from Mafikeng to Thaba 'Nchu and back again before going to Johannesburg and Wits. Msimang travels from Zambia to Kenya to Canada to South Africa to Mozambique and then to Australia. Mabalane goes from Pimville to Diepkloof and then to St Stithians in Johannesburg. Mabenge moves from Mthata to Port Elizabeth and then to the University of Cape Town. Noah moves from Soweto to Eden Park to Highlands North. Each of these movements dramatically sets the scene for what happens in their stories.

The examination of the five books aligns with the life-stories in the ways that family-based agency can operate. As in the life-stories it manifests in positive, negative and nuanced ways. Msimang's story illustrates the ways families can lift people up. Morake, Mabalane and Noah's stories show the nuanced ways in which families liberate and constrain. As a negative example of choice and agency, Mabenge's family situation provides the starkest example of severe constraint. This finding in the books strongly affirms the finding in the 55 life-journeys. Families can be theorised as *agentic*. They make choices together. Further implications of this are illustrated in more depth in the following section on common integrative storylines.

In the books, as in the 55 life-stories, structure and chance events shape outcomes. Mabenge finds a gifted generous therapist. Msimang and Morake are raped – the combination of a structural violence against women and of being in the wrong place at a chance time. Morake loses her stepfather in a car accident. Noah's mother somehow survives a shooting to the head. Faith and God play their role in some of the stories too. Mabalane finds recovery from addiction through Jesus. Morake believes it is in God's plan for her to find her way through the challenges of life. Noah's mother prays as a gun is aimed at her head. "She looked at him straight up the barrel of the gun. Then she started to pray – and that's when the gun misfired" (Noah, 2016, p. 338). Somehow a 9mm handgun, that cannot normally misfire, does so. And Noah's mother survives.

While God and faith are present in three of the stories as shapers of the world, they are also absent in two. These are not major elements of Mabenge or Msimang's stories, for example. Neither finds redemption nor hope through faith. Mabenge turns to science and surgery and psychology and friendship and self-acceptance. These are the factors that help in his recovery.

In summary, the five books affirm the findings from the essays in showing how structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, and God and faith provide a useful vocabulary for illustrating lives over time. Gender is even more starkly illustrated as a violent structural reality for women and gender non-binary people. Families have agency to sharply influence the world and this often occurs through mothers. These family actions materially (and maternally) shape outcomes for later generations.

I now turn to the third and final element I want to focus on in developing the findings from the life-stories through an analysis of the five books – archetypal storylines.

5.4. Common archetypal storylines

5.4.1. Presence and absence of the archetypal storylines

Thirdly and finally, I analysed the five books to examine how the six major archetypal storylines identified in the 55 students' life-stories were (or were not) evident in the five books. The common storylines identified in the life-stories were: 'Leaving the village for the city' (42/55), 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' (41/55), 'Breaking free from chains' (21/55), 'Living on the border' (20/55), 'Knife to the heart' (20/55) and 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea' (18/55).

Table 13: The six storylines present in the five books

(Note that a blank square is indicative of that storyline not being present in a major way)

Storyline	Mabelane (I Ran for my Life)	Msimang (Always Another Country)	Morake (And Then Mama Said ...)	Noah (Born a Crime)	Mabenge (Becoming Him)
Leaving the village for the city	Partly evident		Partly evident		Strongly evident
Building a foundation on the top of the mountain	Strongly evident	Partly evident	Partly evident	Strongly evident	
Breaking free from chains					Partly evident
Living on the border	Strongly evident	Strongly evident	Partly evident	Strongly evident	Partly evident
Knife to the heart		Strongly evident	Strongly evident		Strongly evident
Unstable boat in a stormy sea			Partly evident	Partly evident	Strongly evident

The main patterns in the table above are that:

- 'Living on the border' occurred in all five stories, either partly or strongly.
- 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' is a strong storyline in the books (4/5 books).
- 'Breaking free from chains' (the rags to riches storyline) hardly appears in the books.
- Mbenge's story and Morake's story have the largest variety of storylines. But Mbenge's story has stronger evidence for them...
- The other storylines are all present in some way in the books.

It is also interesting that the books include multiple-overlapping archetypal storylines. I discuss some of these findings below.

5.4.2. *Living on the border*

‘Living on the border’ is the story of growing up with an early sense of difference and diversity. It occurs when the authors grow up in families of duality or of a multiplicity of identities in their schooling or community. These could be around race, religion, ethnicity or value systems. This is an empowering storyline of knowing deep within how to connect across difference. But it is also a troubling storyline of the challenge of finding who oneself is. I highlighted earlier how it can also be a story of the painful separation of family, the rejection of extended family and of part of one’s history and the struggles around that.

‘Living on the border’ is a common storyline across all these books. Noah’s borderland is extensive. He grows up attending three church services on Sunday – the Black township Methodist church, the mixed megachurch and the White rich church. He wrote, *“I could not walk with my mother, either; a light-skinned child with a black woman would raise too many questions”* (Noah, 2016, p. 33). Noah titles Chapter 4 of his book ‘Chameleon’ and documents his struggles fitting in. He wrote of his private school experience that *“In my class we had all kinds of kids. Black kids, White kids, Indian kids, coloured kids ... we all sat at the same table ... There was no racial separation. Every clique was racially mixed”* (p 68). It was not always easy being in-between groups. He wrote soon after of his move to a different school that *“The white kids I had met that morning went in one direction, the black kids in another direction, and I was left standing in the middle, totally confused”* (p 69). Noah’s book is about the ‘borderland’ and how he lived its crazy ways before stumbling, partly by good fortune and partly through his race and economic background, onto the better side of tracks.

Msimang is always in ‘Another Country’ and lives literally criss-crossing borders. Mabelane is living in Soweto and at schools in the suburbs. Both Msimang and Mabelane wrote of the need to blend in. Mabenge was rejected and later embraced for who he is. He was deeply himself among his friends in Cape Town, yet wrote, *“But it is along the modest dusty streets of my home in Ncambedlana, Mthata, that I truly found myself”* (Mabenge, 2018, p. 198). Morake is between the rural and urban and then later between black spaces and white. It is this borderland identity that gives her the confidence (maybe overconfidence) to walk into the racial challenges of Jacaranda FM.

5.4.3. *Building a foundation on the top of the mountain*

After reading the books, I am even more strongly convinced that the story of ‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain’ is something important to consider when understanding the life-

journeys of this group. This is also a gendered reality. Mothers matter. Grandmothers matter. They create intergenerational opportunity (and gratitude) through their sacrifice. Msimang tributes her book 'For Mummy' while also writing in the acknowledgments of her book, *"A special thank you to Mummy and Daddy. Your contribution to my life and my values is immeasurable. I could not do justice here and perhaps I will have to write another book about your lives and your wonderful journey"* (Msimang, 2017, p. 311).

Noah grew up in a world run by women. He begins his book with stories of him and his mother. She tries to discipline him. She takes him to church. She throws him out of a moving taxi. The book is a tribute *"For my mother. My first fan. Thank you for making me a man"* (Noah, 2016, no page number). He wrote, *"My mom's attitude was 'I chose you, kid. I brought you into this world, and I'm going to give you everything I never had'."* (Noah, 2016, p. 85). The closing words of his book are *"And, finally, for bringing me into this world and making me the man I am today, I owe the greatest debt, a debt I can never repay, to my mother"* (Noah, 2016, p. 342).

Morake starts her book with the Setswana statement, *"Ken ale kamore ko ga Mma"*, which translates as 'I have a room at my mother's house'. *"She would tell me that to drill it into my head you should always invest in your family, and home above all else"* (Morake, 2018, p. 1). Morake wrote during a troubled time at university, *"I also owed Mama a victory. She had made herself sick trying to get me to where I was, stressing over getting me through school and this far at university, so I was not about to be anything less than what she had imagined for me: successful. I also had a younger sister who needed support, and the least I could do for Mama was lighten the load"* (Morake, 2018, p. 45). Morake includes her mother in the title of her book. The whole story seems to be a tribute to her. She wrote, *"In my speech I took a moment to thank her for getting me through the rough and tumble of high school, and especially for doing it single handedly ... I pointed her out, and the crowd turned to look at her. Mama's time in the spotlight. That was one of the proudest moments of my life, and I shared it with her. I do not think I had ever told her how proud I was to have her as a Mom until that day"* (Morake, 2018, p. 33).

The presence of heroic parents and grandparents and even their approving or disapproving gaze is present in this storyline. And its importance is confirmed through the five books. An additional nuance is further emphasised, the role of mothers in the sacrifices needed to allow the authors to pursue the opportunities they can now embrace.

5.4.4. Breaking free from chains and other storylines

'Breaking free from chains', the rags to riches storyline, does not appear in the books. Although some of the authors have made more money and achieved more career wise than their parents, they

do not write their stories in this way. They also come from families of some economic means. Mabelane's parents can afford private education and live in one of the better neighbourhoods of Soweto. Msimang herself struggles with her class privilege. Even though 'The Father' in Mabenge's story is cruel, he has the means to pay for Mabenge's studies at the University of Cape Town. Morake comes from more limited means and struggles to pay her way through university, but her financial success is not the focus of her story. Perhaps to write a book and reflect on one's life, there is already a sense of comfort. For the authors moving from rags to riches – there is a solo focus on building the platform for later generations to write books. This is inconclusive.

5.4.5. Other archetypal stories

The other storylines also show up in the books. Morake's story is the most richly layered in terms of the storylines I previously identified. Morake moves to Johannesburg to study, and in this poetic sense is 'leaving the village for the city'. Mabenge grows up in the most challenging family circumstances. His family can be seen as an 'unstable boat in a stormy sea'. Msimang has experienced 'a knife to the heart' in the way that she was a victim of sexual violence.

I need to add in closing that one storyline that comes through in the five books that I did not identify (erroneously or correctly) in the analysis of the life-stories of the students, is the storyline of self-discovery and of coming to know, define and accept oneself through intra-personal struggle. This is a kind of 'internal hero's journey'. This is certainly the storyline for Mabenge and Mabelane who both struggle with escape and addiction and find their way to 12-step programmes and long-distance running as part of their recovery. This potential narrative arc is partly covered in the recovery from the storylines of 'Knife to the heart' and 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea', as well as in the self-exploration needed when 'Living on the border'. But perhaps it deserves its own storyline. This is worth considering in further research.

5.5. Conclusion: extending the arguments through analysing the five books

I have linked five autobiographical books to the key findings from the thematic and narrative analysis of the 55 life-stories of MBA students. This was done in order to generalise beyond the study group.

I was firstly interested in confirming and making more nuanced key findings, including the educational focus of families, religiosity and cross-boundary encounters. The educational family-oriented focus of the five authors confirms this element in the stories. The role of religion is somewhat softened and made more complex. The analysis of the five books revealed further evidence for both expansive and challenging encounters across race. It revealed that gender relations remain brutally violent.

Secondly, I was interested in how structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, and God and faith interacted in the books and whether the patterns identified in the MBA life-stories occurred in similar ways. The five books affirm the findings from the essays in showing how structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, and God and faith provide a useful vocabulary for illustrating lives over time. Gender is even more starkly illustrated as a violent structural reality for women and gender non-binary people. Families have agency to sharply influence the world, and this often occurs through mothers. These family actions materially (and maternally) shape outcomes for later generations.

Thirdly, I was interested in whether the six major storylines identified in the essays could provide a useful way of describing the strands of the storylines in the five books. I believe I have shown they are useful ways of understanding Southern African stories. 'Living on the border' and 'Building a foundation on top of the mountain' were common.

I have shown that the intergenerational life-stories of the MBA students are more than an idiosyncratic presentation of selves in the context of a unique context. These stories have substantive nuanced alignment with books by publicly engaged authors.

6. Discussion: Key empirical findings

This study examined key elements of 55 life-stories of MBA students in a South African business school. The analysis included: shared themes, agency and structure dynamics, upward and downward intergenerational paths, unusual script elements, and archetypal storylines. Narrative analysis provided a set of useful codes and approaches for examining selves in context.

A few major elements of these findings were then compared with five autobiographical books by writers from a similar age cohort. In examining the findings through an exploration of the five books, I was especially interested in confirming and making more nuanced the thematic findings around the educational focus of families, religiosity and cross-boundary encounters. In the books I was also interested in how structure, agentic power, communal agency, chance, and God and faith interacted, and whether the patterns identified in the MBA life-stories occurred in similar ways. I was interested in whether the six major storylines identified in the essays could provide a useful way of describing the strands of the storylines in the five books. This comparison between the books and the student's life-stories brought important nuance to the initial findings. It made more salient certain findings while providing balanced alternative perspectives too. Overall, the analysis of the books extends the potential relevance of this study beyond the initial group.

For those interested in history, memory and autobiography, the findings themselves are worth reading. But what is the merit of this study beyond interesting anecdotes and summary themes? Stories of the past have implications for the future. As Bruner (1990) argued "When somebody says, as if summing up a childhood, 'I was a pretty rebellious kind', it can usually be taken as a prophecy as much as a summary" (p. 121).

This study filled three gaps in the literature. Firstly, it aimed to contribute to the scholarship of self and society, under late modern condition. Little scholarship has considered an African or South African perspective in these debates. By bringing a transitioning South African post-Apartheid perspective, I now extend and add nuance to existing theory.

Secondly, I wanted to explore the value of a narrative approach to identity in this changing African context. I now show in what ways it is necessary to extend the vocabulary used in the narrative approach to account for these local dynamics.

Thirdly, business schools are one of the more influential locations for adult learning. It is an ideal location to study late modern adult learning and identity dynamics. Business school and management development scholarship has examined identity in a number of ways. In the third part

of this discussion section, I show why and how business schools can consider self and identity processes associated with narrative identities – especially in their wider social context.

6.1. Late modernity and the self in South and Southern Africa

Using the metaphor of Nielson (2013), I showed in the literature review how people can be seen as *spiders amid a web* of changing social pressures, structures and meanings that they themselves have created but which come to shape them. Sociology is generally concerned with a *theory of the web*. In the literature review I substantively highlighted the evolving nature of late modernity (*the web*) and the changing demands being placed on the self (*the spider*) (Archer, 2007; Bauman, 2007; Beck et al., 2003; Bornman, 2003; Giddens, 1991). I showed how late modernity as well as globalisation have been shown to expose the self to new processes (Callero, 2003; Fraser, 2003). Beck et al. (2003) have argued that *the spider* is no longer the master of her surroundings, but she still remains the author of her biography, and through that her own sense of self.

I also showed in the literature review that it has been argued that post-colonial societies will carve different non-European routes to and through reflexive/second modernity (Beck et al., 2003). The *web* will manifest differently for *spiders* depending on the context. Post-colonial dynamics will moderate and shape these impacts. It has been proposed that African perspectives may differ from 'Euro-Western' experiences due to different historic cultural, economic and political processes. By undertaking this study, I aimed to highlight key issues from the perspective of the 'South' and especially South African and African perspectives on multiple modernity or vernacular modernity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015; Lee, 2006; Mbembe, 2002).

The authors of these stories and the five books were selected because they experienced a core part of their childhood in the Apartheid era but grew into adulthood in the period of the democratic South Africa. This makes their lives subject to a societal transition – a transition associated with newly democratic freedoms, economic liberalisation, rapid urbanisation and the coming together of previously separated diverse racial groups. The country and the broader Southern African region is an African example of many broader global processes.

I now share in what ways these findings contribute to the scholarship of self and society under late modern conditions – from a South and Southern African perspective.

6.1.1. Cross-boundary pressures

I coded for intergroup difference and how the encounters were experienced across different salient group identities or social identities (Stets & Burke, 2000). This theme has been identified in some of the key literature on late modernity. It is seen as important to the self as it encounters cultural difference and navigates the challenges associated with this (Giddens, 1991). This theme was strongly observed in the life-stories. Again, the evidence for this theme is not important since the context of the MBA course (with a focus on diversity) and the requirement to share one's story with

someone 'different' make it salient. But as with the role of family, what is important are the ways students write about cross-boundary encounters.

The first observation to be made was that race and gender were narrated as becoming less brutal across generations. This could be because things have materially changed. Or it could be because this is the way stories are passed along across time. Or it could also be because of the way the authors performed these stories in the classroom context. In describing their parent's experience, the authors described many more brutal encounters (14), less challenging encounters (6) and only a few positive expansive encounters (3) across difference. Broadly, in the adulthood of the authors, a large number of stories referred to general encounters across difference and diversity as expansive (50 people). This was across all 55 intergenerational stories and across all types of difference.

Race and gender prejudice were present in the authors' parents experience. They were less present in the upbringing of the authors. But the challenges of race and gender became salient again in the authors' adulthood. For example, race was mentioned as a challenging cross-boundary intergroup encounter in the authors' upbringing (5) but was more salient in adulthood (15). Gender even more starkly follows this pattern. When mentioned, encounters across gender were written about as brutal (4) in parents' eras. Gender then appears to be a non-issue in the upbringing of the authors (0).

Women come across as increasingly empowered in their upbringing, in the home and in the school environment. But they then face the 'real world'. For example, many women narrated a higher number of challenging and brutal sexist encounters in university and especially in the workplace (5). Men do not report these experiences. The implications for this shift are discussed below.

Similar evidence showed up with reference to race. Purely numerically, when it came to intergroup encounters, racial diversity was by far the most common form of difference identified in the coding process. It was identified 93 times across the lives of the authors and previous generations. This was understandable considering the history of South Africa. Across intergenerational life-stories, in terms of racial intergroup experiences, there were a high number of brutal experiences (23) and a high number of challenging encounters (25). But it was also noted that there were considerable positive stories told around race (27). The experiences across race in the upbringing and the adulthood of the authors were generally narrated as challenging, expansive and nuanced.

In short, diversity was located in the narrative identity of the authors as a source of brutal constraint (often in the historic past), challenging pain (often in the recent past) and expansive possibility (also often in the recent past). Much has been written about the challenges of race in the democratic

South Africa. The meaning I make of this data is that students' narrative identities include brutal memories, negative challenges and expansive possibilities. Challenging forms of racism and prejudice can leave psychological scars, while positive encounters can generate learning and broadened mindsets. There is a 'rainbow' and painful prejudice in the narrative identities of these authors.

The theoretical and scholarly implications of this are elaborated on below in terms of the links to late modern identities, but also how the issue of cross-boundary encounters show up in the six archetypal storylines.

Giddens (1991) quoted Erikson (1950/1993) in stating that the therapeutic patient of early modernity suffered from the burden of not being who they knew they were. The patient of late modernity suffers from the problem of what she/he should believe in and who she/he might become (Giddens, 1991). A multitude of bewildering choices stretch and challenge the self in developing a coherent narrative. Lash and Wynne (1992) proposed that people in the West today have insufficient distance from themselves to reflect and construct linear and even narrative biographies. They argue that people construct bricolage-biographies.

In the findings from this study there is evidence for a number of these kinds of pressures – pressures associated with *late modern* dynamics. The evidence for hybridity at the level of identity is present. Reflexively organised responses to difference are expected to be a substantive strain on the authors (Giddens, 1991). Two particular pressures are evident – the first is identified in the story of 'Leaving the village for the city'. In this storyline, the challenge and strain is one of learning to integrate, accommodate and learn, while staying true to what one has grown up with. The second example is in the storyline of 'living on the border'. The challenge and strain here come potentially with trying to find a coherent core and sense of stable self in a fluid context.

These two storylines are about how the person struggles with the complexity of difference and the crossing of boundaries. There is a pressure in both these stories to define oneself amidst a range of choices. In these stories there is little discussion of substantive traditional routines – the students are confronted with choice. This aligns with Beck et al. (2003) who argue that new questions emerge in late modernity around what groups do I belong to. This question "can no longer be answered collectively according to pre-given social patterns but must be answered individually with reference to changed probabilities and new stereotypes" (Beck et al., 2003, p. 24).

Across time, there is a documented decrease in the brutality associated with differences in the stories. This is something that is expected after the end of Apartheid. This is also true of the changes experienced around gender oppression in one's family in one's upbringing. In these stories there is

also liberation from expected roles. This is especially the case for young women in the home – who now report few incidents of limitation.

The story of 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea' also speaks to some of the challenges of late modernity in the requirement for self-definition. It also shows the increasing pressure to build any boat you want. It points to the choices that people have and the decisions that need to be made around who to be.

Diverse groups are sharing space. This change represents an increasingly exciting and expansive set of possibilities. But there is also evidence of wounding and painful differences encountered. It is striking in these stories that many young women now grow up believing that they can achieve anything. They receive no documented discouragement or constraint in the community nor in the home. In the workplace (and sometimes university) they encounter gender prejudice and bias – often for the first time. It is an important identity-shaping experience.

In modernity, institutions are delinked from local contexts (Giddens, 1991), yet, new institutions replace them. The church retains its importance in the lives of the authors (which I discuss later) – so do schools and the workplace. Many Black South Africans write of their experience going to previously Whites-only schools at the end of Apartheid. There they experience acceptance, belonging and non-racialism. This can be a liberating and profound experience of acceptance. But they often also experience prejudice and exclusion from teachers or from other children. This duality of increasing interaction being both liberating and wounding is important to note. It is indeed "a world where opportunity and danger are balanced in equal measure" (Giddens, 1994, p. 58). The authors also point to these dynamics within the workplace.

These stories are generally optimistic rather than pessimistic or 'mixophobic' (Bauman, 2007). This could signify the way stories are told when in the presence of 'others' or it could also reflect the relative success this group of authors has had in the context of the changing country. There is also freedom in 'the city'. There is a sense of opportunity even as the rubbing up against 'others' creates challenges and painful wounding.

This finding adds important nuance to the kinds of pressures on the self as theorised by Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) who argue there has been a rise in misunderstanding and prejudice as people come into intensive contact with one another. If we extend the arguments of Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) into this context, we can expect that the pressures on those authors entering and negotiating new worlds will be substantive. This increasing uncertainty in context is stretching the self beyond its traditional mooring – theoretically this may create oppositional identities. Globalisation has been

theorised as leading to an increase in uncertainty. In doing so, globalisation creates a kind of opposing tendency, the drive to find a local niche and to construct a local identity in opposition to the global (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

6.1.2. *Coherent modern realities in a late modern context*

One of the most evident themes across the stories was the theme of education (or its absence) in shaping lives. The salience of education as a key element of the life-story is evident in almost all the intergenerational stories analysed. Of the 55 stories analysed, 48 highlight the importance of education either through its absence (and associated difficulties) or through its presence (and positive impacts). Education (11) was the most mentioned explicitly stated value in the stories.

The parent generation (of the author) was often able to educate themselves breaking with an intergenerational norm (28 of the stories). Often one of the parents or grandparents of the author struggled against the odds to educate themselves. The authors wrote that it is through this education that the authors themselves can advance. Yet, there was also the pain of parents (in 15 of the stories) who were prevented from being educated.

The second salient theme I want to highlight was religious-associated values. This was a pattern for around half of the families of the authors. These religiously associated values can be understood as a positive (as in normatively good) institutional set of guidelines for bettering oneself. Observing religious values on the part of families was often linked to upward mobility, education, 'good' values, discipline and self-empowerment. But it is also noted that the five books had a more ambiguous and less clear emphasis on religion.

There are also the themes of hard work, resilience, perfection and pressure to succeed. These values represent ambitious education-oriented authors. The authors undertook to do a two-year part-time MBA while mostly working in high-pressure senior management roles so this could partly reflect a personality rather than a social phenomenon. The values identified seem to illustrate the ambition present.

While there is evidence for the unmooring associated with global change and identity shifts of late modernity, there is also substantive coherence, rather than fragmentation in the stories told. These stories provide a strong sense that one's life can be shaped by one's actions. There is, in these stories, a distinctive classical *modern* flavour to how people prioritise education, family, hard work, resilience, perfection and the pressure to succeed. These values are more closely aligned with the idea of the self as a 'modern' author of one's destiny rather than a fragmented self.

Eisenstadt (2000) argued that selves and societies are involved in a dialogue between traditional and more modern ways of experiencing the world, pointing to multiple ways in which people experience modernity. The proposition I now make for enriching global theorising is that there are contextual circumstances in which identities seem to be typically 'modern' even under conditions of 'late modern' societal transition. The proposition here is that the stories presented include both modern and late modern dynamics.

For example, religiosity could potentially be an important late modern oppositional identity niche. But that is not what I found. In many of the stories, religion, faith and God were a crucial guide associated with education, discipline and material success – not a rebellious anti-modern (or even fundamentalist) retreat or oppositional identity (Bauman, 2007). I see religiosity in these texts as a modernising and educating force. This is not surprising to scholars of Christianity and modernity in South Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Elphick & Davenport, 1997), but should be taken seriously by those who might see 'highly religious' and 'ambitiously educated' as somewhat incompatible. This is one of the 'modern' themes that acts as a centripetal force against late modern fragmentation.

The educational focus and value sets of the authors would be other themes that point to some of the modern themes in the stories present. The authors write especially of the drive and educational focus of parents and grandparents. There is a strong sense of independent self-authorship and of the ability to define one's future. And as I have mentioned in the findings, there is a loyalty to these previous generations.

There are stories of mothers and grandmothers who enabled the success of later generations. There are stories of fathers who worked in challenging jobs for long days and weeks and years. These are stories of discipline, both imposed by parents and religious-connected values. These are stories too of the enabling shifts in the structures of societies. These are stories of bursaries and better schools. Even in these times of shifting traditions and even post-tradition (Giddens, 1994), many authors in this specific context draw strength from the values they were raised in and the religious institutions from which they emerge. Giddens (1994) and Beck et al. (2003) highlight the increasing importance of decision making and choice, amid new risks but still bound by institutional context. There is certainly a strong sense in these stories of choice and option-taking in family histories and the consequences (both good and bad of these choices). This finding opens up questions around what kinds of local conditions nurture modern identities even as there are sets of global conditions that point towards a different set of situated subjectivities associated with late or reflexive modernity (Giddens, 1991).

6.1.3. *Thickening of African self-writing*

Berger (2010) has argued that African self-writing cannot be seen as separated from European self-writing since we are all human, and we are part of a set of global processes. But in what ways are they connected or different? Mbembe (2002) has argued that African identity has been caught in a dilemma from which it is struggling to free itself: Does African identity connect to a broader human identity or should African identity insist on difference and uniqueness?

Mbembe (2017) has also shown how a liberated Black selfhood remains a complex vast ongoing project. He has shown how Black selfhood is inhabited by colonial ideas even though we live in a post-colonial era. And he has shown how these ideas limit Black freedom but seem to be impossible to escape. In an earlier text, Mbembe (2002) argued that African selfhood and identity today are forged from strands of tired pan-Africanism, neo-traditionalism and recent attempts to rally against structural adjustment and Western neo-imperialism. These political dimensions of African identity were seen as important to the African self-concept. But Mbembe (2002) stated that African identity cannot be reduced to a specific essence. While this is true of any continental grouping, it is important to state because Africa is often thought about as *one place* and 'African' as a romantic and essential identity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015).

Mbembe (2002) seemed to be calling for a more African self-writing as a cure for this problem of African self-authorship even if there were no solid binding foundations on which to organise the African self. He seemed to be saying, when unsure of what to write – just keep writing. What can I offer to this call from my intimate contact with the intergenerational life-stories and books? Who is the South African and Southern African in this study? What kind of Afropolitan authors are they?

These stories provide an interesting middle-class intergenerationally upwardly mobile selection of South and Southern African stories. They show the complexities of the times and need for the self to navigate a number of late modern pressures. From Comaroff and Comaroff (2015), it appears especially that the negotiation between '*sekgoa*' (White) and '*setswana*' (Black), although an experience from more than a century ago, remains a complex journey (for example, in the experience around Model C schooling). The complexity of this negotiation can be extended to other dimensions of identity whatever the 'village' one comes from and the 'city' in which one now lives.

But the findings also show other sets of values. They show the drive and educational focus of parents and grandparents. There is a strong sense of independent self-authorship and of the ability to define one's future. This is an optimistic group. These more modern elements exist alongside late modern elements. Following McNee, this study has oriented itself to the individual in the context of the collective experience (McNee, 1997). McNee's (1997) communal 'African'ness' is present in these

stories in family commitment, not necessarily in deep commitments to tribe or 'village'. African autonomy is present in the personal choices around education and how to respond to the complexity of the boundaries crossed and the challenges and pain experienced.

There is evidence for the centrifugal forces of late modernity breaking us apart – and modern themes that act as coherent anchors for organising selfhood. For the group studied, this underpins their specific alternative African modernity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). Theoretically Mbembe (2002, no page number) made an important point when he argued that “the time we live in is fundamentally fractured, the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed”. I do not agree!

I want to argue that there are thicker strands in the fabric of the self. And that a selfhood can be located in the thicker strands of one's story. This study shows some of the more common patterns in selfhood. I want to make the case that the major themes and the more salient storylines can be woven together. They can cut across one another and give the fabric of the self a strength.

The late modern strands of selves in this context include the challenging and expansive cross-boundary encounters. The late modern storylines include 'Leaving the village for the city', 'Living on the border' and 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea'. These pressures push and pull the self into more expansive opportunities. This is the upside of late modernity. On the modern side, the thicker strands identified included God, faith and religion, family legacy and loyalty, and educational aspiration. Drawing from the six archetypal storylines, the thicker strands also include foundation building, boat stabilising and chain breaking.

Building on the proposal of Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) for using historic African experience and theory to interpret contemporary issues, I now make a closing point about the Southern African context. South and Southern African selves can potentially anchor themselves in core-stories and more modern themes while widening their exposure and drawing on different dimensions of their late-modern selves. By anchoring themselves in the African modern, they can build firm enough ground to navigate the fluid complexity of African late modernity. I am calling here for a hybrid modern and late modern self as a potential way of engaging the local context. Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) emphasise the concept of 'autoplexy' to describe selfhood in nineteenth-century Setswana society. Autoplexy involves 'playing with' many different roles and identities in order to secure freedom of action and social position. I am pointing to a fresh way to deploy 'autoplexy' – to lean into coherent modern dimensions of the self, to own them and make them visible. But also stay open to the complexity of the context and embrace the challenging cross-boundary dynamics of the late modern. In doing this there are opportunities to encourage a grounded flexibility.

6.1.4. *Shifting stories that 'have us' to stories 'we have'*

I have discussed the relationship between these findings and the more sociological or 'outside-in' understandings of the self with a specific focus on late, reflexive and liquid modern dynamics, as well as African theorising on modernity and the self. Understanding the reality of *the spider* and *the web* also requires a *theory of the spider* – the person at the centre of *the web*. In the second part of the literature review, operating 'inside-out', I looked at the way the self is organised in its own right. I make links now between my findings and that literature.

I have mentioned the seminal work of Mead (1934). What was important for Mead about humans is that they had minds. They can resolve difficulties and challenges by reflecting on what is happening and decide on a range of options. They can also reflect on themselves – treating themselves as objects out there in the world. 'To self' (as a verb) is to grasp experience as one's own. 'To self' begins with an existential claim 'I exist' and then develops from there in its complexity. I discussed the difference between the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'Me' is created by the 'I' and is the product of the 'selfing process'. The 'Me' incorporates life-stories as its own. Through 'selfing', the person authors their story. The 'I' emerges and evolves, and the 'Me' is produced (Mead, 1934).

The Meadian frame opens up a conversation on the self 'as knower' and the self 'as known'. I see parallels in this distinction between the 'I' (knower) and the 'Me' (known) with 'process' and 'structure', as well as 'form' and 'content' (Côté & Schwartz, 2002). I also see similarities in this vocabulary with the work of Kegan (1982) around what issues 'have us' (we are subject to their powerful often hidden nature) and what issues 'we have' (we can reflect on and shift our relationship to them).

In the literature review I made connections between a Meadian frame and the constructive developmental theory of the 'evolving self' (Kegan, 1982). I discussed how Kegan (2009) later wrote of how he saw contemporary culture (in diverse modern societies) as a kind of school where all of the adult roles are the equivalents of school or university courses we are all enrolled in. For Kegan, modern humans have a demanding schedule, and he defined what it takes to succeed at these courses. He found that, for people to do well in this school, the 'curriculum of modern life' required people to learn not just new knowledge but continuously transform the ways they saw the world and their place in it. This was necessary to be able to productively participate in more complex and expansive ways.

The inference is that a person can gain greater levels of influence over their circumstances ('the known') by transforming their thinking paradigm ('the knower'). I discussed the three adult stages of Kegan's theory as being the socialised stage, the autonomous stage and the self-transforming stage. I

proposed links between Kegan and the Median frame. The 'I' moves back and forth between the poles of independence and inclusion, but in doing so the 'I' comes to see more of itself – more of 'Me'.

In the literature review I never connected these lines of theorising with the work on late, reflexive, liquid and African modernity and selfhood. I make some connections now. One suggestion I want to make (emerging from the concept of the 'I' as the subjective 'knower' and the 'Me' as the objective 'known') is that perhaps storywriting and thematic understanding of these stories may be a way to move story elements that we are subject to (in the language of Kegan) to become elements of our selves (that we can now observe and interpret). Connecting this with Mbembe (2002), it is not only important that there is more African self-writing, but that there are increasingly coherent understandings of what emerges from that writing! Only in this process can the African 'I' better understand its sense of 'Me'. Post-modern perspectives might point to the never-ending layers of the onion of the self that get pulled back ad infinitum. But Kegan (who I would place in the late modern psychological tradition) would point to the potential firmer ground that can occur. This is because for him there is increasing mastery of the self in this process of shifting something that 'has us' to something that 'we have' mastery over.

Mbembe (2002) argued that African selfhood is insufficiently coherent and defined and that the tired concepts of tribal, racial or liberatory identities no longer suffice. There is a risk of remaining adrift where forces beyond one's control dictate the outcome of one's life. The thematic and structural patterns in the findings point to potentially important dimensions of the socialised self. This group was often shaped by faith and religion, by family legacy and resultant loyalty, by hard focused work, by educational aspiration, by increasing gender equality when growing up (but by gender violence outside the home), by boundary negotiation and the expansive but challenging possibilities that this involves. This group's storylines included foundation-building, village-leaving, boat-building, chain-breaking, border-navigating and wound-healing.

That this group studied is both late modern and modern is a socialised reality. By knowing this, the hidden implicit powers of socialisation are shifted into the conscious mind and become known. In this process, their power is diminished, and through an awareness of their influence, autonomy and choice become possible.

Again, I do not suggest the themes and patterns are necessarily generalisable. The 55 authors in the group analysed were generally middle class, professional, business focused, multi-racial, and pursuing an expensive advanced higher education degree. And the books studied also included no stories of emerging from deep poverty. In this sense it is only a small sub-section of society. Much

more work would be needed to understand the generalisability of these kinds of themes. But if 'we' – and please allow me the poetic option of collapsing the boundaries between researcher and researched here – if we can begin to gain some mastery of the themes and patterns of our collective lives in the Southern region of the African continent, Kegan (2009) argues we can begin to better master circumstance and the forces that drive us. In a discursive sense then we can become subject to our own gaze rather than the gaze of the 'West' (Gabay, 2018). This can enable a shift from being socialised to greater individual autonomy (Kegan, 2009), but maybe collective autonomy too.

There are also links here to what Archer (2007) argues for – that in societies of constant change, there is a 'reflexive imperative' where social guidelines no longer offer much help in orienting choices and practices. She suggests a set of differing types of reflexives and argues for how those types might reinforce patterns of the past or disrupt them. If Africa is struggling now, then it would make sense not to reinforce patterns of the past. I have attempted, within the boundaries of this group, to flesh out some of the structure and content. More in-depth understanding of our reflexivity with regard to collectively common stories and the structure and content of those stories is needed.

6.2. Narrative and identity

Biography and life-story have been theorised as intimate to our identity and how the self is understood (Ezzy, 1998; McAdams, 1996). By acquiring a biography, it has been argued that we become a person (Maines, 1993) and we shape our lives (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). I now build on what has been labelled a 'narrative turn', in which sociological phenomena can be seen as constituted of stories (Maines, 1993). There are many strands of these stories, including settings, themes, agency and structural dynamics, interesting scripts, and the six archetypal storylines presented here. This narrative identity discussion makes links between general concepts of identity, narrative identity, and the methodological approach of narrative analysis.

6.2.1. Identity formation – guardians, searchers and resolvers

Giddens (1991) writes specifically about identity in late modernity. For the first time, self and society are interrelated in a global context. In this process, politics moves from the national and global to the personal with a shift in focus to debates around abortion, gay marriage, etc. Giddens labels these issues as life-political issues, which late modern human beings have to inevitably confront. Confronting them creates dilemmas during identity formation. People are concerned with questions of 'who to be', 'how to act' and 'what to do'. Differing from the post-structuralist positions, rather than passively being tossed about by the forces of late modernity, denuding life of meaning, modern meaning re-merges through the lifestyle choices and identity work that individuals do.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) call for much greater conceptual clarity when the concept of 'identity' is used. Without some breaking up of the conceptual 'blurriness' of 'identity', there can be analytical confusion. I employed the concept of identity as self-understanding and 'situated subjectivity' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Identity in the way I am using it here is a personal response to the question of 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into the world around me?' (McAdams, 1994). Erikson (1950/1993) highlighted the development and negotiation of identity as a central challenge of late adolescence and young adulthood. As people grow into early adulthood, they are required to answer the question, 'Who am I?'. This is the fifth stage in Erikson's model. In this stage of identity formation, the person needs to call on the material from the previous four stages (McAdams, 1994). The formation of an identity and the maintenance of that identity has also been highlighted as increasingly crucial (Côté & Levine; 2002). Identity formation and maintenance is a challenge in late modernity where, even in later life, contexts and situations require identity change.

There are a number of established typologies for understanding identities in late modernity (Côté & Levine, 2002; Marcia, 1966). Marcia (1966) built on Erikson's work with the suggestion of four identity statuses (stages). Marcia saw the choices around identity development as involving four

possible pathways arising from two variable factors – exploration and commitment. The first three statuses arise as a result of failing to achieve the ideal of a specific identity. This happens for three main reasons. The first status is ‘identity diffusion’ in which the person does not explore options and choices, and also never makes a commitment to any of the options available. The second status is where the person does not explore and rather commits to unquestioned assumptions from childhood – this is called ‘foreclosure’. Foreclosures are the ‘best behaved’ of the statuses (McAdams, 1994). The third status is where the person does explore options and is deeply questioning, but never makes a choice and cannot resolve the options and choices. Marcia calls this stage ‘moratorium’. The final and ideal status is where the person forms an identity. The person explores and may face deep choices and a crisis. But the person is able to make choices and commit to an identity. He calls this status ‘identity achievement’.

Côté and Levine (2002) argue that there is a potential deficit of identity in society. There is evidence that up to half of adults are in foreclosure or diffusion-identity statuses. And that more research is needed to assess the adult trajectory and what arrests development. In terms of Marcia’s stages, the authors are more likely to be in moratorium, foreclosure and identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). The ambition and outward success evidenced in the groups’ stories suggest that this group probably includes few ‘refusers’ or ‘drifters’. There is implicit evidence for ‘guardians’ (in the importance of inherited family values, for example), ‘searchers’ (in the wider engagement with the world in the village-leaving and border-living) and ‘resolvers’ (in the strong sense of direction across some of the archetypal storylines, such as building a boat).

6.2.2. Family and family-based agency

The authors were encouraged to write about what shaped them going back two generations. They were asked to examine their roots and where they and their families had come from. They were also encouraged to write about their upbringing and the issues that shaped them. Then they were encouraged to write about their adult lives and the issues that face them now. It is not at all surprising to see them write about family. This in, and of, itself is not significant and is in fact potentially a redundant finding. So, I comment now less on the salience of family issues in the authors’ stories and focus instead on the nature of the family issues identified.

In terms of empirical findings, the authors identified family members as their most direct influences. *This is not material since the essay instructions asked for a reflection on family influences. What is more important is the way that family was written about.* Mothers (23) showed up more than fathers (16), although both are the most common positive influence identified alongside grandparents (8) and family more generally (6). For a minority, mothers (2), fathers (2) and families

(1) were negative influences. Wives (6) showed up more often than husbands (1) as being a positive influence. Then the experience of divorce is also a challenging life-shaping experience in both upbringing and adulthood.

The strength of mothers in shaping values is potentially influenced by a number of things. Mothers may be home more than fathers. The Apartheid economy drove the separation of men from their families. There were also structural and cultural reasons why women would invest in their children. In the life-stories, many sacrifices were made specifically on the part of mothers to enable the success of their children. Worth noting is the role that family played at the centre of many authors' lives. This is elaborated on below in terms of theoretical implications for agency and structure, but also for the identity of the authors and the institution of family in late modernity.

Giddens (1991) has suggested that the institution of 'family' survived the first modernising process. The dynamics within families suggest that the institution, which survived the first modernity, may also survive the second modernisation too (Beck et al., 2003) – at least in the case of the group studied. Families matter, especially when considered across larger periods of time – decades rather than years. Families have historically been locations of prejudice and constraint, but this is changing. The more static gender relations of Beck's first modernity are giving way (Beck et al., 2003). This is in evidence in the life-stories with declining prejudices facing woman growing up.

It is also clear in the findings that families matter in terms of the trajectories that shape a life-course. Could this be a new era for the importance of family in upliftment? Can family be a home for self-development and expression, as well as an enabler of collective economic advancement? This is especially true in contexts where family-oriented collective action is a means to survive and thrive in the uncertainty of late modernity.

Families can be seen as collective units that take advantage of opportunities within structural constraints. Families cause long-running problems for individual actors in these stories. The archetypal life-stories of 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain', 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea', 'Breaking free from chains' and 'Knife to the heart' always (or often) have family as a central actor.

This is especially true as families improve their circumstances across time and geography in contexts of societal transition. Kin networks are crucial to intergenerational change. This is not an important finding for scholars of kin networks (Hogan, Hao & Parish, 1990). This is also not new for scholars of individualism and collectivism in national cultures, especially outside of Western contexts (Triandis, 2001). But it is potentially interesting for scholars of identity concerns with agency and communion

because it suggests that acting in the world for the purposes of self-enhancement needs to be seen as more than an individual pursuit of the self. McNee (1997) for example has pointed to the need to understand agency and structure within Africa in more nuanced ways than simple collectivism vs individualist perspectives. The identification of this coding category elaborates on the conceptual position she proposed – by linking agency to family. More broadly, narrative analysis of life-stories needs to elaborate on the conceptualisation of agency to take this into account.

A number of scholars undertaking narrative analysis and examining narrative identity address issues of culture and agency. Saldaña (2009) introduces a framework that separates out action-oriented events in life-stories into the categories of agency, structure, communion and serendipity. McAdams (2001) identifies and links agency and communion to measures of life wellbeing. Within narrative identity scholarship, agency is often conceptualised as individually located. For example, McAdams (2001) cites Bakan (1966) as stating that “Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms” (p. 1).

With regard to theorising on family, agency and structure within narrative, I suggest that family-based agency is an important coding category in the context of late modern societal transition. I highlighted in the methodology section how McAdams (2001) focuses on agency and communion as two ways of being in the world, since “people’s life stories differ with respect to the salience of agency and communion themes, and those differences are measurable” (McAdams, 2001, p. 1).

This coding approach has been identified as particularly helpful when analysing life-stories. I highlighted in the methodology section how Lieblich et al. (2008) described how these kinds of methods allowed insight into the inner world and outer forces operating. They argue that an agency-structure reading alone captures some of the sociological dimensions of institutional constraint but misses the interpersonal psychological elements. These elements are captured by the agency and communion elements. But they argue that even these two ways of reading would have missed the role of chance and fate. They advocate for coding for structure, agency, communion and serendipity (chance/fate).

I make a case now for a new important theme (and future code) of ‘family-based agency’ for contexts such as the ones this group faced. Family is a dynamic collective actor in the stories I analysed. This is an important finding for scholars interested in developing coding frameworks of narrative analysis outside of Western contexts. In my reading, agency is often conceptualised in Western contexts (implicitly or explicitly in my view) as ‘individual’; and communion themes are conceptualised around ‘union’, ‘connection’ or ‘care’. But collective action does not always move us

inwards into bonding. It can also be oriented outwards towards collective expressions, shared achievement, family success and intergenerational change. The 55 stories here, as well as an analysis of the five books, suggest that agency can be additionally understood as collective – and in this case family-based. Family-based agency as a code describes the collective intergenerational struggle against structure, as well as the using of emerging structural opportunities. Future research is encouraged to examine the ways in which groups, such as families, navigate structure. Family-based agency is suggested as a sub-code of ‘agency’.

But there is more to say in linking families to narrative identity. If one is the product of generations of family-based agency, and if one finds oneself in the upper middle class of a highly unequal society through the work of previous generations, then for many of the authors in this study, there is a debt and an ‘honouring’ of those that have come before embedded in one’s sense of self and one’s life-story. Family-based agency then has an intergeneration outcome not just in the economic and social contexts, but also in the sense of self, in the extended self (Eakin, 2008). There is recognition that one is who one is only through the family-based agency of previous generations. For example, the storyline of ‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain’ reflects an intergenerational pathway through the constraining and enabling structures of the world. Within the narrative identities examined, there was often a deep commitment to these roots – rather than a distancing of oneself from the past. The authors situate their relationship with their ancestral families in the present. Through reflexive choice and the weaving together of the contextual strands from their upbringing, the authors orient their stories towards this past debt.

6.2.3. God and faith

An additional code within narrative analysis is needed to better account for the role of God and faith in agency and structure theorising, especially if life-story and narrative identity are to be taken seriously. It is in some cases only through finding God that the author was able to find themselves or a better pathway through structure. Their own agency had failed them. How does one code for this? Without a code for God or faith, I could not properly analyse the dynamics of structure and agency in the intergenerational life-paths. This adds to the existing frameworks of Saldaña (2009) and McAdams (2001). Religion is an important area of psychological studies of the person (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). While some orientation to the data may see the intervention of God as a ‘false’ belief and mythical explanation for structure, agency or serendipity, this is not how the authors subjectively experience their lives. This is not their narrative identity. Following this study, God and faith is proposed as an additional code to consider alongside existing codes in the literature around narrative identity. These findings and the theoretical links suggested can be further linked to the

earlier section on African late modernity and calls for an understanding of selfhood in the African context.

6.2.4. Place and space as chapters and changes

Place can be understood as the nexus of structure and agency. The authors often mention place and geography and movement. Movements from one place to another disrupt storylines. While the structure of the essay itself may encourage people to consider the changes across time, this is more broadly, I would argue, the implicit structure of the narrative form and narrative thinking (Ricoeur, 1991).

School changes often accompany a disruptive change, setting the scene for new story possibilities. Different geographies present different possibilities. Places structure outcomes. Places provide structures against which people struggle. Places provide the opportunities that people embrace to succeed. These disruptive movements across location can be linked to theorising around the increasing challenge of coherence in identity development in late modernity (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1996).

Giddens (1991) argues that in traditional contexts, time and space are bound up with place. Under modern conditions universal time and geographically-specific maps delink space–time from ‘place’. From a narrative identity reading of the stories studied across the South African transition, ‘place’ continues to matter. It was also clear in this study that space still matters. In these life-stories, the world is not flat (Friedman, 2005), whether we refer to spaces and fixed locations or more subjectively situated ‘places’. If globalisation has been theorised as a nomadic wandering ‘between unconnected places’ (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999), then I find that in storytelling terms, spaces and places are deeply connected and their connections are crucial. Increased social and physical mobility (Callero, 2003; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) is at the heart of how to understand the stories here.

Place retains foundational importance as the setting for stories to be written. Shifting places involves new opportunities and new risks. Shifting places closes chapters in stories and opens new ones. The authors seldom tell stories of being located in one place – at least for a long period of time. It is also true that the moves made have an impact on what is learned.

In this emphasis on place, this study affirms the view of Gieryn (2000) that ‘place’ is important in sociology. There are different defining geographic positions from which authors engage the world. Experienced geographies substantively shape what is possible within a story.

South Africa is an example of a country that has experienced an accelerated integration of different groups – racial primarily, but also around class and gender. In the essays there is also evidence for

the rapid movement across different locations, including more traditional (often ethnically or racially isolated and rural or peri-urban) and modern (often boundary-spanning, integrated and intensely urban) social contexts. Place and the changing of place act as an organiser of the life-stories. Bauman (2007) wrote that cities matter – they are the space where people leave behind the familiar monotony and limits of rural life. This is evident especially in the geographic and economic trajectories of the authors and in the storyline ‘Leaving the village for the city’.

It is important to also note that the economic dynamics of late modernity are often salient in these stories. But the authors write of these dynamics in the micro-context of their own lives and of those close to them, rather than in a wider way. The authors seldom write about issues of global or national economic change. The economic dynamics are entangled rather than crisply thought through. This might point to the challenge for authors of interpreting and telling their stories in economic terms. Like a fish that does not know the water, they do not see how they might be the survivors and successful participants in the kind of ‘hunter’ economy that Bauman (2007) suggests is increasingly the norm. I raise the issue of the economy here because it links strongly with place and space. People move for new work opportunities and are upwardly mobile (a nexus of space and economic opportunity). They move because they lose jobs or find themselves disadvantaged by economic changes.

In the narrative context there is an ongoing semi-stable geographic nexus that shapes the kinds of stories that are told. The authors come from somewhere (not anywhere). They grow up somewhere (not anywhere.) They moved from a specific ‘here’ to a specific ‘there’. Moving places can be seen in the narrative tradition as an important shifting of the context in which a story is told (Silverman, 2011). Movement potentially creates the potential for new storylines and new chapters in the book of life. Disruptive movements mean a change in the direction a story takes. Certain things happen in certain places and not in others. Changing places can also change the outcomes of entire stories. In terms of narrative analysis, geography and physical movement dramatically set (and limit) the scene and scope of what unfolds.

6.2.5. Interesting script elements

There has been a call for further research on narrative identity outside of the ‘West’. There are some unique elements that probably would not occur in more Western cultural narratives. A few stories start with a traditional praise greeting or ancestral backdrop. Some position their stories within grand communal and tribal ethnic narratives of place and values. Some authors draw on African praise poetry traditions in introducing themselves in contrast to approaches where students

introduce themselves more directly with where they were born and who they were born to. A few Black African authors position their writing within royal lineage.

Globalisation has been theorised as leading to an increase in uncertainty. In this increasing uncertainty and the stretching of the self beyond its traditional mooring, globalisation creates a kind of opposing tendency, the drive to find a local niche and to construct a local identity in opposition to the global (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) – although the post-Apartheid shifts clearly provide greater choice on who to become. It is also clear that people cannot entirely reinvent themselves afresh. I see the ‘far ancestral’ and ‘royal lineage’ script elements as story elements that help bring coherence to one’s identity. This is a kind of mythic setting for their story. In my reading of these stories, it is a way of organising time, community, mythic heroes, collective hardship, and shared belonging. But it could be interpreted in a number of ways.

Perhaps in employing these story scripts, the authors suggest that you can only know ‘me’ if you know my ancestors and what they went through. Or perhaps it is an orientation to a specific African cultural worldview in which those who have come before continue to play a role in life today. They are the *ancestors* who live and shape lives and to whom there is a connection and from whom guidance is received.

It could also be a claim for an identity-niche in the context of a modernising Western educational setting. It could be a claim to something unique, non-global and particular in opposition to the complexity and uncertainty of late modernity. This is an identity niche – a claim to specific group-belonging that gives a sense of distinction in a cosmopolitan urban context of Johannesburg and the somewhat ‘flat’ managerial context of a business school. It could in this sense be a deliberate surfacing of an element of one’s identity – an identity that can, unless defended, be marginalised.

It could also be a simple act of history-telling in a format that is comfortable for the author and for which little thought needs to be given. In the same way someone might say “Hello”, and when asked why they said that might respond, “How else would I introduce myself?” Not enough evidence is present in the findings, but it opens up many important lines for further inquiry.

6.2.6. Six archetypal storylines

Life storytelling is theorised as the essential way that individuals can develop a coherent sense of self across time and space. This is certainly evident. The intergenerational life-stories represent coherent storylines. Following this study, it would be incorrect to state, in the unmooring of global change and identity shifts of late modernity, that people can entirely invent themselves. Bauman (2007) is concerned around the inability of selves to plan in times of liquid modernity. Lackey (1992) argues

that in late modernity the self becomes a circular project seeking unity from fragmentation, certainty from uncertainty, and empowerment from powerlessness.

I have identified six specific archetypal storylines that were present in the stories. In line with narrative analytical approaches, I have tried to see the bigger picture of this study within the lexicon of narrative and story. These archetypal storylines are not quite 'plots' since the exact intricacies of the choices facing protagonists are not made clear. I see them as elements of the plots like settings or characters. They are archetypal in the sense that they are slightly simplistic anchor dynamics that bring coherence across time and space.

These archetypal storylines are a way of summarising the findings in narrative form. The six storylines are: 'Leaving the village for the city', 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain', 'Breaking free from chains', 'Living on the border', 'Knife to the heart' and 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea'.

The development of the six archetypal storylines drew on the coding approach that sought to link the temporal dimension to the evaluative dimension of life to develop a set of patterns of the ups and downs of life across time (Brockmeier, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 1997). This was consistent with Bruner (2001) who has argued that (at least for Western contexts) autobiography is concerned with turning points. This approach offered a way to explore multiple-generations of people in a kind of intergenerational life-course approach (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). This was a tool for seeing lives across generations and understanding challenges and opportunities in a historic context.

These ups and downs were specifically organised into five time/generational periods. These were: pre-grandparent, grandparent, parent, upbringing and adulthood (life post high school, including university and career). Depending on the very specific character of the ups and downs, these were then coded as: intergenerational struggle, intergenerational achievement, seizing opportunities, encountering the wider world, common ups and downs, tragedy, oppression, recovery, serious family troubles and unfathomable family troubles.

It can be further noted, that when the authors write of their lives improving, this could be a matter of self-selecting truths. Or it could be material. In either case I see it as an important narrative element across the stories.

Within the authors' stories: 30 write of the experience of encountering the wider world; 29 of intergenerational achievement; 24 of intergenerational struggle; 17 of seizing opportunities; and 17 of serious family troubles.

This data tells a story of intergenerational struggle and achievement. It strengthens the earlier finding of the ways in which authors are encountering an ever-wider world. Of course, this was not every authors' story. It is an important caveat that there were some really shocking family stories of challenges and tragedy and horror and recovery.

Gender was not a factor in the way the stories were told with regard to the above intergenerational themes. A few more women than men (9 versus 3) mentioned more detail on the ups and down of life. And a few more women than men (15 versus 9) mentioned the intergenerational struggles that brought them to this point. But largely, men and women provided similar patterned accounts of the ups and downs across generations.

I broke this down by race and normalised to correct for the initial selection criteria (normalised to a selection of 10) across the five groups (Black, White, Indian, Coloured and Africans from the region). This meant that sometimes there is a fraction of a person in the descriptive statistics below. White South African authors wrote the least about intergenerational struggle (3 out of 10 cases) compared to Indians (7,3 out of 10), Coloureds (7,5 out of 10), Black South Africans (5 out of 10) and non-South-African Africans (3 out of 10). Black and Indian South Africans wrote the most of serious oppression (1,5 and 2,7 out of 10 times). But these numbers are hard to draw firm conclusions from in lieu of the small size of the number of authors.

These archetypal storylines have been connected with a number of issues already discussed. I focus on them in the section below on business schools and narrative identity in context and especially when I consider business school opportunities.

As I have highlighted, the two storylines of 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' and 'Breaking free from chains' most closely align with historically modern ideas of the self – where one is the author of one's destiny. The two stories of encountering difference have more of a late modern orientation in the way that authors 'leave the village for the city' and 'live on the border'. Both of these complicating sequences involve new questions of who one is in relationship with others and a changing context. Both invoke the potential for complex multi-faceted less-stable identities.

6.3. Business schools and narrative identity in context

6.3.1. *Identity and key themes in the findings*

Identity has been addressed in limited but important business and business school scholarship. Narrative analysis has been employed in organisational settings. But narrative analysis has not been employed to understand and enhance business school education. The one exception is Ruth (2017) who showed the usefulness of narrative analysis to understand the motivations for the MBA (Master of Business Administration) journey. Ruth (2017) showed the potential of narrative analysis. She identified seven stories to describe why students did an MBA ('The Show Goes On', 'The Quest', 'Born Again', 'Deus ex Machina', 'The Voyage', 'The Servant' and 'The Big Apple'). She showed how story analysis can take research beyond what can be illustrated through survey instruments and, in doing so, forged a path that this study follows.

As far as I could find, there is no scholarship of business school students that examines student lives and histories in the breadth and depth that my study does. Business school focused scholarship has yet to substantively consider narrative identity processes in a social context. I provide a unique perspective on MBA student identity and self-authoring in late modernity. There are therefore a number of 'hooks' to connect the findings of this study with the business school context. Who are MBA and business school students in a broader societal context? What life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students' narrative identities?

Before discussing the implications of my findings and answering these two questions, I briefly highlight some of the relevant scholarship. From a business practitioner perspective, there has been a surge of interest in the construct of identity within organisational scholarship. There has recently been a reflection on this surge – and the next steps have been outlined by Ashforth (2016). For Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) identity has proved to be a useful bridging construct for understanding organisational, managerial, professional and occupational identities. Identity refers to "subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and – by implication – 'How should I act?'" (p 6). They outline a research agenda for identity scholarship in organisations. Of relevance for this study is their focus on how the study of identity has helped bring empathetic insight to people – including who they are and what they do. They highlight and emphasise the importance of scholarship that is concerned with agency. This draws attention to how the individual subject narrates tales of the self but is also subject to 'extra-individual' forces, especially through discourse and institutionalised patterns of culture. They further emphasise the need to understand the raw material from which identities are created. This study makes an important contribution to these objectives.

Khurana and Snook (2011) have been concerned with professional identity. Much of the management scholarship on 'identity' has focused on the employees' relationship with the organisation in which they work. Or it has been oriented around career development (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). For example, identity has been employed as a concept to understand the highest managerial level, a segment of this grouping can often be considered transnational in their identity (Petriglieri, 2014). Scholars of organisational change have used a narrative approach to understand how organisational change can impact on personal identities (Reissner, 2010).

From an adult-learning perspective, Alheit (1994) has described how the complex changes happening in society have placed new pressures on people. There has now emerged a need for a different form of adult learning to deal with an unstable context. Adult learning is, in this sense, connected with the concept of agency. For Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency is made even more important in the late modern era (along the lines theorised by Giddens, Beck and Bauman) as a 'pre-given life' gives away to a 'life chosen'. Biography becomes more subject to self-will – but new learning must take place without a curriculum (Alheit, 1994).

Wojecki (2007) argues for the crucial role of the identity concept in adult learning. Khurana and Snook (2011) have highlighted how identity is important for understanding how people act in the world. Among other questions around success, life-path selection and what it means to lead, they state that business schools play a role for students in answering the question 'Who am I?'. They argue that the modern-day business school serves more than a site of knowledge acquisition. Because of the demands of late modern contexts, students transform their identity through the learning journey. The business school is best seen today as an identity workspace where students do not just 'learn about' but 'learn to be'. This is a question not just of who one is, but who one might become (Khurana & Snook, 2011).

To do this important work of building relevant and empowering identity workspaces, business schools need tools for understanding our students beyond surveys that measure traits and motivations. McAdams (1996) demonstrated an important stream of psychology that explored not so much on the traits people 'have', but the goals, tasks, scripts and strategies that people formulate to 'do' things in a social context. An increasingly important way of understanding people is through seeing personality at three levels: traits, motives (personal concerns) and then one's life-story (McAdams, 1996). It is this final element that connects the person to the context more deeply. And it is this final element that is the focus of my discussion here. Who are MBA and business school students in a broader societal context?

This question throws up all kinds of interesting possibilities in relationship with my findings. For example, the finding around the importance of values that are connected with one's family of origin has implications for values-based leadership development (Copeland, 2014) and for values-based ethics (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Values are not self-located but can be considered part of the extended self (Eakin, 2008).

The same goes for findings on the importance of religiosity, faith and God. Spirituality has been strongly associated with organisational leadership (Fry, 2003). My work here shows the importance of this scholarship for leadership development in contexts like the one studied. I propose that unless business schools understand the role of religion, faith and God in the life-story and narrative identities of their students, these kinds of questions cannot be answered. There is emerging work on the importance of faith for leaders in the African context (Barnard, 2020; Namatovu, Dawa, Adewale & Mulira, 2018).

Barnard and Mamabolo (2019) found that "Western management literature seldom considers the role of faith in how executives fulfil their obligations. But on the African continent, faith is a key element of management" (p. 2). They found that African executives use their faith as a source of psychological capital, as a value system for servant leadership and as an informal institutional guide for action. There are many positives to these dynamics, with one negative being the risk of religion entrenching division. This study points to the importance of this line of research.

What if we considered it a step on the journey or a chapter in their story? The stories they tell, and the ingredients of the life-stories and their identities, are the crucial material required for them to write a story that has generative impact and a meaningful conclusion in later life (Erikson, 1950/1993; Kotre, 1999; Marcia, 1966).

For McAdams (1996) the purpose of adulthood is to use the material of one's youth in order to 'write' a story that one is proud of in old age. McAdams (1996) argued that many adults in their 20s and 30s focus their identity efforts on fashioning and refining their imagoes. Imagoes are like main characters with simplistic essences of identities. Imagoes include 'entrepreneur', 'active sportsman', 'new mother', 'loyal friend' or 'ambitious lawyer'. Imagoes are simplistic 'stock' characters that help to organise the self. They are similar to ideal selves or inner states.

People in their 20s and 30s have been found to focus on building a career, forming a family and establishing themselves in a range of communities of which they are a part. To do this, they have been found to make identity commitments to the main characters (imagoes) that they will become in a larger communal story. This is the age of many business school students enrolled in longer

programmes – especially MBA students. McAdams (1996) argues that our students will be concerned with communion and agency. How can a business school faculty help students build the capacity for communion and agentic action? The stories shared and analysed here give lots of material to work with. In terms of communion, they show the historic commitments to family. They also show the ways in which ancestors may have played a role in one's life and to whom one might be dedicated. The findings around how some students deploy scripts of royal-linked lineage or ancestral communal connection show how some students might connect communally. The storyline of 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' shows the potential for generativity in past lives and may be a symbolic anchor for our students in this life – showing how agency and communion may be integrated in action. The stories also provide nuanced material for considering agency. My findings show the importance of struggle, focus, discipline and success in lives lived. They show how agency interacts with structure and how success emerges through taking advantages of the opportunities that emerge, especially within education.

In terms of biographical work and narrative identity, McAdams (1996) would suggest that business school students in their 40s and 50s will be concerned with reconciling conflicting imagoes and bringing balance among competing dimensions of the self through larger integrative imagoes or identities. But periods of identity change and confusion will occur as life changes. So, these processes are uneven. Think of someone, for example, going through divorce or failing in their career.

Adults in their 40s and 50s have been found to be concerned with their legacy and what is labelled 'generativity'. To be generative is to leave something of value behind. It is to start considering how the story of one's life might end and what a good life will mean – as one will look back in old age. Not all endings are equal. Better endings have to do with symbolic immortality where something positive is generated for later generations.

Business schools have the potential to orient our students to the potential in their stories. We can help them complete a chapter within which the MBA sets the scene for latter chapters and the completion of the overall storyline and arch of their lives. This is a potentially fresh and productive approach that opens up all kinds of avenues for teaching to fulfil. I now explore the question of what life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students' narrative identities. I do this by fleshing out the potential implications of the six archetypal storylines.

6.3.2. The archetypal storylines and business school opportunities

I have shared a few thoughts on the potential of understanding our students' narrative identities in their social context. I now consider what life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools

more deeply consider their students' narrative identities? Story analysis and storyline themes have been shown to offer insight into MBA student experiences (Ruth, 2017). For scholars of business and business education, the six integrative storylines uncovered in this study have important implications for broader contextually relevant dimensions of personality.

I have identified six stories to describe how these students ended up in the MBA classroom and what has shaped them. Eakin (1999) suggests that we make our autobiographies not just with a sense of the present but in the context of hopes and plans for the future. The table below presents an interesting set of potential implications for the learning journey.

Table 14: Archetypal storylines and the potential implications for business schools

Archetypal storyline	Potential implication for hypothetical students	Implications for business school faculty and management
Leaving the village for the city	I am excited by this complex world and the opportunities it represents. I cannot wait to engage with others. But I am also substantively bruised by my experiences crossing boundaries and the associated prejudices and misunderstandings. I am searching for a better sense of myself and my roots in this diverse world and how I can live with diverse others.	This storyline points to the challenge of moving from an ethnocentric worldview to a more diverse perspective. Students like this need frameworks for how to cope with a world that is both bruising and expansive in the way it throws them into contexts of difference. They need ways to ensure that their prejudices do not overly shape their leadership. But also ways to potentially value the 'village' even as they lead in the 'city'. They may need ways to find their voice and constructive activism, especially if they are fighting for marginalised and prejudiced groups. Their anger and frustration at inter-group injustice will need to become the fuel rather than the fog in their leadership.
Building a foundation on the top of the mountain	I enter the classroom to complete a journey that my parents and/or grandparents began. Graduation is not the end of a two-year journey, but rather a 50-year or even 100-year journey. This degree is not just for me or my children, but for those who have come before me. I owe it to them. I will continue to focus and build on the foundation they have provided.	This storyline has foundational implications for career guidance, coaching and career-path navigation. If we do not see students as communal and collective beings, we risk asking the wrong questions. We also risk undermining their story writing process, which might, in the context of late modern centrifugal pressures, need affirming.
Breaking free from chains	I am excited by the MBA's potential to further liberate me and my family from poverty. I am building wealth and want to leave a legacy for those who come after me. I am burdened by the additional pressure from starting from nothing and having to make up for all the lost ground. A question I face, is "how can I make the best career moves?" What are the emerging career opportunities out there?	Students on this life-journey may be really interested in financial management content, especially over the longer term. They are also interested in the ways in which the world is evolving and where new opportunities are emerging for business development. They may be especially skilled and open to mentoring because they recognise what others have done for them.
Living on the border	I want to belong. I can see multiple perspectives. Do not try to put me in a box ... I am bigger than that. I am here to further grow my existing broad multi-cultural abilities, but I also want to know who I am.	The majority of the management scholarship on multi-culturalism sees students as coming from ethnocentric contexts but then navigating a global world that is different. But students might already come from a 'different' place. They might be managing an entirely different problem – how to build a coherent sense of self at the boundaries of different communities. This changes the reading list and the focus of courses.

Knife to the heart	I have had a number of difficult experiences. This world can be painful. It is for the brave and the courageous. I can be there for others who are going through something because I have been there before. I know that difficult times come and go ... I am open to a growth mindset, but I do not always embrace it. I hope there will be opportunities to continue to heal the wounds that I carry with me.	These students may need help to see the ways in which their experience of a negative chance encounter might flair up in the leadership. It might prevent them from seeing opportunities in case the wound is reopened.
Unstable boat in a stormy sea	I struggle with a damaged and difficult childhood and family system. I am here as someone trying to build a foundation for a different life to the one I grew up in. I am open to stability and a greater sense of healthy self. Questions that sit with me include: How can I raise a family well? How do I not pass on the pain of my past? What does it mean to be healthy?	These students are wide open - not only to the technical dimensions of the course but also the values and personal dimensions of the programme. They come as explorers and are open to new possibilities. They may need ways to leverage their own healing and their wounds to become better, more empathetic leaders.

I now discuss a number of key issues to elaborate on the table above.

In the story 'Leaving the village for the city', students encounter a much more diverse world and recognise their own ethnocentricity. These students are excited by this complex world and also bruised by its prejudices and misunderstandings. Questions for these students could be around: Who am I in this diverse world? How do I live with diverse others? What is my relationship with my cultural roots? There are pretty-standard established research lines and teaching materials associated with these questions. The scholarship on multi-culturalism and pluralism at global level often builds on Hofstede, Trompenaars, Triandis and the GLOBE studies (Triandis, 2001; Tung & Verbeke, 2010). But the orientation of much of this scholarship is at mono-cultural western students trying to understand differences. The orientation of this scholarship is rarely towards the cultural 'other' who is trying to navigate the western world. The assumption behind much of this scholarship is that the reader is part of the current 'norm' and needs to see the perspective of 'others'. But increasingly the people needing support and growth are the previous 'others' who are confronted by the 'norm'. This diversity scholarship is also rarely aimed at students 'living on the border' who bring complex hybrid identities to their lives and careers.

In the story 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain', the authors lived with and constructed a sense of themselves as inheriting legacy built on the work of previous generations. The students in this regard were indebted psychologically to those who come before. Their identities were not then isolated in a narrow, individualised self. They can be understood as extended selves (Eakin, 2008) with extended ownership of their relationships to intergenerational family. Students with the story 'Building a foundation on the top of the mountain' hope to achieve what their parents and grandparents could not. They are graduating not only themselves, but also their families. The degree belongs not only to the student, but also to those who have walked part of the journey before them. They are only the most recent runner in a long relay race. Such students might ask, not only, 'What do I want from my career?' but also 'How do I honour the legacy that my parents and grandparents have left me?'. This has foundational implications for career guidance, coaching and career-path navigation. For example, this storyline could relate to the concept of servant leadership (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

In the story 'Breaking free from the chains', students are the first in their family's history to be offered a life of economic opportunity. They are carrying difficult economic responsibilities and often caring in substantive ways for their direct and indirect families. This is a phenomenon known in South Africa as 'Black Tax' (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangle, 2018).

In the storyline 'Living on the border', students experience the tension of multiple salient identities and this is a deep part of who they are and what has shaped them. This will be both an empowering and a bruising experience. There may be a sense of part of themselves being cut off or a greater sense of integration and inclusion. I think here of the importance of scholarship on intersectionality and bridging leadership.

The students with the storyline 'Knife to the heart' are those for whom what is salient in their life-journey and that of their family are chance events that substantively changes the path they were on. These students may need to work through this pain to continue to remain open to change and growth. I think of the importance of scholarship on remaining open hearted (Heifetz & Linsky, 2006) and staying resilient (Thomas, 2008).

In the story 'Unstable boat in a stormy sea', students struggle with a childhood and family system that was damaged and difficult. The students sitting in front of the lecturer are not just a group of introverts or extraverts or motivated by certain key drives. They are in recovery from years of sustained childhood trauma. They are trying to build a life with missing elements. Future oriented questions for these students could include: How can I raise a family well? How can I continue to heal the wounds? I think here of the scholarship on wounded healers as leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).

Bringing this section of the discussion to a conclusion, business schools are a distinct and interesting site for adult learning (Alheit, 1994) and identity work (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). They are especially important considering they educate the next generation of business leaders and economic elites. I posed the question earlier: What life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students' narrative identities? I have identified interesting opportunities as highlighted in the table above. In the tradition of narrative, the purpose of adulthood is to use the material of one's youth in order to 'write' a story that one is proud of in old age. Business schools have the potential to orient our students to the potential in their stories. We can help them write great stories with their own life narratives.

7. Conclusion

This study examined key elements of 55 intergenerational life-stories of MBA students in South Africa. I set out to do this by employing the concept of narrative identity to understand the intergenerational life-stories. The study examined the essays as socially constructed stories that say something about societal history, but more importantly about the author's own self – their narrative identity.

The analysis included: shared themes, agency and structure dynamics, upward and downward intergenerational paths, unusual script elements and archetypal storylines. Narrative analysis provided a set of useful codes and approaches for examining selves in context. A few major elements of these findings were then compared with five autobiographical books by writers from a similar age cohort.

7.1. Contribution to late modernity and the self

The first contribution of the study was to bring a South African and Southern African perspective to the ongoing debate about the evolving nature of late modernity and the changing demands being placed on the self (Archer, 2007; Bauman, 2007; Beck et al., 2003; Bornman, 2003; Giddens, 1991). This is a valuable addition to post-colonial perspectives and adds crucial perspective to dominant theoretical trends. This is especially in the interplay of historically modern and late modern patterns of identity.

If the pressures on post-colonial selves are taken seriously, then simply sharing extracts of these stories (as they were written) is in itself valuable. Following Mbembe's (2002) call for a thickening of African self-storytelling, these stories go beyond the two main historic dimensions of African identity scholarship: the revolutionary and the traditionalist. In the simple telling and writing, a rich sense of selves becomes evident. But beyond the power and need for telling and witnessing, I identify a number of interesting themes and patterns.

I have shown that nuanced expansive and challenging demands of cross-boundary encounters are some of the late modern dynamics that are encountered. However, in the study context, there remain coherent themes in local identities and that 'modern' themes act as a centripetal force against late modern fragmentation.

Modern identity themes are visible in stories of achievement, personal advancement and the focus on education. These kinds of themes are often religiously linked. This is not surprising to scholars of Christianity and modernity in South Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Elphick & Davenport, 1997),

but should be taken seriously by those who might see 'highly religious' and 'ambitiously educated' as somewhat incompatible.

The stories include themes of boundary crossing and encountering difference – themes that would be expected in late modern scholarship (Archer, 2007; Giddens, 1991). These stories tell of the reduction in brutal physical oppression across generations – in this sense life may be getting better for the previously oppressed. There are also many stories that emerge about the expansive possibilities of diversity. But there still remain stories of lives wounded by ongoing prejudice. For example, a clear finding was how some women wrote of being raised without limits (like how a girl or woman should think or what she can achieve) in their home environment. But then these same stories also told of encountering gender prejudice as an adult – often in the workplace. This highlights ongoing risks (Beck et al., 2003) and greater choice or decision making (Giddens, 1991).

The general scholarship on evolving modernity and late modernity might miss, in its focus on the loosening of constraints, the continued importance of the family system in South and Southern Africa – in both social and psychological ways. Giddens (1991) acknowledges the way in which the structure of family survived the changes from tradition to the modern. This study affirms its ongoing importance.

Shifting stories that 'have us' to stories 'we have' can potentially enable collective autonomy. What is it that can now be held out in front of us and observed? Despite the pressures on selves, the themes and common storylines can be understood as thicker strands, both modern and late modern, in a somewhat fractured but still coherent fabric of the self. These thicker strands cut across one another and give the fabric of the self a sense of coherence. I see in this analysis a hybrid modern and late modern self as a potential way of engaging the local context. I am pointing to a fresh way to deploy 'autoplexy' – lean into coherent modern dimensions of the self, own them and make them visible. But also play with the late modern dynamics and openness that comes with cross-boundary dynamics. By honouring their own experience of the African modern, people can build firm enough ground to navigate the fluid complexity of African late modernity. If the world is evolving towards Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015) and if these social changes are situating the self in new settings and placing different demands on the self (Archer, 2007; Giddens, 1991), then these findings are important not just locally but globally.

7.2. Contribution to narrative identity scholarship

In terms of a second contribution to narrative identity theorising, I interpreted the stories as being more than historical accounts. They were interpreted as integral to the authors' sense of themselves. These stories constituted part of the authors' 'narrative identities' (McAdams, 1996; Ricoeur, 1991;

Somers, 1994). Identity in this context is understood as situated subjectivity and self-understanding (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

In terms of Marcia's stages, the authors are more likely to be in Moratorium, Foreclosure and Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966). The ambition and outward success evidenced in the groups' stories suggest that this group probably includes few 'refusers' or 'drifters'. It was clear in the findings that families matter in terms of the trajectories that shape a life-course. Extreme positions on the fluidity of late modernity and the individualisation of life do not stand up against the clear importance of the family. Families matter, especially when considered across larger periods of time – decades rather than years. Families can be seen as collective units that take advantage of opportunities within structural constraints. Families also sometimes constrain themselves. Agency, in the narrative identity scholarship, seems to be often conceptualised in individual terms (Lieblich et al., 2008; McAdams, 2001; Saldaña, 2009), yet, I argue from the stories here, that it can also be seen as a collective phenomenon. The introduction of the code of family-based agency is proposed for narrative analysis of these kinds of groups.

Furthermore, the identities of the authors bring the past into the present. In these stories, parents and grandparents (and more especially mothers and grandmothers) are often written about with gratitude for the positive shaping of intergenerational paths. They are often key actors in the positive turning points in an ancestral line. The authors in these stories honour them for this past – but also relate to them in the ongoing present. This is a really interesting narrative identity-related finding. A number of scholars undertaking narrative analysis and examining narrative identity have focused on agency (Lieblich et al., 2008; McAdams, 2001; Saldaña, 2009). They have tended to write about it in individualistic terms. Current theorising from narrative analysis can be enriched by taking account of 'agentic' collective intergenerational family efforts.

This finding will not be surprising for scholars of kin networks (Hogan, Hao & Parish, 1990), but it points to an understudied dimension of personal identity – individuals make decisions with imagined elder family members present. And it is the way people from the past live in the present that is an important potential contribution to theorising. There is an ongoing sense of duty and responsibility. There is an ongoing demand in the present to live up to their legacy. One implication in the academic university context is to more strongly foreground the reality that students coming to study are continuing an intergenerational path, not simply selecting the best course for themselves. And when they graduate and walk across the stage to be granted their degree, they are there partly through their own efforts, but substantively through the work of previous generations of people. Many people from these past generations will no longer be alive or physically present to witness this

important event – an event that is a result of what they started – but these influential family members are ‘alive’ and are totally present in the narrative identities of those crossing the stage¹⁶.

Further to the need for better vocabulary for dealing with family and agency dynamics, I also found that, in order to properly account for structure and agency dynamics, I needed to add the code of *God and faith* (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). The scholarship in the narrative identity tradition seldom directly mentioned God and faith as ‘real’ shaping forces. God and faith played an important role in the stories. God and faith are proposed as a way to enrich theorising and can be added to the existing coding frameworks of McAdams (2001) and Saldaña (2009) in order to further understand and interpret narrative identity. Without this vocabulary, existing frameworks were found to be inadequate.

It was also clear in this study that geography still matters. In these life-stories, the world was not flat (Friedman, 2005). This study affirms the view of Gieryn (2000) that ‘place’ is important in sociology. There are different defining geographic positions from which authors engage the world. Experienced geographies substantively shape what is possible within a story. If globalisation has been theorised as a nomadic wandering ‘between unconnected places’ (Le Pere & Lambrechts, 1999), then I found that in storytelling terms, spaces and places were deeply connected and their connections crucial. Increased social and physical mobility is placing new pressures on the self (Callero, 2003; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). In the narrative context, there was an ongoing semi-stable geographic nexus that shaped the kinds of stories that were told. The authors came from *somewhere* (not anywhere). They grew up *somewhere* (not anywhere). They moved from a specific *here* to a specific *there*. Moving places can be seen in the narrative tradition as an important shifting of the context in which a story is told (Silverman, 2011). Movement creates the potential for new storylines and new chapters in the book of life. Disruptive movements mean a change in direction - certain things happen in certain places and not in others. Changing places changes the outcome of entire stories. In terms of narrative analysis, geography and physical movement dramatically set the scene and scope of what unfolds.

While most of the stories, in their form, have a global familiarity, there were a few interesting elements (surprising too, if one is not from this context). A few authors explicitly and poetically positioned their writing within ancestral lines and royal lineage. A few others positioned their stories within grand communal and tribal ethnic narratives of place and values. Some authors drew on

¹⁶ Ever since this finding emerged in this study, I have personally not been able to attend a university graduation ceremony without imagining these past family members or ancestors standing quietly at the back of the hall, cheering and ululating. And I cannot but visualise the students acknowledging them through a wave or nod in recognition that this is their achievement too.

African praise poetry traditions in introducing themselves. Some ideas are raised in the analysis for the potential implications of these 'African' approaches. There is a need for more research in the African context on the narrative identity implications of 'far ancestral' and 'royalty-linked' script elements.

Finally, and importantly, I developed six archetypal storylines that seek to express what is present in the life-stories analysed in a narrative form. I have drawn these storylines from much of the earlier analysis, demonstrating the utility of coding approaches that link the temporal and the evaluative dimensions of life. I have also shown how those archetypal storylines occur in five autobiographical books. I have linked those storylines with their potential significance in the business school context, which I detail below.

7.3. Contribution to business school scholarship

As briefly mentioned earlier, I argue that business schools are an important location to study identity as they can be seen as identity-holding environments where adults return to ‘learn to be’ as much as to learn new skills (Khurana & Snook, 2011; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). A third objective of this study was to identify potential implications for business schools and similar institutional contexts of adult learning (Alheit, 1994).

Much of the business school and management education scholarship has focused on the employee’s relationship with the organisation in which they work. Or it has been oriented around career development (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016). I agree with those who state that business schools also act as identity workspaces with regard to dimensions of identity, including but also beyond, work and career development (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). I contribute to this body of scholarship by bringing a context perspective. Story analysis and archetypal storylines have been shown to offer insight into MBA student experiences. Through illustrating the way archetypal storylines might manifest in the business school context, I have built on Ruth (2017) and shown how, considering the locally-specific late modern pressures on the self, business schools and other institutions of adult development can further enhance their identity-work.

What life-long learning possibilities emerge if business schools more deeply consider their students’ narrative identities? I show how the six archetypal storylines identified offer a guide to working with adult learners in transitioning societies like South Africa. For example, in the story ‘Building a foundation on the top of the mountain’, the authors can be understood as linking their identity to continuing a legacy built on the work of previous generations. The authors felt a debt to those who came before. Such adult learners might ask, not only ‘What do I want from my career?’, but also ‘In my working life, how do I honour the legacy that my parents and grandparents have left me?’. This is but one example that has foundational implications for career guidance, coaching and career-path navigation.

7.4. Personal reflections

I have taught the MBA course in which these stories were written for the last ten years. Every year I have read hundreds of stories like the ones here. I am always struck by their depth. Years ago, when I started this inquiry, I saw it as somewhat similar to an archaeological dig. With my scholarly hat on, I did not know what I would find until I began to look. This made it hard to develop a research proposal that had detailed questions. It also required me to summarise a wide expanse of potentially relevant literature. It was only after clearing away the sand from the dig site and digging below the surface of the 55 life-stories (and the five books), that I was able to explore their significance.

Archaeologists dig with a huge amount of care. They know they have a precious site that they need to look after if they are to find anything important. I tried to dig carefully - knowing that I am working with lives that matter. I kept a journal during the early phase of this project as a reflexive process. I wrote then that *"There was always a sense of deep privilege at receiving a glimpse into the worlds of my students and their families"*.

I am reminded in these closing reflections of Frank (2011) and his interest in why someone selects a story. The question can be turned back to the researcher. Why have I selected this project? I wrote in the early days of this project a part-response to this question: *"Is it not my own desire to be human and to find myself in the context of the South African journey?"*

Frank proposed that his best work was done when stories chose him, rather than him choosing the stories. If these stories chose me, what have I experienced and learned? Reading these stories is like opening up worlds that were not visible before. It is like turning on the lights in fifty-five previously dark rooms. Informed by Dialogical Narrative Analysis (Frank, 2011), I close on a more personal note. For Frank (2011) research is the start of a conversation, rather than the end of one. What conversation do I want to start?

In the university and business school context, I hope this study can remind us about the beauty lying in the rich diversity of our study body. I hope it can reveal important dimensions of the successful and occasionally pained students with whom we share a time and space. I hope it can remind us of the differences and the similarities. For teaching faculty, I hope this study brings a little heartfelt sociological imagination for the historical and social realities that are ever present but not immediately visible when we stand on the classroom floor, and look out, chalk in hand, at the faces in front of us. How did all of our students end up in the room? We know so little of their life-journey and the life-journeys of their families. If we only knew their stories – we could accompany them on their journey. We could provide a supportive space for their deep hopes to manifest and their best future story to be written. The purpose of adulthood is to use the material of one's youth in order to

‘write’ a story that one is proud of in old age. In this regard, mid-career learning institutions, such as business schools, have the potential to orient the students to the potential in their stories. We can help them write great stories with their own life narratives.

I am aware that there may be some conditions in which the tools of a PhD study and the searching for cross-cutting themes might diminish the very specific humanity of the people in these stories. It may ‘average out’ and strip the appropriately embedded emotional and human core from a story. I have gone back and forth on this. One day, tending towards the poetic and the intuitive, and the next, being pulled to more structured qualitative approaches. I hope I have done justice to both impulses.

What emerges from these stories is the deeply humanising character of story writing, and even more so, story reading. The people in these stories, many of whom have passed on, have been able to live again in my heart and mind. These are the stories of real, complex, diverse, pain-feeling, change-making human beings who have emerged to live again once more, from behind the thin veil of the past. It has been an honour to come to know you all.

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