

Claude-Hélène Mayer
Zoltan Kovary
Editors

New Trends in Psychobiography



Springer

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Foreword

I am delighted to celebrate the publication of *New Trends in Psychobiography*. The life historical investigation of creative people—exceeding the Cartesian split between subject and object—represents the unity of life and thought, the principle of all psychobiographical researches. I've been interested in psychobiography for more than a half century. When I began my graduate work at Harvard in 1965, Harvard was the first and last stronghold of a traditional academic personality psychology known as personology. This was a tradition established by Henry Murray in the 1930s. Its basic principle was that academic knowledge of human personality can be achieved by the systematic in-depth study of the individual person, this is a claim that is odd with academic psychology going back to then, and it is still the case. In 1972, when I joined the faculty of Rutgers University, we tried to re-establish the tradition of personology at Rutgers. Our effort failed, but the one concrete result of those efforts that George Atwood and I (George was on the faculty at that time) was that we embarked to plan a series of psychobiographical studies of the personal subjective origins of the theoretical systems of Freud, Jung, Wilhelm Reich, and Otto Rank. These studies formed the basis of our first book, "Faces in a cloud. Subjectivity in personality theory," published in 1979 but actually completed in 1976. In the conclusion of that book, we surmised that since theories of personality can be shown to be shaped by the subjective world of the theorist, what psychoanalysis needed was a theory of subjectivity itself. We laid down the principles of such a theory that we called psychoanalytic phenomenology. Since then, we have done psychobiographical studies of philosophers like Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and lastly Heidegger. Our study of Heidegger, especially Heidegger's descent into Nazism, was published in different volumes in recent years, for example in a book edited by Zoltan Kovary, one of the editors of this current volume. So, I am very grateful to him and Claude-Hélène

Mayer, and all the other authors of this book for expanding and enriching the tradition of psychobiography—psychobiography by the way as an instance of personology. So, I wish them all the best with this wonderful volume.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: New Perspectives in Psychobiography



Claude-Hélène Mayer and Zoltan Kovary

Abstract This chapter is the introductory chapter to the book “New Trends in Psychobiography”. It provides the readers with an insight in the topic of psychobiography, presenting different phases of development of psychobiography throughout the past decades. It then introduces the various chapters published in the book, their contents and aims and thereby provides the reader with a preface of new trends theories and methods in psychobiography.

Psychobiography is the systematic application of scientific psychology in the interpretation of life and works of significant people like artists, scientists, philosophers, activists or politicians. Its history goes back to the beginning of 20th century; that was the time—in 1910—when Sigmund Freud created the first ever written psychobiography, “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood”. Although we can identify some antecedents from earlier ages (like historical and literatural biographies or pathographies written by psychiatrists), it was Freud’s work that introduced the modern psychological perspective in life history analysis. It is also important to mention, that psychobiography emerged from the investigation of outstanding artistic creativity, which is still one of the most frequent topic of these explorations. After Freud’s initiation—from the 1920s to the 1950s—psychobiography was a popular research method among psychoanalysts, but life historical approach also influenced the unfolding “idiographic” tradition of personality psychology in the US including G. W. Allport, Henry A. Murray and others. From the 1950s life historical-holistic

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approach went out of style in personality research, and even psychoanalysts began to criticize the usage of psychoanalytic ideas in non-clinical situations.

The next few decades (1950–1980) included the “age of stagnation” for psychobiography, except from the outstanding works of Erik H. Erikson, who improved this method in many ways. From the 1980s—according to the success of narrative psychology—we can experience the return of life historical perspective in personality psychology—supported by some welcome changes in psychoanalysis (self-psychology, the introduction of phenomenology and hermeneutics by Stolorow and Atwood, etc.) and in philosophy (the narrative identity theory of Paul Ricoeur). Modern day psychobiography therefore is much different from the classical version: theoretically it is more eclectic, using different trends of personality psychology, its research focus is widened, it is more accurate concerning source criticism, data handling, reflecting on the process of interpretation, validation and on the personal involvement of the psychobiographer. In 2005, the first synthesis of contemporary psychobiography was born: W. T. Schultz edited “Handbook of Psychobiography” featuring the most prominent US authors of the field.

Since the publishing of that book, thirteen years have gone by. Psychobiography became much more accepted by the science of psychology, and articles and monographs were published all over the world. The editors and the authors of this volume thought that it was time to collect all the authors and researchers of this developing and growing field again, and create an international volume. That is how “New Perspectives in Psychobiography” was born. The current book is divided in four main themes. Theme 1 is “Cornerstones of Psychobiography”, Theme 2 is “Theoretical, Methodological and Conceptual Approaches in Psychobiography”, while Theme 3 is “Psychobiographies on Selected Individuals”. Theme 4 presents the authentic voices of selected outstanding contemporary psychographers in interview.

Theme 1 presents **cornerstones of the discourses of contemporary psychobiography**, such as basic principles and criticism, selected perspectives and ethics.

Theme 2 presents and discusses **theoretical, methodological and conceptual approaches in psychobiography**, including nine chapters, including epistemology, systems psychodynamics, positive psychology movements, or phenomenological analysis.

Theme 3 refers to **psychobiographies on selected individuals**, such as medical practitioners, writers, poets and philosophers, painters, couturiers, musicians, politicians, and religious leaders. Both themes present new perspectives in terms of psychobiographies either with regard to theory, methodology or concepts or relating to new insights into lives that have not or hardly been explored before with regard to selected aspects.

Finally, in **Theme 4**, selected **contemporary psychographers** are interviewed to comment on key questions in psychobiography.

James Anderson and William L Dunlop open up *Theme 1* by discussing the problems of psychobiography by providing a guide for executing psychobiography. This chapter focuses on the purpose of psychobiography, looking at the inner world of the individual and critical aspects that need to be considered in psychobiographical research. The authors provide guidelines on how theory in psychobiography should

be used and emphasise that the researchers should be aware of their interpretations and that cultural embeddedness should play a crucial role in the application and interpretation of psychological concepts and theories in psychobiography. **William McKinley Runyan** closes Theme 1 of this book. This chapter reviews the adventures of an advocate of the study of individual lives interacting with supporters and opponents of the project through years as a graduate student at Harvard from 1969 to 1975, and as a professor at UC Berkeley from 1979 to 2010. He also demonstrated that individual life histories are relevant in understanding psychologists like Freud, Horney or Skinner and philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Michel Foucault. He found that there may be more personal dimensions in statistics than assumed; examples discussed here are Sir Ronald Fisher and Jerzy Neyman. **Joseph G. Ponterotto** and **Jason D. Reynolds** open the discourse on ethics and trends in best practices in psychobiography. Ethics, as they say, should be central to the psychobiography research plan and execution. They introduce a best practice ethics model for psychobiographers that is infused throughout the research, writing, and publication process. Addressed are ethical considerations at each stage of the research process, including: selecting one's psychobiographical research subject; navigating the initial proposal review and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process; considering informed consent procedures and options. **Robert F. Mullen's** chapter deals with the "Abstractions of intent: How a Psychobiography grapples with the fluidity of truth". Psychobiography, as he claims, uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. It is *phenomenological* because it presupposes that the issues under investigation are best understood from a perspective inclusive of the subject's personal, subjective and phenomenological world. The in-depth case study is also "*clinical and interpretive*": an accompanying facet of a carefully psychobiography is the hermeneutic circle, another component susceptible to error due to the varying definitions and understandings that accompany all manner of texts.

In Theme 2, **Zoltán Kőváry** focuses on the epistemological background of psychobiography, presenting that a psychobiographical research is based on the same foundations as the everyday work of the psychologist and also supports her/his self-knowledge by exploring self-involvement. That is why psychobiography can fill the gap between academic psychological research and practice, it might help the development of psychology students, and by unfolding the epistemological and ontological background of "studying individuality" can support the entire science of psychology to clarify its own "real" subject, and to become a "rigorous" science on its own. **Frans Cilliers** and **Claude-Hélène Mayer** take systems psychodynamic perspectives into account and emphasise that these perspectives have become vibrant in psychological and interdisciplinary research. The authors explain that the SP perspective, with its roots in psychoanalysis, fosters an understanding of the dynamics between individuals and system elements across the lifespan and might contribute to a deeper understanding of the (un-)conscious dynamics within individuals and systems, such as the environment, the family and organisations. Through the focus on the individual and the system, new insights into unconscious and often latent dynamics emerge and are discussed in this chapter.

Zelda Gillian Knight discusses the case for the psychobiography as a hermeneutic case study method. With an emphasis on life-narrative, psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study requires a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis; for this she presents a model of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in the context of psychobiography. Furthermore, the notion of the researcher's unconscious bias is introduced and included in this new method of analysis; it is termed the 'researcher's transferential implant'. **Claude-Hélène Mayer** and **Michelle May** present positive psychology theories which focus on positive, holistic and health related concepts within psychology. The authors explore the concepts of positive psychology movements (PP1.0 and PP2.0) and provide guidance for using positive psychology theories in psychobiographical research. They argue that PP2.0 can be particularly contributive to new perspectives psychobiographical research. **Barbara Burnell**, **Carla Nel**, **Paul J. P. Fouché** and **Roelf van Niekerk** are focusing on research suitability indicators in the study of exemplary lives and thereby show guidelines for the selection of the psychobiographical subject. This chapter aims to address the objectivity challenges arising from possible researcher bias during subject selection. The authors propose employing a suitability indicators approach to eugraphic subject selection by considering contextual factors and utilizing the psychosocial concept of generativity in its broadest sense. They conclude with the application of these guidelines to the study of two South Africans who, despite several striking differences, had a shared socio-historical context and generative focus, namely their opposition to the apartheid system.

In her chapter **Ágnes Bálint** argues that "Less is more and more is different: distinction between high resolution and low resolution psychobiography". She places the issue of psychobiography into a broad epistemological context, and by introducing the metaphor of digital image resolution, she makes a distinction between high and low resolution biographies. In case of high resolution psychobiographies biographers rely mainly on the bottom-up constructive processes, low resolution psychobiography, on the other hand, is narrowed in terms of content and focus. Details are not relevant unless they serve the aim of outlining a meaningful picture. The grappling with the fluidity of truth is the main topic in this chapter.

The chapter of **Carol du Plessis** and **Christopher R. Stones** illustrates how a 'forgotten' psychological theory (script theory, based on the work of Tomkins) can serve as an extremely useful explanatory paradigm for a complex religious figure. The case study focuses on Gordon Hinckley (b. 1910, d. 2008), who remains a prominent figure in contemporary Mormonism. Using Tomkins' script theory in conjunction with a psychobiographical method and the analysis of data gathered from published speeches, this study explores Hinckley's personality structure and identifies three core psychological scripts.

In *Theme 3* various authors describe life span and selected aspects of the lives of writers, poets and philosophers and other culturally significant individuals. The section is opened by **Márta Csabai** who writes about the case of Etty Hillesum in the time of Holocaust. Almost four decades after her death in Bergen-Belsen, the young Dutch woman's diaries were published in 1981 and since then have received intense attention from the general public, and some reflections from philosophical,

theological and psychological theorizing as well. The diaries reveal a deep struggle for personal independence against the unprecedented threats of the strengthening Nazi oppression. **Claude-Hélène Mayer** explores the career development of the world-known writer Paulo Coelho. The study is based on a single case and uses the methodological frame of Dilthey's modern hermeneutics. First- and third-person documents were collected and analysed through content analysis, focusing on particular events in the writer's life. The analysis shows that Coelho's life only partly matches with the proposed career development model and expands it through concepts of spirituality, calling, life goals and serendipitous career development events. **Rainer Matthias Holm-Hadulla** presents Johann Wolfgang Goethe's creative relationship with his mother under psychobiographical perspectives. According to him Goethe is the ideal case for psychobiography because he had a unique ability to describe his personal development and the psychic crises he experienced. He developed strategies to solve emotional problems that are of practical use till today, because his ability to remain dedicated to life and to his creativity, despite severe emotional crises, is of special psychological interest.

In the next chapters we can read the analysis of great thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Remaining in the field of existentialism, **Tamás Tényi** and **Dalma Tényi** discuss Dostoevsky and Nietzsche and the contradictory nature of the self related to their works and life history. The authors deal with the curious and uncanny parallel between a dream recounted in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the famous Turin incident from Nietzsche's life shortly before his psychotic breakdown. Their psychoanalytic interpretation focuses on the articulation of the contradictoriness and multiplicity of the self. The title of **George E. Atwood's** chapter is "Time, Death, Eternity: Imagining the Soul of Johann Sebastian Bach", which describes a search for the soul of the composer, as it is expressed and symbolized in his music. The chapter—according to the author, who is a pioneer in the field of modern psychobiography—is less a scholarly argument and more a reverie, almost a dream, about Bach the man, and Bach the child. The author's goal is to create a fantasy embracing and interconnecting what is known of his life and of the patterns in his music. The chapter also contains in interview with him conducted by Penelope Starr-Karlin. **Athena Androutsopoulou, Evgenia Dima, Sofia Papageorgiou** and **Theodora Papanikolaou** reconstruct love, play and work as a central theme in painter Georgia O'Keefe's early and late memories. They explain what the concepts of love, play and work mean in the context of "Georgia". She thereby aimed at constructing herself in terms of making satisfactory meaning. The authors argue for a positive psychology perspective and provide the reader with some clinical implications. **Leandi Verwey** and **Zelda Gillian Knight** lead us to formerly unexplored territory of creativity. Their chapter is about 20th century couturier and fashion icon, Coco Chanel. This chapter is an example of psychobiographical research in that it consciously and deliberately employs the object relations theory of Donald Winnicott to explore the life narrative of the selected subject. According to this the chapter examines Chanel's life in a new way by considering her development psychologically, and the formation of her identity and the impact that this had on how she related to her Self and the world.

A novel and much interesting topic is **James L. Kelley's**, who is writing about the notorious Jim Jones; he and over 900 of his followers perished in what has been called "The Jonestown Massacre." This study uses methods of psychobiography and objection relations theory to account for Jones' lifelong ambivalence toward those to whom he acted as caregiver. The author proposes a psychological schema he names "nurture failure" to account for Jim Jones' style of leadership, which mixed solicitude with violence in the context of a religious organization that promised to right all of society's wrongs.

Amadeusz Citlak is introducing the "Lvov-Warsaw School" of psychobiography in his chapter. In the beginning of the 20th century, the philosophical-logical Lvov-Warsaw School was also a psychological school in which several interesting psychological theories were developed, including the theory of actions and products of Kazimierz Twardowski and the theory of cratism (the theory of power) of Władysław Witwicki. The latter created psychobiographies about Socrates and Jesus Christ, and the author's intention is to make a certain verification of Witwicki's assumptions.

Roelf van Niekerk, Tracey Prenter and Paul J. P. Fouché reflect on the life of Christiaan Barnard and the build-up to the first heart transplant in South Africa. Although it is based on a formal, academic psychobiography, this chapter is an attempt to formulate a non-academic psychobiography of Barnard's career. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Barnard's general career development, this chapter aims to illuminate the specific events and experiences that culminated in the first human heart transplant.

A psychobiographical portrait of enigmatic poet, academic, political activist, philosopher and social worker, Adam Small's Eriksonian ego-strength or virtues is shown by **Paul J. P. Fouché, Pravani Naidoo and Theo Erns Botha**. They develop new perspectives by drawing the portrait across pre-, middle- and post-apartheid eras. Alexander's psychobiographical indicators of salience and a psychosocial-historical conceptualization were used to identify and analyze significant biographical evidence on Small's life. The findings indicate that Small developed hope, will, purpose and competency as ego-strengths or virtues throughout his first four Eriksonian stages.

In the chapter "A Reflection on the Psychosocial-historical Turning Points in the Life of Sol Plaatje: Co-founder of the African National Congress" by **Crystal Welman, Paul J. P. Fouché and Roelf van Niekerk** aimed to identify the significant psychosocial-historical turning points in the life of enigmatic multilingual political activist and journalist Sol Plaatje (1876–1932), utilizing the lens of Erik Erikson's theory of lifespan development. The findings highlight significant psychosocial-historical events or turning points in the life of Plaatje. **Paul J. P. Fouché** with **Tracey Prenter and Roelf van Niekerk** present a paper about South-African born international movie-star Charlize Theron. This chapter represents an attempt to formulate a popular, non-academic psychobiography of Charlize Theron. In the academic psychobiography, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development was employed as the theoretical framework to conceptualise the personality development of this exceptional individual. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Charlize's personality development, this chapter aims to focus attention on the course of development that culminated in the award of an Oscar to a South African raised in a

home environment marred by conflict and violence. Last, but not least, the chapter of **Sharon Johnson** presents insights into psychobiography as an effective methodology to work with young adults in South Africa. In this chapter, the advances applied aspects of psychobiography are shown and discussed, presenting insights into the life story of a young individual living in South Africa. The question of defining psychobiography and biographical life studies is explored in this chapter.

The book closes with *Theme 4*, the presentation of interview excerpts of extraordinary contemporary psychobiographers, such as Jim Anderson, William McKinley Runyan, Joseph G. Ponterotto, Dan McAdams and Jefferson Singer, conducted by **Claude-Hélène Mayer**. These psychobiographers respond to questions relating to the future of psychobiography, the differences of biography and psychobiography, psychoanalysis and psychobiography and contemporary psychobiographical research.

This short overview of the content of this book demonstrates that this new book is trying to cover many of the territories of 21st century psychobiography, intending to introduce new ones as well. It also aims at providing directions for future research and teaching using the psychobiographical method. Psychobiography is developing dynamically, and we really hope that this volume, “New Trends in Psychobiography” will support this development that will lead to the comprehensive recognition of this outstanding psychological method all over the world.

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Part I
Cornerstones of Psychobiography

Chapter 2

Executing Psychobiography



James William Anderson and William L. Dunlop

Abstract In examining the problems of psychobiography and providing a guide for executing psychobiography, we begin by looking at its purpose: to gain a greater understanding of the biographical subject, to get access to the subject's inner world, to learn why the subject thinks and behaves as she or he does. Theoretical concepts are useful because they alert the psychobiographer to possible patterns in the subject's life. But the greatest danger is foisting theory onto the subject. Instead theory should open up, not close down; provide new questions, not easy answers; complicate, not simplify; produce possibilities, not reductions. Thorough research is the basis of psychobiography; the psychobiographer relies on material that brings one closest to the subjects, such as diaries, letters, and autobiographical writings. The subject's dreams, fantasies, and fiction also have a special value. Psychobiographers have the challenge of using their empathy and identification with subjects in order to understand subjects deeply while also being aware of how they themselves may slant their interpretations because of their feelings about the subjects. Knowledge of the subject's culture is necessary, especially when it differs markedly from that of the psychobiographer. The cultural factor is especially sensitive in psychobiographical writing because psychological concepts, developed for one society, may not apply well to another society.

Keywords Problems of psychobiography · Theoretical concepts of psychobiography · Subject's inner world

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2.1 Introduction

It has not escaped us that our title “executing psychobiography” can be read in a way we did not intend, as meaning: “killing off or liquidating psychobiography.” Numerous critics have been hostile to psychobiography for a simple reason, that many studies are deficient due to factors such as inadequate research or a dogmatic application of theory foisted onto the subject’s life. Aware of those critiques, a reader might well think, “At last, here is a chapter advocating that we get rid of psychobiography.” That reader will be disappointed. While we recognize that many published psychobiographies suffer from substantial shortcomings, our intention is not to argue that psychobiography should be abandoned. Rather, the existence of these faulted works, combined with the many misconceptions about this discipline, led us to write this study, which is meant as an exploration of the problems of psychobiography and a guide to *executing*, in the sense of doing or carrying out, psychobiography proficiently.

Our chapter draws and expands on earlier studies of the methodology of psychobiography, in particular, those of Anderson (1981a, 1981b, 2003a), Runyan (1982), Elms (1994), Schultz (2005c), Kőváry (2011), and Ponterotto (2014). We have organized our study as an exploration of five topics: the use of theory, the nature and gathering of research evidence, interpretation of that evidence, the psychobiographer’s relationship with the subject, and the impact of culture. All of these topics rest on an understanding of the purpose of psychobiography, and so, after an introductory illustration, we try to answer the question, “What does psychobiography mean to accomplish?”

2.1.1 An Instructive Illustration: Ogilvie on James Barrie

Psychologist Ogilvie (2004, 2005) sought an example of a literary figure who could be understood according to classical psychoanalytic theory. Knowing something about the life of James Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, Ogilvie considered using that author as his example. Peter Pan, in his first appearance in Barrie’s writing, is a part-human creature, formerly a child, who escaped from his home and lives on an island nearby. Granted a wish, he flies back to visit his mother several times, but ultimately he becomes locked out and cannot return to her. From the window he can see her curving her arm as if she is lovingly imagining holding a small child.

Ogilvie states that the likely psychoanalytic explanation is obvious. Namely, that Barrie wrote the story based on his having been “displaced” by another child “who became the center of love and attention that previously had been showered upon him” (Ogilvie, 2004, p. 49). The story of Peter Pan “gives expression to his sense of betrayal” (Ogilvie, 2004, p. 50). The next step, thought Ogilvie, was to check the family records; might Barrie have been in the oedipal period of 3 to 5 years of age when a sibling was born? He was. Perfect.

Except for one problem. Upon looking closely at Barrie's life, Ogilvie found that there was a far better explanation for Barrie's creation of the scene with Peter Pan. When Barrie was six years old, his brother David, seven years his elder, died in a skating accident. Barrie's mother, traumatized, fell into a severe depression from which she never recovered. Barrie's childhood was dominated by his attempt to connect with, enliven, and interest his mother. In time he began telling her stories, and his writing, notes Ogilvie, stems in part from his desire to entertain her. Ogilvie concludes that the scene with Peter Pan trying to get close to his mother makes sense as an expression of the actual relationship Barrie is known to have had with his mother: Barrie wanted intimacy with his mother but felt blocked to some extent by her tie to her dead son.

Ogilvie's adventure in studying James Barrie illustrates a number of the main themes of this chapter on the writing of psychobiography. A psychobiographer must be careful not to foist a theory onto the subject, as Ogilvie considered doing at first. Instead, high-quality psychobiography stems from in-depth research. Interpretations work best when they emerge from the evidence. Theoretical concepts, though, can offer guidance, especially if used lightly rather than dogmatically. Ogilvie relies on such a concept: namely, that creative work stems from the author's inner world. Ogilvie ends up arguing persuasively that Barrie's imagination, as expressed in his writing on Peter Pan, maintained intimate ties with the author's earlier experience.

2.1.2 Psychobiography as an Exploration of the Subject's Inner World

The purpose of psychobiography is to use psychology in gaining a deeper understanding of the person whose life one is studying (see Kőváry, 2019). Psychobiographers seek to know why people think and act as they do, and they try to get at the individual's inner world. Psychology has long known that people not only hide much about themselves from others but they also hide much from themselves. The dual challenge for psychobiographers is to get underneath the image the subjects present to others and also to penetrate into the realm that contains that of which subjects are unaware in themselves.

A focus on the inner world directs psychobiographers to hone in on the subjectivity of the person we are studying. Psychobiographers want, for example, to discover, what the person thinks of as the truth, not the so-called objective truth that is supported by facts.

German historian Waite (1977), when he took on the grave question of Adolf Hitler's fanatical anti-Semitism, was aware of giving priority to the subjectivity of the person he was studying. Scholars have tried to track down the possibility that Hitler's maternal grandfather might have been a Jew. There is evidence, not definitive, that Hitler's grandmother worked as a servant in the house of a wealthy Jew and became pregnant while unmarried; her employer may have been the father.

Waite (1977) notes that while in power Hitler promulgated a law banning Jews from employing Gentile servants. He flew into a rage several times when Catholic household servants were mentioned. He directed the Gestapo to conduct a secret investigation of his genealogy, presumably with the hope that the findings would prove he did not have Jewish blood. One of his greatest concerns was that the Aryan race would suffer from “blood poisoning” because of the Jews living among them. He seemed to fear his own blood was tainted, as he frequently used leeches and directed his physician to remove some of his blood with a syringe. All of these behaviors could be accounted for by a belief Hitler had that his grandfather was Jewish. Waite further speculates that Hitler relied on the defense of projection; he placed parts of himself onto the Jews as a way of trying to rid himself of those parts. He ranted against Jews for having bodily odors and large noses; he was concerned about his own bodily odors and large nose. From an early age, as extensive evidence shows, Hitler considered himself to be inferior, unlikable, even monstrous. By becoming history’s most virulent anti-Semite, he declared in a sense: “It is the Jews who are depraved, not I.”

There are complex causes of Hitler’s anti-Semitism, not the least of which was the atmosphere of Vienna when he was a young man; hatred of Jews surrounded him. Waite takes into account those factors. But he argues that a key element is Hitler’s suspicion of having Jewish blood. Whether or not the dictator had Jewish ancestry counts for little; what matters is his belief on some level that he did.

Edel (1979), who wrote a psychologically informed biography of Henry James, underlines the value of getting at “the figure under the carpet, the evidence in reverse of the tapestry, the life-myth of a given mask” (p. 26). We all create an “inner myth,” Edel (1979) claims, “the myth that tells us we have some being, some selfhood, some goal, something to strive for beyond the fulfillments of food or sex or creature comforts” (p. 28).

While Edel describes the concept of the life myth, psychological researchers working in the field of narrative psychology have gone farther in producing the related but more developed concept of narrative identity (also called life story), which refers to “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to provide his or her life with unity, purpose, and meaning” (McAdams, 2015, p. 250; also see McAdams & McLean, 2013). These researchers have shown the interpretive operations people use in deriving meaning from memories (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), the developmental milestones involved in the development of narrative identity (McAdams, 2015, p. 253), and how “gender, ethnicity, race, and social class shape the process of constructing narrative identity” (McAdams, 2015, p. 254). Psychobiographers, in exploring the way in which their subjects gain meaning by developing an inherent interpretation of their lives, can draw on the extensive knowledge psychologists have generated about how narrative identity operates.

William Todd Schultz in his psychobiography of Truman Capote illuminates Capote’s life myth or life story. Although often viewed as small, effeminate, and weak, Capote saw himself as powerful and capable of getting revenge when he was hurt or underestimated. As Schultz (2011b) notes, “Words would become his weapons. With words Capote made himself mighty” (p. 10). When Capote published

portions of *Answered Prayers*, his work in which he revealed embarrassing information about various socialites who had confided in him, those affected were disturbed and angry. “I can’t understand why everybody’s so upset,” Capote claimed, “What did they think they had around them, a court jester? They had a writer” (Schultz, 2011b, p. 10). Capote’s life myth was that he was a mighty writer who could and would hurt others when he wanted to.

Schultz also talks about a negative view Capote had of himself. If we adopt Edel’s “life myth” as a conception of one’s power and potential, then we should add something like a “vulnerability conception” to describe a view of self that captures one’s fears, fragilities, and critical evaluations of oneself. Schultz (2011b) describes what he calls Capote’s “ouch script.” According to this script, Capote, in Schultz’s words, believes that inevitably

[h]e seeks love, he tries to make himself as lovable as possible, but what he finds is hurt, disappointment, and betrayal. (p. 45)

We recommend too that the psychobiographer not only search for the life myth and the vulnerability conception but also analyze the dynamic relationship between the two. With Capote, for example, it is clear that he uses his sense of power as a writer in the service of protecting himself against the fears he has when he sees other as turning against him and harming him.

2.1.3 *What Theoretical Concepts to Use?*

Psychobiographers rely on theoretical concepts, which assist them in understanding the inner world of the subject. These concepts in essence describe patterns that apply to many people. Here are three examples from among dozens of concepts.

1. Sibling rivalry. As we shall see, Edel argued that this concept applies to the brothers William and Henry James.
2. Attachment and loss. Bowlby (1991), the founder of attachment theory, wrote a psychobiography of Charles Darwin. Bowlby suggests that Darwin’s persistent depression stemmed from the combination of his early loss of his mother (when he was eight years old), his having little opportunity to mourn her death, and his receiving inadequate substitute care.
3. Nuclear script (a concept from Tomkins, 1987). Singer (2016), in his penetrating psychobiography of Robert Louis Stevenson, explains that the novelist had a nuclear script that formed the basis for his creating the account of divided personality depicted in the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The elements of the novelist’s script, according to Singer, were:

his desire to engage in pleasure, his self-loathing for this indulgence, his subsequent efforts to justify his pleasure-seeking by questioning the hypocrisy of his Calvinist upbringing, and then his reversal back to reverence of the life of mature honor and moral decency.

The upstanding Dr. Jekyll and the immoral, pleasure-seeking Mr. Hyde are an expression of Stevenson's personal script.

In an article on best practices in psychobiography, Ponterotto (2014) takes the position that a variety of approaches, including work that is based on quantitative analysis, can result in sound psychobiography. We do not disagree with him, but, because of our emphasis on gaining access to the subject's inner world, we point out the advantages of a particular approach. We argue that the concepts just described, as well as other concepts that are valuable for psychobiographers, rest on what we call the *psychodynamic hypothesis*: it states that forces operating largely out of awareness produce many of a person's thoughts and behaviors. While Stevenson knew of his conflicts, it was these conflicts percolating in the recesses of his mind that played a central role in his creation of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

For an illustration of the necessity of the psychodynamic hypothesis, we turn to the autobiography of B. F. Skinner, arguably the most important developer of behavioral psychology. In the second volume of his three-volume account of his life, Skinner (1979) describes his reaction after a lover, whose first name began with the letter N, broke up with him: "For a week I was in almost physical pain, and one day I bent a wire in the shape of an N, heated it with a Bunsen burner, and branded my left arm. The brand remained clear for years" (p. 137).

Skinner offers no explanation, probably because he realizes that the behavioral psychology that he promulgated cannot make sense of such an incident. Without more information, we cannot provide a definitive psychodynamic interpretation, but we can suggest some plausible possibilities. Unconsciously he may have felt that the branding would keep this person, who had abandoned him, with him, and at the same time the pain from the burning may have hurt less than the emotional pain and hence may have seemed preferable. Whatever the explanation, it is undeniable that his behavior was unconsciously motivated; Skinner's not believing in psychoanalytic psychology did not keep him from behaving in the way psychoanalytic theory says people behave.

Still, we have the question of how to decide what to use from among the myriad theoretical concepts provided by psychologists. We offer five guidelines.

First, we recommend that psychobiographers become familiar with a wide range of approaches. It used to be that Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson were the thinkers most relied on by psychobiographers. Observing that contemporary psychoanalysts in their clinical work had become far more influenced by later analytic writers, I (the first author of this chapter) suggested that psychobiographers also might turn to post-Eriksonian theory (Anderson, 2003b). I described the approaches of Donald W. Winnicott, Heinz Kohut, and Otto Kernberg and how their concepts could be used in life studies.

Second, Kohut (1982, p. 396) made a distinction between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts. There was a similar movement in the second half of the Twentieth Century to move away from metapsychology and instead to rely on what has been called clinical theory (see Holt, 1981). The idea is to avoid grand theories, such as Freud's model of id, ego, and superego and Carl G. Jung's postulation

of the collective unconscious, and to draw on concepts that clinicians frequently see as applying to their patients.

Third, we point to Schultz's (2005a, p. 120) directive that psychobiographers let the life they are studying guide them. Schultz illustrates this process with his work on photographer Diane Arbus. Starting with substantial evidence of her seeking out symbiotic relationships, he looks at theorists who examined this phenomenon. He finds suggestive leads in the work of Erich Fromm, who postulates that the search for symbiosis can be an "escape from freedom." Then he considers Melanie Klein's concept of splitting, wonders whether that defense is one Arbus uses, and finds convincing evidence that it is. His search soon leads him to considering Donald W. Winnicott's work on the false self, and again material on Arbus's life, including especially her own words, leads him to consider how she had, and reacted against, the kind of compliant adaptation to others that Winnicott discusses. Note how Schultz's use of theory opens him up to possibilities rather than closing him down.

Fourth, we turn to a similar idea from Alan C. Elms, who was Schultz's mentor in graduate school at the University of California, Davis. Elms recommends that psychobiographers be ready to change theories as they learn more about their subjects. "If you remain open to theoretical shifts when the biographical facts refuse to fit your initial theory," Elms (2005, p. 89) notes,

you may well end up with a stronger psychobiographical case than in the theory-centered approach.

Elms gives the example of his study of Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Elms thought at first that Haig might fit the Machiavellian personality. As he learned more, however, he concluded that Haig was better characterized as having an authoritarian personality. A representative behavior of Haig's was his reaction after President Ronald Reagan was wounded by a would-be assassin. Haig announced, "As of now, I am in control here in the White House." Haig's clumsy act provoked widespread derision. Elms (2005, p. 90) observed that Haig "was not being a smoothly manipulative Machiavellian but a crudely assertive authoritarian."

Fifth, it is valuable to rely on constructs that are supported by psychological research. McAdams (2005, p. 79) advocates that psychobiographers use

personality concepts that are embedded in a rich and evolving scientific discourse, wherein constructs are operationalized, hypotheses tested, and theories are continually reformed and refined as a result of consensually validated rules of discovery, inference, and justification.

McAdams (2005, p. 79) does not expect psychobiographers to limit themselves to these constructs, and he does not do so in his own psychobiographical writing. There is much of what psychobiographers study that is not explainable via concepts that are supported by the kind of research McAdams discusses. In writing a psychobiography of George W. Bush, for example, McAdams (2011) examined how Bush reacted to the one deeply tragic event of his childhood, the death of his three-year-old sister from leukemia when he was seven years old. The little boy became the "family clown" so as to lift "the spirits of his grieving mother" (p. 117). McAdams's explanation makes much sense, but there just does not happen to be a concept supported by research

that applies. It is likely that Bush was reliant on his connection to his mother for a sense of well-being and so he was motivated, unconsciously, to improve her mood in the aftermath of the death of her daughter. Note too that the same kind of analysis can apply to James Barrie; he persistently entertained his mother, who was depressed over the death of her son.

2.1.4 *Use of Theory*

The greatest danger in the use of theory is the temptation to force the subject to fit a theoretical concept, much as Procrustes made his victims fit his bed. Meyer (1972, p. 374) observed that the field of psychobiography at its worst “enjoys a sort of perpetual open season, during which a gaggle of sitting subjects may be peppered with analytic buckshot.”

Theory should open up, not close down; provide new questions, not easy answers; complicate, not simplify; produce possibilities, not reductions.

For an example of what not to do, we turn to Wolfenstein (1967, p. 97). Observing that Lenin, Trotsky, and Gandhi all had “stormy” adolescences, he said, by way of explanation, that adolescence is “the period of the ‘crisis of identity.’”

Coles (1973, p. 28) criticized Wolfenstein’s use of this concept of Erikson’s:

Here a phrase of Erikson’s has been turned into a new label ...What is meant to inspire in others one kind of response (does this way of putting things fit? is it helpful? or ought I look elsewhere, perhaps use my own words, or simply keep looking and listening?) gets quite another response (that is the answer, or what I want to prove, or what I had better well prove, since everyone else these days is doing so).

Wolfenstein might have looked at one of those revolutionaries—Gandhi, for example—noted that he had a “stormy” adolescence—and referred to Erikson’s work on the identity crisis. But that would have been the beginning, not the end. Then he could have looked at some of the features that Erikson, in his rich writing on identity formation [in works such as *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (Erikson, 1968)], described as being involved with the development of an identity. There are many questions he could have asked, such as: Did Gandhi have a “negative identity”? How did his identity draw on early identifications? What part did the options provided by his culture have in his development of identity?

Another example of contrasting uses of theory involved me (the first author of this chapter) and psychoanalyst George Pollock, with Heinz Kohut also playing a part.

I set out to do a psychobiographical study of William James for my dissertation in the psychology department (then called the Department of Behavioral Sciences) at the University of Chicago. First, though, I did a careful study of psychobiographical methodology (published as Anderson, 1981a). In choosing theory, I used the approach discussed in this chapter. I immersed myself in the data about James, including spending many weeks in the archives studying his unpublished letters, diaries, and other papers. Certain diary entries and what I called James’s “loss-of-self experience” led me to use Kohut’s recently developed self psychology as one

lens for understanding James. The loss-of-self experience was a mortifying moment in James's (1936/1902, p. 157) life when he suddenly felt "a horrible fear of my own existence." He pictured a severely ill patient he had seen in an asylum. "That shape am I, I felt, potentially...." James recalled.

There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear.

I had the unusual opportunity of consulting with Kohut by phone and sending him a written description of the loss-of-self experience. Kohut replied to me,

Thank you for the 2 pp about James's loss-of-self episode. Very convincing! I am curious whether you will also supply material from childhood (about the relationship to his selfobjects) that explains the precariousness of the self.

[In this context, "selfobjects" refers to the people he was closest to, such as his parents.] He also wrote he had arranged for me to meet with Ernest Wolf, probably his most-trusted protégé, and soon after receiving the letter I discussed with Wolf in further detail the use of self psychology in my study of James (Kohut, 1978a, July 25).

A few months later, at the invitation of George Pollock, the head of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, I gave a talk there about my work on James. I emphasized my use of Kohut's self psychology and mentioned that Kohut had told me he found my analysis of the loss-of-self experience according to self psychology to be "very convincing."

What I did not know at the time was that there was a bitter struggle raging between the old guard of the Institute, who were adherents of Freud and ego psychology, and the followers of Kohut's insurgent self psychology. Pollock, who was aligned with the orthodox analysts, took umbrage at my viewing James through the lens of self psychology. He asked Kohut whether Kohut could have seen my work as "very convincing," as I had claimed in my talk. Kohut found a copy of his letter to me in his files and confirmed that he had written me (Kohut, 1978b, November 5).

But here is the key point about use of theory. Pollock was convinced that the obvious concept for understanding William James had to be castration anxiety (castration anxiety plays a key role in the little boy's Oedipus complex; the boy fears he will be castrated for his sexual desire for his mother). In criticizing my presentation, Pollock wrote Kohut what must have seemed to him to be the clinching argument: "at no time did he mention the fact that William James's father had lost a leg" (Pollock, 1978 November 9). Here is Pollock's meaning: James's father lost a leg at the age of 13 and walked with a cork leg (that much is true). Therefore William James had to have castration anxiety as a central factor in his psychology. The connection that a dogmatic psychoanalyst would make is this: Since James saw his father had lost his leg, James had to feel he was in imminent danger of losing his genitals as punishment for his Oedipal desires. That leap in thinking is an illustration of pushing a preexisting theory onto a subject without adequate data. My extensive investigation

of James's life yielded no credible evidence that the concept of the Oedipus complex applied to James. See my study of the relationship of the son and father (Anderson, 1987).

Burke (1954, p. 49) once commented: "A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing." In other words, use of theory, especially when employed crudely and dogmatically, produces one view, thereby eliminating other views. It truncates our vision. That is where Pollock went wrong. His adherence to the concept of the Oedipus complex gave him only one way of understanding James. We recommend that psychobiographers remain ever vigilant of the danger of foreclosing other possibilities through cleaving blindly to a limiting theoretical viewpoint.

2.2 Research, the Basis of Psychobiography

No psychobiography can be any better than the research on which it is based. Psychologists who do other kinds of research are well aware that they can do nothing without their data, and in fact psychologists doing quantitative research and those doing qualitative research (such as psychobiographers) are all in the same situation: they gather research and then process it and interpret it.

Successful psychobiography rests on resourceful research. The most valuable materials are those which bring us closest to the subject, such as letters, diaries, autobiographical accounts, interviews with the subject, and interviews with people who knew or know the subject well. In his work on the chess champion Bobby Fischer, Ponterotto (2012) showed the kind of enterprise that he and we advocate. For example, he interviewed Russell Targ, Fischer's brother-in-law. In the following section, we will provide several anecdotes that underline the vital worth of different kinds of research material.

Addressing prospective psychobiographers, Elms (1994, p. 23) notes,

Even if you think you can get by with the published sources on your subject, I urge you to give archival research a try.

He adds,

The published versions of primary sources often inadvertently omit just those small clues that a psychobiographer may find most useful.

When I (the first author) worked on William James, my focus was on his period of depression while he was a young man (see Anderson, 1982). Ralph Barton Perry, a Harvard philosophy professor and a former student of James's, dominated the scholarship on this period with his interpretation that James's period of distress was in essence philosophical. "The spiritual crisis," Perry (1935, I, pp. 322–232) wrote, "was the ebbing of the will to live, for lack of a philosophy to live by." He added that James "experienced a personal crisis that could be relieved only by a *philosophical* insight."

Perry (1935) wrote a magisterial two-volume biography of James that included many letters and diary excerpts that were not published elsewhere. A diary entry that was crucial to understanding James's depressive period concerned his decision to abandon his plan of becoming a philosopher (he later changed his mind). James wrote that his "strongest moral and intellectual craving [was] for some stable reality to lean upon" but a philosopher forfeits such stability because his responsibility is "every day to be ready to criticize afresh and call in question the grounds of his faith of the day before." The pivotal sentence, as quoted by Perry (1935, I, p. 343), reads:

I fear the constant sense of instability generated by this attitude would be more than the voluntary faith I can keep going is sufficient to neutralize.

The whole problem seems to be one of James holding onto his belief in a stable reality. The impression is that he simply needed more faith.

But when I looked at the more-than-a-century-old, handwritten pages of the diary in the James papers at Harvard's Houghton Library, I saw that Perry had left out the second half of James's sentence. James had continued: "- and that dream-conception, 'maya,' the abyss of horrors, would 'spite of everything grasp my imagination and imperil my reason'" (Anderson, 1981b, p. 248). All of a sudden, James's distress sounded more psychological than philosophical. It was not a simple matter of needing to summon more faith. Instead, he was afraid of losing his sense of reality, becoming panicked, and going crazy. Intentionally or not, Perry had edited the materials (not only in this instance but elsewhere) in such a way as to have them support his philosophical interpretation. We recommend that, whenever possible, the psychobiographer seek primary materials rather than being satisfied with what has been published.

Our next example of the value of careful research involves George W. Bush. As President and Commander in Chief, George W., like his father, George H. W. Bush, led the American military in an invasion of Iraq. But the younger Bush did not stop short of Baghdad; in his war the military conquered the country. Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator, was captured and eventually executed. The common view is a Freudian one, that the younger Bush was trying to outdo the elder Bush. Noting how common competition of a son toward his father is, one author (Weisberg, 2008, p. xviii) claims:

But the term *competition* doesn't begin to do justice to the Oedipal complexities of this particular relationship. George W. Bush has been driven since childhood by a need to differentiate himself from his father, to challenge, surpass, and overcome him.

Again we have a theoretical concept being imposed on the psychobiographical subject. McAdams (2011) took an exhaustive look at the material, including comments by people who knew George W. and statements from George W. himself. He found ample evidence of George W.'s predominant love for his father and of George W.'s sense that his father's enemies were his enemies. George W. was particularly incensed at Saddam for Saddam's involvement in an assassination plot against his father. "Rather than win out over his father," McAdams (2011, p. 80) concludes, "it

seems more psychologically plausible to suggest that George W. Bush sought to win out over his father's *enemies*" (p. 80).

Classical psychoanalysis may seem to be the punching bag of this chapter, but in the next example it receives support rather than criticism. Naifeh and Smith (1989) wrote a psychologically informed biography of the artist Jackson Pollock. The book was the target of an attack review in the *New York Times*. "Their dime-store psychoanalysis reaches its greatest vulgarity," Frank (1990) wrote, "when they assert that Pollock's dripping and pouring technique of the late 1940s reminded him of his father urinating on a stone: 'Creative potency, like sexual potency,' they say, was a childish contest of that kind to him." Yet a careful reading of the book, which later won a Pulitzer Prize, shows that Naifeh and Smith researched their study scrupulously. They do not "assert" that there was some connection between Pollock's famous drip technique and urination. Instead they found considerable evidence about the importance and role of urinating in Pollock's life. And they cite several people who knew Pollock and report Pollock telling them that, when Pollock looked at his first drip paintings, memories of his father urinating came to mind. One friend recalled what he heard from Pollock:

He was himself standing beside his father on a flat rock, watching his father pissing, making patterns on the surface of the stone...and he wanted to do the same thing when he grew up. (Naifeh & Smith, 1989, p. 541)

Naifeh and Smith do not foist a Freudian concept on their subject; instead they present us with their evidence and the interpretation that arises from it.

2.3 A Special Category of Research

As psychobiographers seek to gain insight into the subject's subjective world, there is a special category of research that is especially valuable to them. Dreams, fantasies, humor, parapraxes, word associations, use of language, delusions, and artistic products have the capability of providing access to the subject's inner mind; all can be thought of as expressions of the unconscious. Discussing the aim of getting underneath the mask a person shows to others, Edel (1979, p. 26) writes of phenomena that can be thought of as portals to the inner world:

The aggressive emotion that masquerades as a cutting witticism; the excessive endearment that conceals a certain animus; the pleasant joking remark that is accompanied by a hostile gesture; the sudden slip of the tongue which says the opposite of what has been intended. This is the "psychological evidence" a biographer must learn to read...

For illustrations, we will turn to Edel's decades-long study of Henry James.

Edel, who already had evidence of the contentious, stressful, and also loving relationship between the two brothers, William and Henry James, came across a letter William wrote to a complete stranger. The recipient of the letter was the Secretary of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; he had just informed William that he, William, had been elected to the Academy.

“William replied that since Henry, his ‘younger, vainer and more frivolous brother,’ was already a member,” notes Edel (Anderson, 1979, I, p. 17), “there might be a redundancy of Jameses,” and he declined the invitation. William, no doubt, was trying to be humorous; yet the hostile and condescending side of his feelings about his brother seeped out in the comment, which provided Edel with additional evidence about the nature of the relationship of the two.

Two more examples also pertain to that relationship. Henry was in Europe when he learned of William’s marriage in the Boston area. In writing a letter of congratulations, Henry used these words:

as I was divorced from you by an untimely fate on this occasion, let me at least repair the injury by giving you...a tender bridal benediction. (Edel, 1977, I, p. 584)

With the word, “divorced,” Henry is ostensibly referring to their being distant from each other. Edel focuses on Henry’s use of language and speculates that Henry used that word because he felt “divorced” from his brother; they had a “primal relationship” and now another, William’s bride, had taken his place, and he may well have felt that William’s wedding provided an “injury.”

Edel (1977) finds further evidence about Henry’s reaction to William’s marriage in *Confidence*, the novel Henry was writing in the weeks after he learned of the wedding. There are two friends. One, named Wright, is scientific minded like William; the other is aesthetic and a lover of art, like Henry. The whole novel revolves around Wright’s decision not to marry one woman, due largely to his friend’s advice, and his marrying instead on the rebound another woman, with whom he becomes disenchanted. Edel sees Henry as struggling

through self-consolation, jealousy, rejection, assertion, in an attempt to rectify the disturbed familial emotions. (p. 586)

Here we have touched on a huge, complex, and controversial topic: how an artistic product, such as a novel, painting, or film, reflects the inner world of the creator. In this chapter on executing psychobiography, we can say no more than to advise psychobiographers not to overlook that rich source of information but also to be cautious: the product is rarely a photograph of the creator’s experience; rather it is an imaginative expression of it. For some inquiries into this topic, see Edel (1965), Schultz (2005c), and Anderson (2011).

A dream provides our last example involving the Jameses. Dreams, like creative products, are an expression of the inner world, difficult to interpret, and invaluable to psychobiographers. Edel (1977) seizes on a dream of James’s, called by James “the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare of my life” (I, p. 60). Edel’s (1977, I, 59–66) intricate analysis of the dream teases out indications of the novelist’s life-long attempt to turn the tables on the forces that he felt threatened him.

When we were writing this chapter, we did not have at hand a telling example of a parapraxis, a Freudian slip. But before the revisions were completed, there took place one of the debates among Republicans contesting for the 2016 presidential nomination. Marco Rubio, Senator from Florida, declaimed about the importance of being a parent (we’ve put his slip in italics):

The most important job I'm ever going to have, the most important job anyone in this room will ever have, is the job of being a parent. Not the job of being president, or the job of being a senator, or the job of being a congressman. The most important job any of us will ever do is the job of being a *president*, because the most important institution in society is the family. (Who said what and what it meant: The 4th GOP debate annotated, 2015)

A psychobiographer studying this public figure might speculate that Rubio, in contradiction to the public image he wishes to portray, actually values the job of president more than the job of being a parent, especially considering the many days he has been spending away from his four children while campaigning.

2.4 Interpreting

Having described the varieties of materials, much of which is hard to analyze, we turn now to the question of how psychobiographers decide what to do with this mass of information, that is, how to go from the evidence to the best understanding of the subject that they can come to. Of course, no comprehensive and definitive answer is possible, but we describe three approaches, those proposed by William McKinley Runyan, by Irving Alexander and Amy Demorest, and by William Todd Schultz.

Runyan (1982, p. 47) expands on the process of choosing among different interpretations. While affirming that there is no single incontestable interpretation, he notes that there are ways of assessing which interpretations are better:

Explanations and interpretations can be evaluated in light of criteria such as: (1) their logical soundness, (2) their comprehensiveness in accounting for a number of puzzling aspects of the events in question, (3) their survival of tests of attempted falsification, such as tests of derived predictions or retrodictions, (4) their consistency with the full range of available relevant evidence, (5) their support from above, or their consistency with more general knowledge about human functioning or about the person in question, and (6) their credibility relative to other explanatory hypotheses.

The second approach, which relies on what we call the Alexander-Demorest Identifiers of Saliency, is a strategy for looking at the subject's texts (such as memoirs, stories told to others, and interview material) and determining what is most significant psychologically. Alexander (1990) developed the method, and Amy Demorest, who studied with him in graduate school, has further refined and employed it.

Demorest (2005, pp. 12–13) summarizes the identifiers:

According to the identifier of *primacy*, what appears first is significant in serving as a foundation stone or key to unfolding meaning. The identifier of *frequency* signals the importance of that which recurs. In *uniqueness*, what is singular or odd is found to have significance. In *negation*, what is actively denied or opposed is flagged as having special consequence. *Emphasis* calls attention to that which is obviously accented or underlined; underemphasis can be as salient as overemphasis. With *omission* we are given notice of the importance of that which is missing. In *error* or *distortion* a mistake indicates the presence of revealing material. The indicator of *isolation* is a signal of salience to what which does not fit or stands alone. Alexander's last indicator is *incompletion*, which calls attention to the significance of that which is left unfinished.

As an example, we look back at the previously discussed incident from B. F. Skinner's life. Abandoned by a girlfriend, he burned the first initial of her name into his arm. Three of the indicators of salience point to the importance of this incident. It is unique, in the sense of being odd; it is underemphasized; and it fits the criterion of incompleteness, in that Skinner mentions it but does not elaborate on or explore it.

While the Alexander-Demorest approach may be used to select numerous scenes that are important for the subject, Schultz, creator of the third approach, argues for the value of choosing one particular scene, which he calls the "prototypical scene." "In this single scene (an episode or event)," Schultz (2005a, p. 116) explains, "the core parameters of an entire life story are embedded and encapsulated. The prototypical scene is the blueprint of a life; it summarizes nuclear conflicts and personality patterns." Schultz notes that such a scene is identifiable because it is so vivid, emphasized by the subject, emotionally intense, recurrent in the subject's life and work, and important in the subject's development. The scene also includes a violation of the status quo or of the normal course of life, and hence the subject is driven to return to it often to try to make it understandable.

Schultz gives an example of such a scene about which Truman Capote told and retold many times. Capote said that at the age of about two years old he was living with his very young mother in a hotel room:

She would leave me locked in this hotel room when she went out in the evening with her beaux and I would become hysterical because I couldn't get out of this room. (Schultz, 2005b, p. 51)

Schultz explains that this scene captures the key themes of Capote's life and his fiction: he feared betrayal and abandonment, he felt isolated, and he constantly desired to escape from the realities of his troubled life.

While we would not have described the three approaches if we did not see merit in them, we by no means claim that every psychobiographer should use these strategies. We realize that psychobiographers often, even usually, will use less systematic approaches. To some extent psychobiography remains an art—albeit one that may make use of the findings of scientific psychology—and analysis will rely always to a greater or lesser extent on the author's intuition, experience, empathy, and insight.

2.5 The Psychobiographer's Relationship with the Subject

It is just here, at the psychobiographer's use of oneself as the main tool of psychological analysis, that we encounter the most intricate topic in executing psychobiography: the author's relationship with the subject who is being studied.

Two perceptive comments from Edell provide us with an entrée into the topic. Edell (1961, p. 461) notes that the knowledgeable psychological biographer is able

to recognize the existence of a series of possibilities rather than accept smugly the single answer to any given question projected by himself; and he can try to understand systematically his own easy rationalizations. In a word, he indulges in fewer rigidities of thought and laxities of feeling derived from his own fantasies.

Edel (1961, p. 461) then goes on to identify what he sees as the central dilemma that we psychobiographers face:

our dilemma is that to write a good biography we must identify with our subject in some degree: how otherwise re-experience his [or her] feelings, his problems, his struggle? We must try to measure the world through the subject's eyes and to penetrate into that world. But in becoming this other person for the purpose of biography, the biographer risks everything.

Psychobiographers' success or failure can revolve around their relationship with the subject. On the one hand, a deeper understanding can come only from a close engagement with the subject, being able to identify in such a way as to imagine how subjects feel during travails they face. Psychobiographers must be able to picture that they themselves would act, or at least would want to act, as the subject acted, if they encountered the same circumstances as did the subject and had the same formative experiences as the subject had. Someone studying William James would have to find a bridge to imagining what it would be like to feel suffused with fear as James once was. A chronicler of Truman Capote would have to picture wanting, as did Capote, to get revenge. A biographer of Henry James would have to find in oneself the same desire for obtaining glory and conquering as Henry James had.

When psychobiographers can make a personal connection to the subject, their work is potentially enhanced. Schultz (2005a) reveals that he shared with his subject, Diane Arbus, an interest in eccentricity and a desire for what we would call authenticity. Schultz and Arbus were both fascinated with eccentrics. He notes that

like Arbus, I felt that by some convoluted magic they succeeded in being more real, more committed to their own intensification of personality, [more] absorbed in their fakery, whereas I, and my friends, simply felt fake. (p. 114)

But the psychobiographer's close connection to the subject can also cause trouble. Schultz (2005a) points out the personal motives, often unknown to themselves, of psychobiographers:

We may secretly wish to vindicate our subjects, attack them, love them, or participate vicariously in their fame. Our pursuit of their secrets may be a way of pursuing our own, a working through of conflicts and anxieties. (p. 113)

It is not hard to see how such feelings can lead to faulted studies. In his article on best practices in psychobiography, Ponterotto (2014, p. 83) explains that the strong and biased feelings of the author about the subject can result in four kinds of psychobiographies that are all problematical: hagiographies, idealographies, degradographies, and pathographies.

Psychoanalysis for decades (see, for example, Racker, 1968; Tansey & Burke, 1989) has put great emphasis on countertransference, which refers to the reactions and emotions, based in large part on the therapist's own psychology, that the therapist has

toward the patient. It is well accepted in psychoanalysis that analysts must develop a close familiarity with and mastery of their own feelings. Largely for that reason, every analyst is required to go through a personal psychoanalysis. Erikson (1975, p. 116) points to the parallel with psychobiographers; he uses the term “countertransference” to refer to their reactions and emotions toward their subjects.

We recommend that psychobiographers pay conscious attention to their countertransference. Talking with friends and colleagues, if not with a therapist, about possible biases, idealizations, identifications, and resentments can help. Perhaps it should be required to include some remarks in the work about one’s feelings regarding the subject. The benefit would be that the readers, working their way through the study, would be able to take into account the author’s biases.

Strouse (1987), biographer of Alice James (who was the sister of William and Henry James) carried out a searching and honest inquiry into her feelings about her subject. Alice James was a brilliant, witty, and insightful woman, as is apparent from her diary and her letters, but she led a frustrating and limited life. Overwhelmed by her psychological problems, she was an invalid from her teenage years until her death at age 43. She lived most of her life with her family in the Boston area and spent the final years living with a woman friend in England. Strouse, as a woman who grew up with brothers, notes she was attracted to writing about a woman who developed in such a sparkling and unusual family, the James family, also as the only daughter. While working on the book, Strouse was unclear about how attached she had become to Alice James. Strouse (1987, p. 69) visited her grave, and, she recalls, “I was quite astonished to find myself suddenly in tears.” Realizing that no one had visited the grave in years, she found herself saying to James, “Don’t worry—I’ll take care of you.” Then Strouse thought, Then Strouse thought,

I realized in a rush that she had worked her powerful will on me, just like she did with people who lived with her: there I was, after a hundred years, taking care of Alice.

Her reaction to James gave her insight into how the people around James had reacted to her.

As Strouse continued with her writing, she became stuck. She found herself bothered by Alice James. She saw James being unable to devote her fine mind to anything useful and pushing people away. James had rendered herself, as Strouse saw, “literally in-valid” (p. 70). Taking time off from her writing, Strouse gained a new insight into James. Strouse saw in effect that her own frustration that James did not do or accomplish more reflected James’s own disappointment.

[H]er fierce competitiveness - her ambition in that family to be more than ‘just’ a girl, an invalid, a waste, a failure - that measured the degree of her incapacity. (p. 71)

Strouse realized she had had a “countertransference reaction” to James. “I could learn about her from my own emotional responses” (p. 72),” Strouse concluded.

In looking at James, Strouse also was aware of the vast differences between being a woman in the 20th Century versus the 19th Century. Reading about James’s “lack of education, her circumscribed, thwarted life,” Strouse said to herself, “There but for the grace of God and a hundred years go I” (p. 69). We note too that psychobiographers’

engagement with a subject fuels their willingness to put in the hard work of studying the subject in depth.

While countertransference analysis focuses on the inner psychological response of the author to the subject, it is meant to include all aspects of the author's response, including Strouse's attention here to her role as a woman in comparison to James's role in an earlier era.

There is a parallel approach in the field of qualitative research called reflexivity, which also strives to be as comprehensive as possible but which complements countertransference by emphasizing the researcher's culture and related areas, such as socioeconomic status, class, gender, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic background. Reflexivity refers to the process whereby researchers continuously look at and consider how their assumptions, values, and perceptions influence their data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Lambert, Jomeen, & McSherry, 2010, p. 322). On reflexivity, see also Chase, 2005; Reissman, 2008; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Researchers are not objective observers, but instead their culture impacts them in numerous ways.

2.6 Psychobiography as Cross-Cultural Research

That topic, of the impact of culture, requires a section of its own in this chapter. In many cases, the psychobiographical subject lived in a historical era—distinct from that of the psychobiographer's—with numerous differences, such as in values, assumptions, and gender roles. Jean Strouse and Alice James did not see the world in the same way, and there were many differences in the beliefs they adopted from the world around them. Even with more contemporary subjects, the cultural differences may be extensive. Two of Schultz's subjects, for example, had backgrounds distinctly different from Schultz's. Truman Capote (Schultz, 2011b) was influenced by Southern culture, and Diane Arbus (Schultz, 2011a) grew up in a particular New York Jewish milieu.

The cultural factor is especially sensitive in psychobiographical writing because psychological concepts, developed for one society, may not apply well to another society. For example, psychoanalytic ego psychology, as developed in the United States, valorizes autonomy, but in many eras and areas of the world, autonomy is aberrant and the emphasis is on connection with family.

One representative and flagrant example of a failure to appreciate differences in culture involves Abraham Lincoln. A historian (Tripp, 2005) claimed that Lincoln was gay. His main piece of evidence was that Lincoln for some years, as is true, slept in the same bed with a close friend, Joshua Speed. It may well be that the large majority of young men who slept in the same bed with a close friend of the same sex in New York City in the 1990s (where Tripp was living as he wrote the book) were gay. But in Springfield, Illinois, in the late 1830s, it was common for people of the same sex to share beds and therefore the situation provides no evidence of homosexuality.

Another example illustrates not only an ignorance of culture but also the foisting of theory onto a subject. Wolfenstein discusses Gandhi's hunger strikes as well as his choice of salt as a target for a large-scale non-violent protest against the British colonial government in India. Wolfenstein draws on a theoretical proposition from psychoanalyst Ernest Jones that salt can be a symbol of semen. Wolfenstein (1967, p. 221) proposes:

If it had this unconscious meaning for Gandhi, then we may understand his depriving himself of condiments, including salt, as a form of sexual abstinence, involving a regression to an issue of the oral phase. In the context of the Salt March, Gandhi's taking of salt from the British can thus be seen as reclaiming for the Indian people the manhood and potency which was properly theirs.

Erikson (1975) looked at the same incident of the Salt March but provided a strikingly different analysis. He argues that salt, as a food preservative, had a particular value in colonial India because of the chronic shortages of food. It also had substantial economic value. Most strikingly, salt was a perfect commodity for pointing out the injustice of British rule. Gathering salt that had been deposited on the seashore was illegal in the Raj because it was construed as an evasion of the salt tax. The goal of the Salt March, as Gandhi conceived it, was for the protestors to break the law by the simple act of picking up salt. With Wolfenstein's interpretation in mind, Erikson (p. 160) concludes that in deciding on the Salt March Gandhi

was obviously in command of his political and economic as well as his psychological wits. And in any context except that of irrationality clearly attributable to sexual repression, one should take any interpretation that explains a human act by recourse to sexual symbolism with more than one grain of salt.

Anthropologist Robert LeVine (Parin, LeVine, & Friedman, 1975, p. 384) recommends that psychobiographers "do extensive historical research to provide the cultural basis for [their] own empathy with historical figures." He advocates that the researcher gain a deep familiarity with the culture of the subject, much as anthropologists do when they carry out ethnographic research.

2.7 Conclusion

Some years before Edel considered writing a biography of Henry James, he arranged to edit a volume of James's plays. The James family had deposited at the Harvard library the family archives. Edel was given access to the materials, not yet processed, so he could search for scripts of the plays. One large wooden box, previously unopened, contained materials from James's last secretary; she was a typist, and James dictated much fiction, as well as letters, to her, rather than writing them out by hand.

That box contained the plays Edel was searching for. Some odd sheets of paper labeled "last dictation" caught Edel's eye. In Edel's words (McCullough, 1985): "The dictation was like 'stream of consciousness.' A note from [the secretary] said that

James during his last illness called for her and dictated these fragments, signing them ‘Napoleon’!”

Edel saw the significance of the material. A stroke had thrown James into a confused state. The pages recorded his delusions, including fantasies of being Napoleon. Edel, although he supposedly was in the library only to collect material related to the plays, copied out the sheets.

When he began work on the biography, years later, he had access to the James Papers, which had been processed in the meantime, and he discovered that the crucial dictations were missing. He learned that the James family descendants had destroyed them because, in their view, the sheets revealed the disintegration of James’s mind.

In his biography, Edel (1977) made use of the delusions. They provided the final and clinching evidence of the theme of James’s life myth that Edel traced throughout his long narrative. As Edel summarized it elsewhere (“The Ideal Edel,” 1977):

The myth that Henry James lived by, I believe, was a desire for power, a myth of the idea of glory, that he himself was a kind of Napoleon of letters.

We end with this story because it illustrates several of the central ideas we have discussed. First of all, research is all important. If Edel had not seen the significance of the dictations and had not been so resourceful as to copy them, a valuable piece of evidence would have been lost forever. We also spoke about the benefit of certain kinds of evidence that offer special access to the subject’s inner world; a delusion fits into that category. And finally we advocated that psychobiographers search for the subject’s life myth, as Edel did, with some assistance from the witness provided by the dictations.

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Chapter 3

Adventures in Psychobiography and the Study of Lives: A Personal Journey



William McKinley Runyan

Abstract Personal life histories are, I believe, intertwined with the creation and development of every tradition in psychology. This includes psychoanalysis, behaviorism and humanistic psychology. A useful review of this work is in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005). Examples in this chapter are Freud, Karen Horney and B. F. Skinner. We also look briefly at a post-modern critic of psychology, Michel Foucault. How important are personal experiences and politics in opposition to psychology? More recently, I have argued that individual life histories are also relevant in understanding philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, discussed in this chapter. Surprisingly, there may be more personal dimensions in statistics than assumed. Examples discussed here are Sir Ronald Fisher and Jerzy Neyman. This chapter reviews the adventures of an advocate of the study of individual lives interacting with supporters and opponents of the project through years as a graduate student at Harvard from 1969 to 1975, and as a professor at UC Berkeley from 1979 to 2010. With Gardner Lindzey (Lindzey & Runyan, 2007), I co-edited the most recent volume of the *History of Psychology in Autobiography* in 2007. This includes a wider array of perspectives than my own, with chapters by Elliot Aronson, Elizabeth Loftus, Albert Bandura, Walter Mischel, Daniel Kahneman, Ulric Neisser, and others. Many of these accounts are fascinating. I wonder, gentle reader, how has it been going for you? What experiences have you had encountering the variety of “hard” or “soft” traditions you have been exposed to?

Keywords Sigmund Freud · Karen Horney · B. F. Skinner · Michel Foucault · Bertrand Russell · Ludwig Wittgenstein · Sir Ronald Fisher · Jerzy Neyman · Psychobiography

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3.1 Introduction

I was thrilled to be starting a new program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice at Harvard University in the fall of 1969. As an undergraduate at Oberlin College in Ohio majoring in psychology and sociology, I had been reading books such as Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1963) and *Young Man Luther* (1957) or *The Social System* (1951) by Talcott Parsons. It was amazing to see so many of these names on the directory for William James Hall. It was possible to visit them in office hours and have a chance to talk. How might I make my way in this world?

The list also included B. F. Skinner. I had read his *Science and Human Behavior* (1953) and his utopian novel, *Walden Two* (1948). I had written a BA thesis on utopian communities, based on historical research and on visiting different kinds of contemporary utopian communities. One of these was Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia, drawing in part on ideas in Skinner's *Walden Two*. One of the most important books for me at the time was *The History of Psychology in Autobiography* (vol 5, 1967), edited by Boring and Lindzey. This included autobiographical chapters by Henry A. Murray, Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers and B. F. Skinner. This made it easier to understand their work, and to start a conversation with each of these individuals in the coming years. I regret never meeting Gordon Allport as unfortunately he had died in 1967.

I became professionally interested in studying individual lives by 1969 and later in psychobiography while trying to become an interdisciplinary social scientist. As an undergraduate at Oberlin College from 1966 to 1969, interested in psychology and sociology, I was strongly influenced by the interdisciplinary work of Harvard's Department of Social Relations. This department included professors in personality and clinical psychology, in sociology, and in cultural anthropology. An early book used in the program was *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, edited by Clyde Kluckhohn and Murray (1948, 1953 revised). A theoretical statement which influenced me was in *Toward a Field Theory of Behavior: Personality and Social Structure* (Yinger, 1965). He argued that

In formal statements there is general agreement that the science of behavior must be carried forward on four levels—biological, individual, cultural, and social. These can be identified roughly with the four sciences of biology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. (p. 8)

This vision of an interdisciplinary social science was appealing to me, and by the time I started graduate school, I saw myself as trying to develop the study of lives as a level of analysis in the social sciences. At an opening overnight retreat in September 1969, faculty and students in a new program at Harvard called "Clinical Psychology and Public Practice" sat in a circle and reported on their interests and plans for the future. My plan was to explore the possibilities for the systematic or scientific study of life histories. What were the possibilities of scientifically studying the course of lives? This question seemed both of personal interest and relevant to evaluating the effects of social intervention programs, not on short-term outcomes based on single variables but on the course of lives, to the extent that it could be known.

By the summer of 1970, I had gotten in touch with Henry A. Murray and Robert W. White, both of whom had been professors in the Department of Social Relations. Murray (1893–1988) had been a founder of personality psychology (*Explorations in Personality*, 1938) and an early advocate of “personology” or the study of lives. I found that Murray’s encouragement, vitality and enthusiasm inspired me in some way almost every time we met, from that first meeting in 1970 to a final visit in December 1987, about 6 months before his death at age 95. As I commented in reviewing his biography (Runyan, 1994), compared to other psychologists, Murray seemed more alive, to have greater depth and humane learning, greater awareness of inner experience, greater wit and expressiveness, and greater sensitivities to the nuances of social interaction. He could also be self-centered, jealous, and harshly critical of himself and others. Murray seemed to me a person of unusual stature, who gave me a sense of what it might have been like to know Freud or Jung, not as influential as they were in publications, but as charismatic and eye-opening in personal interaction as anyone I had met.

Robert White was supportive in different ways: thoughtful, reserved, even patriotic, yet responsible and helpful, taking the time late in his life to write comments for my first two books. On *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982), he wrote

With impressive scholarship and with commendable judgment Professor Runyan brings up to date the larger problems in the study of lives.

On *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, (1988) he said

Showing that psychological understanding need not be limited to psychoanalysis, Runyan develops a comprehensive conceptualization for the use of psychology in psychohistory.

I greatly appreciated his taking the time to do this, and felt that his comments highlighted features of the books which were central in my aspirations for them.

After earning his undergraduate degree in history from Harvard in 1925, White intended to teach social and cultural history. Once in graduate school, however, he switched his field of interest from the history of nations to the history of lives. Though intrigued by psychoanalysis, which at that time focused largely on psychopathology, White was also interested in his subjects’ adaptive capacities and in the development of competence, sometimes in spite of difficult earlier circumstances. In *Lives in Progress* (1952) and later editions, White studied the lives and adaptations of three Harvard students, 2 males and one female, following them up with interviews in later years. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to talk more with White at the end of his life (1904–2001) and to think more about the personal meanings that the study of lives had for him. White received his Ph.D. under Murray in 1937 and wrote a classic early text on *The Abnormal Personality* (1948). As a junior in college, the third edition (1964) of White’s text provided an appealing and life-historically oriented introduction to the field.

I had studied the archives at Harvard’s Pusey Library and Houghton library containing the papers and correspondence of Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, Erik Erikson, William James and many others. In 2000 I asked Robert White if he would be

willing to deposit his papers and correspondence in Harvard's Pusey Library (named after Harvard President Nathan Pusey). He said he would be glad to do so. Apparently Harvard Archives had asked him when he retired in 1967, but had never heard back from him. A librarian now got involved and helped White's son go through his files in his Longwood Towers apartment in Boston. His papers were eventually archived in Pusey Library. This was a small contribution by me to historical scholarship in the history of psychology and of social relations at Harvard.

When I began graduate school I was familiar with the work of White and Murray, both of whom had retired by then, but I was unaware of the extent and nature of the opposition within academia to the study of individual lives. In graduate school from 1969–75, I got more of a feel for the problem. My sense of this opposition motivated my attention to methodological and conceptual issues in my dissertation, *Life Histories: A Field of Inquiry and a Framework for Intervention* (1975), and in my first book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982). During graduate school, my interests in narrative and in the study of individual lives were not warmly received by some of the faculty. In talking with one senior professor of developmental psychology, Jerome Kagan, about my plans to write a dissertation on the study of individual life histories, he said that my proposal was not like taking a rocket to the moon but more like making a trip to the garbage dump. Not surprisingly, he did not become a member of my dissertation committee.

On May 25, 1971, near the end of my second year of graduate school, Professor David McClelland wrote me a letter saying that my philosophical interests were not suited to the program, neither to the action-oriented approach of Clinical Psychology and Public Practice nor to the empirical studies of the Personality and Developmental Program. "So, I would urge you strongly to leave Harvard before you waste more time here, your time and our time." I declined the offer. Trying to understand what there was about my approach that he disliked so much, I went to talk with him about it in his office, but he refused, saying that this was not psychotherapy. Years later, in a chapter on "*Autobiographical Sources of My Intellectual Interests*" in McClelland (1984), McClelland said he used to have philosophical debates with his father, a Methodist minister and college president, which would start out objectively but "often became very heated." McClelland wrote that he "came to hate these family arguments," which drove him to put as much distance as possible between himself and his family. Because McClelland's father could take either side of an issue and "never once admitted that he was wrong, no matter how powerful my arguments were," these debates had "profound effects:

...I feel certain that my interest in empirical science came in part from my desire to find incontrovertible facts that could not be disputed. (3)

Although not certain, I wondered if these experiences were related to our conflicts.

Opposition to the study of individual lives sometimes comes from thinking it is not scientific enough. If it is not based on experiments or statistics, how could it be scientific? This debate about the scientific status of the study of lives is vividly illustrated in Henry A. Murray's own career. James B. Conant (1893–1978), initially a chemist, became President of Harvard in 1933. He started an "up or out" policy for

professors. They had to be promoted to Professor within 6 or 7 years or they would be forced to leave Harvard. Henry Murray had an M.D. in 1919 from Columbia and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Cambridge University and was hired as Assistant Director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic under Morton Prince, M.D. in 1926. When Henry Murray came up for tenure in 1936, the manuscript for *Explorations in Personality* was available, although not yet published. Gordon Allport (1897–1967), one of Murray’s strongest supporters argued that Murray was the intellectual heir of William James and was important for the development of humanistically oriented psychology at Harvard. Another committee member, neuropsychologist Karl Lashley (1890–1958) had just been hired after a search for the “best psychologist in the world”. Lashley hated psychoanalysis, saw Murray’s work as unscientific, and threatened to resign if Murray was given tenure. Allport suggested he might go somewhere else if Murray was not given tenure. The tenure vote was divided with three votes for and three votes against. To resolve the situation, Edwin G. Boring, Chair of the Psychology Department proposed that Murray be given two five-year appointments without tenure. By 1946, after WWII, the department had split into two different departments: Psychology (experimental psychology) and Social Relations (social and clinical psychology with sociology and social anthropology.). A reader for the new Social Relations department was *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, edited by cultural anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and Murray (1948, revised 1953).

The debate about what counts as scientific psychology continues to the present. How is the study of individual lives related to scientific psychology? Lee J. Cronbach argued in his 1957 Presidential Address to the American Psychologist Association that there are “*Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology*”, experimental and correlational. In 1975, Cronbach wrote about the importance of person-situation interactions in “*Beyond Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology*”. In addition to person-situation interactions, I argue that there are at least four tasks or objectives in personality psychology: (1) developing general theories of personality (2) studying individual and group differences (3) analyzing specific behaviors or classes of experience, and (4) understanding individual persons or lives. This framework is elaborated on in my chapter on “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives” in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005). I am aware that other sets of objectives can be outlined for other purposes.

While on sabbatical at Harvard in the spring of 1986 and again in the spring of 1990, I was excited by Stephen Jay Gould’s arguments for historical science, as in evolutionary biology and in historical geology. He covered both fields in his course titled “History of the Earth and of Life.” In Gould’s view, Darwin was “the greatest of all historical scientists” (Gould, 1989, p. 282). Historical science is needed for studying complex sequences of events and processes, as in life histories. It might become a great resource for psychobiography and for the study of lives. In my view, the study of individual lives is NOT merely a rough initial stage in the science of psychology, to be replaced by quantitative or experimental psychology. The study of individual lives is also one of the ultimate objectives of an appropriately scientific and humanistic psychology. There is a great deal which remains to be done. This chapter draws on the

experience of one person struggling with these issues from 1969 to the present. Psychobiography is an appealing concept as it can include what is most personal and experiential. I look forward to seeing how these fields can develop.

I can often better appreciate another person's work if I understood how they became interested in the topic or why they thought it important. My interest in life histories seems to have developed from a sequence of earlier intellectual interests. While an undergraduate at Oberlin College, I had surveyed different disciplines with the intention of forming ideas about what seemed most worth studying and to identify areas of concentration. I read textbooks and histories (insofar as my understanding permitted) in mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, biology, philosophy, history, economics, political science, psychology, sociology and anthropology. It seemed to me that consciousness or subjective experience was a central factor in human lives. I proposed writing an honors thesis on the topic, but the chair of the largely behavioral psychology department at Oberlin said it was not a topic they covered. Instead, I pursued an honors thesis in the sociology department on utopian or experimental communities. I studied the history of utopian communities in the United States, and visited a number of contemporary communities, including a religious Bruderhoff, a radical political commune in New York City, and Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia, which drew in part on behavioral ideas in Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948).

What effects did different, intentionally-designed social systems have on human experience? My interest in the study of lives was related to both of these earlier interests. It seemed to me that the best way of assessing the value of a social system was in terms of the quality of the lives led by the people within it. A second stream of personal questions also led to the study of life histories. What are the possibilities of existence? What range of things have men and women done with their lives? What to do with my own life? And what differentiates one possible future from another? A third motivation for the study of lives was an interest in human welfare and in helping other people. It seemed that social action programs could be meaningfully assessed in term of their impact upon the course of people's lives. The design of social programs seemed to depend upon at least implicit theories about life courses and how they might be changed. In short, the study of life histories in my 1975 Ph.D. dissertation represented a personal response to questions of: What to study? How to live? And how to help other people? These three questions still seem important, no matter how rough my initial inquiries.

3.2 Life Histories of Psychologists

I have long been interested in the psychological study of different psychological theorists. Since 1988 I taught a course on the relations between the work and life of major personality theorists, including Freud, Horney, and Skinner with Foucault as an alternative. Short sketches of the personal sides of these four very different kinds

of thinkers will illustrate this approach. I have written about these individuals before, yet they remain some of the best examples I know, so I use them again.

3.2.1 *Sigmund Freud*

There is an enormous literature on the relations between Freud's personal biography and his intellectual development. In general, these works concentrate on his self-analysis, interpretations of his dreams, or his identification with historical figures, such as Leonardo daVinci or Moses, starting with Wittels in 1923 and proceeding through Jones (1953–1957), Ellenberger (1971), Roazen (1975), Sulloway (1979), Gay (1988), Breger (2000), Elms (2005), and including many others. I will focus on just one example from Freud's life. For inspiration Freud drew upon his self-analysis as well as upon his clinical work and cultural resources. In two key letters to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, Freud wrote, first on September 21, 1897,

And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret that has been slowly dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my neurotica [theory of the neuroses]. (Freud, 1985, p. 264)

In other words, he no longer believed in childhood sexual seduction as the cause of neuroses. On October 15, 1897, he wrote:

Dear Wilhelm,

My self-analysis is in fact the most essential thing I have at present and promises to become of the greatest value to me if it reaches its end...Being totally honest with oneself is a good exercise. A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early as in children who have been made hysterical... If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of Oedipus Rex...the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. (Freud, 1985, p. 272)

This certainly sounds as if Freud's personal experience is being used to support his belief in the Oedipal theory. (The cautious methodologist may be concerned about over-generalization, as Freud moves from his own case to a "universal event in early childhood.") There are, of course, controversies about the extent to which this abandonment of the seduction theory and conception of the Oedipus complex were shaped by his self-analysis, his clinical patients, assumptions about the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse, and/or political expediency (e.g. Masson, 1984; Malcolm, 1984; Breger, 2000).

3.2.2 *Karen Horney*

Karen Horney (1885–1952), the distinguished neo-analytic or social psychoanalyst, is best known for works such as *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937), *New*

Ways in Psychoanalysis (1939), *Self-Analysis* (1942), and *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950). An early advocate for understanding the cultural contexts of psychopathology, Horney criticized Freud's apparent misunderstanding of women's psychology in a series of papers posthumously collected under the title *Feminine Psychology* (1967). In his major biography, *Karen Horney: A Psychoanalyst's Search for Self-Understanding* (1994), Bernard Paris, a Horneyan literary critic, professor of English at the University of Florida, and founder and director of the International Karen Horney Society, writes that working on the biography changed his perception of her, both as a person and in relation to her work. Reading her books over the years, Paris had "formed an image of her as a wise, benign, supportive woman who, having worked through her own problems, was now free to help others" (p. 175). However, earlier biographies of Horney by Jack Rubins and Susan Quinn, along with his own research, led to revisions in his understanding of her. He now sees Horney as a "tormented woman with many compulsions and conflicts who violated professional ethics and had difficulties in her relationships" (p. 175).

Her compulsive affairs with colleagues and with students in training or in supervision with her for many years contributed to this altered view. According to Paris, from roughly 1934–39, Horney had a romantic relationship with Erich Fromm while also having affairs during this period with Paul Tillich and Erich Maria Remarque. Over the course of her career, she also had affairs with several of her analysands, including Harold Kelman in the 1940s. Kelman was a major figure in the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis, which he and Horney co-founded in 1941.

In Horney's *Self-Analysis* (1942), she writes about a patient named Clare who struggled to sort out problems in her relationship with a man named Peter. Paris speculates that Horney is really writing about her relationship with Erich Fromm, which ended as a romance around 1939, but continued in its professional capacity for a few years beyond that. Paris suggests that the Clare-Peter relationship was similar to the Horney-Fromm relationship, in terms of its

unworkable combination of a dependent woman and a man hypersensitive to any demands upon him. (p. 146)

Paris also suggests that Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941) indirectly discusses their relationship and that perhaps

Fromm and Horney were writing in part for each other, each trying to show the other how much he or she understood. (p. 147)

Paris (1994) argues that being disturbed by Horney's behavior, or even considering it pathological, need not lead to rejecting her ideas. His view is that although Horney had significant character flaws, she was

also a rather heroic figure whose courage in seeking the truth about herself enabled her to make a major contribution to human thought... We do not achieve profound psychological understanding without having had the need to look deeply into ourselves. Where would Horney's insights have come from had she not experienced her difficulties?. (p. 176)

In other words, her "difficulties" may well have been one of the sources of her ideas, leading to continuing self-analysis and to continuing theoretical creativity.

3.2.3 B. F. Skinner

Are personal-experiential factors operative only in so-called “soft” disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, but not in what we have come to think of as “hard” natural science disciplines? In my view, personal-psychological-experiential factors can also be important within quantitative or experimental natural science disciplines, although perhaps in somewhat different ways, as illustrated in the life of B. F. Skinner. In an excellent book on psychobiography, *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (1994), Alan Elms argues that even though B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) was “the” preeminent behaviorist of his time, and in the view of some, the preeminent psychologist, the personal sources of Skinner’s ideas have remained obscure. According to Elms, Skinner’s novel *Walden Two* (1948), his best-selling book with more than 2 million copies sold, provides some insight into his changing self-conceptions and his relations with behaviorism. For example, Skinner observes that he usually wrote slowly and in longhand but that writing

“Walden Two was an entirely different experience. I wrote it on the typewriter in seven weeks.” Parts of it were written “with an emotional intensity that I have never experienced at any other time”. (p. 86)

Walden Two is partly a dialogue between Burris, “a pedestrian college teacher,” and Frazier, “a self-proclaimed genius who has deserted academic psychology for behavioral engineering.” B. F. Skinner, whose full name was Burrhus Frederic Skinner, says the novel was

pretty obviously a venture in self-therapy, in which I was struggling to reconcile two aspects of my own behavior represented by Burris and Frazier. (p. 87)

In a 1977 interview Skinner told Elms that when he wrote *Walden Two*, he was not really a Frazierian, a social engineer. However, writing the book convinced him: “I’m now a thoroughgoing Frazierian as a result and I’m no longer Burris” (p. 99). In other words, Skinner was no longer the pedestrian college teacher but rather a brilliant maverick applying behavioral principles to the redesign of society. Elms argues that writing *Walden Two* was Skinner’s response to a mid-life crisis he experienced at age 41. His mid-life crisis may have reactivated an earlier identity crisis Skinner suffered during his “Dark Year” at age 22 when he concluded that he couldn’t be a fiction writer because he had nothing to say. The early crisis led to professional identity confusion and disastrous consequences for Skinner’s self-respect. “The crisis (at age 22) was finally resolved, as such intense identity crises often are, through the wholehearted acceptance of an ideology—indeed, an extreme ideology. In Skinner’s case, the ideology was radical behaviorism” (Elms, 1994, p. 90).

3.2.4 *Michel Foucault*

Sometimes the personal-psychological-experiential side of the human sciences is downplayed or denied, whether by Marxists, by sociologists of scientific knowledge, or by post-modernists. An extreme case of this denial can be found in the work of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian (1926–1984) who has been enormously influential in the humanities and in the history and social studies of science. He and many others in the history of science emphasize the ways in which science is socially, politically, economically, culturally, materially, and historically constructed. These are important perspectives that sometimes open one's eyes to previously unseen processes that, once acknowledged, can be utilized and/or acted upon. Yet in his critiques of social institutions Foucault often denies the relevance of the personal or psychological in favor of the political. He maintained this emphasis nearly to the end of his career, at which point he unexpectedly changed his intellectual orientation. In a 1969 interview about his book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault once again refused the psychological, this time to focus not on politics but on discourse itself, without "looking underneath discourse for the thought of man" (Foucault, 1969, in 1996, p. 58).

The relevance of psychology can be denied for intellectual, political, and/or personal reasons. I suspect that all three operate in Foucault's work. In a 1974 interview on the Attica prison uprising, Foucault asks: Doesn't

everything that is a psychological or individual solution for the problem mask the profoundly political character, both of society's elimination of these people and of those people's attack on society? All of that profound struggle is, I believe, political. Crime is a 'coup d'état from below'. (p. 121)

Yes, psychological analysis can mask the political. However, the converse also happens: the political can mask the personal and the psychological. Personal hurt or rage is sometimes projected onto wider political arenas. Often, the personal-experiential, the political, and the intellectual-cultural are interwoven in complex and reciprocally influencing ways. And there are few better examples of this than Foucault himself.

What are the sources of Foucault's desires to critique modernist culture, to evaluate the human sciences, or to dismantle extant power relations? Do they come from disinterested intellectual reflection, from social-political events, and/or from personal experience? Once again, all three contexts may be involved. It seems plausible that aspects of Foucault's critical stance can be related to his personal experience of feeling persecuted as a homosexual in France, attempting suicide in 1948, threatening or attempting suicide a number of other times, and feeling mistreated by the mental health establishment. A doctor at the *École Normale Supérieure*, citing confidentiality, would say only that "these troubles resulted from an extreme difficulty in experiencing and accepting his homosexuality" (Eribon, 1991, p. 21). According to Eribon, one of Foucault's lovers, after homosexual encounters

Foucault would be prostrate for hours, ill, overwhelmed with shame. (p. 27)

At these times a doctor was often called to keep him from committing suicide. These personal experiences, occurring in a particular social and cultural context, may well be one of the sources of Foucault's antipathy to the mental health establishment and of his perceptions of the human sciences as invasive and harmful rather than beneficent. These and other personal experiences may have been interwoven with the formation of political stances and changing intellectual programs throughout Foucault's career.

At the end of his life, in what is said to have been his last interview on May 19, 1984 (Foucault 1996), Foucault says that in his earlier books, *Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, and *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1965),

I tried to mark out three types of problems: that of the truth, that of power, and that of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can be understood only in relation to each other, and only with each other. What hampered me in the preceding books was to have considered the first two experiences without taking into account the third. (Foucault 1996, p. 466)

In other words, these early works were concerned first with discourse itself, then with the relations of truth to power, but ultimately neglected individual conduct, which Foucault tried to address more fully in his last books on the history of sexuality, ethics, and techniques of the self. Foucault acknowledges, more so in his later life, that all of his work has origins in fragments of his personal experience, including his writings on madness, prisons, and the history of sexuality.

3.3 Psychobiography in Philosophy and in Statistics

An underlying theme in my interests is how to relate scientific theory and research to historical and biographical inquiry. Carl Hempel (1905–1997), was a leading logical empiricist who I came to greatly admire personally and intellectually. I had been impressed by his books on *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science* (1952) and by *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (1965). I had the opportunity to meet him as a post-doc in 1977 while he was a visiting professor at UC Berkeley. I audited his philosophy of science class and for me it was a model of rigorous thinking and humane responses to students and to philosophies of science different than his own. He would say,

What is the strongest case we can make for this view? Now, here is my response to it.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962, 1970), Thomas Kuhn challenged aspects of logical empiricism, and drew more attention to the psychological and social aspects of changes between different scientific paradigms. Kuhn moved from UC Berkeley to Princeton in 1964. Even though they had very different views, Hempel and Kuhn sometimes taught together. In 1979 Kuhn moved to M.I.T., as professor of philosophy. At an event honoring Kuhn at M.I.T. late in his life, after he had been diagnosed with lung cancer, Hempel was one of the invited speakers and

received a long ovation. This may have been even before he spoke. Does anyone else remember?

In an influential 1942 paper, “*The Function of General Laws in History*,” Carl Hempel argued that historical explanations depend explicitly or implicitly upon general laws. Many historians and philosophers of history, starting with Dray (1957) have disagreed. My own view is that historical inquiry can draw on causal generalizations for explaining aspects of events, although not for explaining whole complex sequences of events. I tried to relate Hempel’s thinking about scientific explanation to a dramatic case in psychobiography. Shortly before Christmas on December 23, 1888, Vincent Van Gogh, 35 years old, cut off the lower half of his left ear, took it to a brothel, asked for a prostitute named Rachel, handed her the ear, and requested that she “keep this object carefully.”

How is such an extraordinary event to be accounted for? In “Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography” I review more than a dozen different explanations of this event. One proposal was that he was frustrated in trying to develop a relationship with Gauguin and that aggressive impulses were directed against himself. Another idea is that he had been influenced by bullfights he had seen in Arles in which the ear of the bull is given by the matador to a lady in the crowd of his choice. A third interpretation which may have more support is that Vincent was emotionally and financially dependent on his brother Theo. They often spent Christmas together, but Vincent learned that Theo would spend the holiday with his new fiancée. Perhaps the self-mutilation was a plea for his brother’s attention. After the self-mutilation, Theo came and cared for him. Is one of these explanations uniquely true? Are some of them partially true? Or, perhaps, are none of them true? What criteria and processes are there for critically evaluating each of these alternative explanations? This is a question which comes up in evaluating every set of alternative explanations. If so, it would be good if we can get a handle on it. “*Why Did Van Gogh Cut Off His Ear? The Problem of Alternative Explanations in Psychobiography*” was first published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1981), and as a chapter in *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982). It has been reprinted several other places, and in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005). I was honored to hear from Professor Hempel that he assigned this paper in one of his later philosophy of science classes.

One of the most powerful critics of the view that scientific inquiry is more basic than, or provides the foundation for, historical inquiry is Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997). Berlin was trained as a philosopher at Oxford but over the years turned more and more to intellectual history; and to arguing for the importance of romanticism in relation to the Enlightenment, as in *The Roots of Romanticism* (1999). Henry Hardy edited many of Berlin’s books, including a large collection of his essays, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (1997). Berlin opposed the view he saw expressed in the French Enlightenment or by Descartes taking mathematics as the model for human knowledge while denigrating historical inquiry. The study of individual persons or lives can be complicated, but it is part of The Proper Study of Mankind. This claim will be illustrated with a few important examples. In philosophy, we will look briefly at relations between the life and work of Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

In statistics, we will look at relations between the life and work of Sir Ronald A. Fisher in England, and of Jerzy Neyman, who developed one of the world's leading statistics departments at UC Berkeley.

3.3.1 *The Personal Side of Philosophy*

Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein can be seen as two of the 20th century's most important philosophers, although in very different ways. They arrived at dramatically different conceptions of philosophy in relation to science. Russell favored a more "scientific philosophy", while Wittgenstein wanted a philosophy much broader than this. Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was co-author of *Principia Mathematica* with Alfred North Whitehead (3 volumes, 1910, 1912, 1913), analyzing the logical bases of mathematics. The Vienna Circle which developed logical positivism, drew both on this book and on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). Wittgenstein (1889–1951) started as a potential protegee to Russell, but they ended up with dramatically different views. Russell favored a more "scientific philosophy", while Wittgenstein opposed such a view.

What was the personal context of Russell's work in philosophy? Russell's 3-volume autobiography opens with an inspiring prologue, "What I Have Lived For":

Three passions, simple but over-whelmingly strong have governed my life: the longing for life, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. (Russell, 1967, p. 3)

Russell provides moving descriptions of each of these three passions. This prologue is an eloquent statement of major human values. It impressed me when I first read it in the summer of 1969 before beginning graduate school. Is Bertrand Russell a model of intellectual productivity, with something like 70 books in many different fields? Or, is the lesson that great intellectual achievements can come at a high personal cost to those around one, as in Russell's relations with his first three wives and with his children, Kate and John?

A two-volume biography of Russell by Monk (1996, 2000) provides a much darker view of Russell's life than provided in his autobiography, or than in several earlier biographies. Monk argues that the three great passions were attempts by Russell to

overcome his solitariness through contact with something outside himself: another individual, humanity at large, or the external world. (p. xviii)

To an extent greater than I had realized in reading his autobiography, Russell feared the depths of his own emotions, felt cut off from others, and was afraid of going mad. Monk may be too critical of Russell, but provides a level of detail about Russell's psychology that deserves examination. Russell published 70 books and more than 2000 articles. This is a daunting comparison for any of us in the academic world.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, however challenged Russell's world view, while publishing relatively little during his lifetime: a total of one book review (1912), one book, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and one article (1929). After his death in 1951, *Philosophical Investigations* was published (1953), and many other volumes based on his lectures, conversations, and notebooks. Wittgenstein was born in 1889 to one of the wealthiest families in Vienna. Wittgenstein wanted to know if he had the talent to make a significant contribution in philosophy. Without a prior appointment, Wittgenstein arrived at Russell's rooms in Trinity College, Cambridge on October 18, 1911 to introduce himself. Wittgenstein sat in on Russell's seminar through the term and talked with him afterwards. Before Christmas, Wittgenstein asked Russell if he had the ability to make a contribution to philosophy. Russell said he didn't know, and asked to see a piece of his writing. Wittgenstein returned with a manuscript he had written over vacation. Russell was impressed and said Wittgenstein might do great things in philosophy. Unfortunately, this manuscript has not survived. Wittgenstein later told a friend that Russell's encouragement

had proved his salvation, and had ended nine years of loneliness and suffering, during which he had continually thought of suicide. (Monk, 1990, p. 41)

Russell felt that Wittgenstein might be the protege he had been looking for. However, by June 1913, Wittgenstein became severely critical of Russell's work. Russell was devastated by the criticisms. He wrote to his lover, Lady Ottoline Morrell that after these criticisms he "felt ready for suicide" June 19, 1913). Russell later wrote that Wittgenstein's criticism seemed right and

I saw that I could not hope ever again to do fundamental work in philosophy. My impulse was shattered like a wave dashing to pieces against a breakwater. (March 4, 1916, in Monk, 1996, pp. 301, 302)

Wittgenstein became severely critical of the view that scientific knowledge is the model of all knowledge. An overly scientific view gets in the way

not just of philosophical clarity, but of a full understanding of art, music, literature, and above all, ourselves. (Monk, 2005, p. 106)

3.3.2 *Statistics*

There are complex relations between thinking statistically, thinking historically, and thinking personally or experientially. The lives of Sir Ronald Fisher (1890–1962) and Jerzy Neyman (1894–1981) provide much to learn from. R. A. Fisher made major contributions to statistics, to genetics and to the design of experiments. However, Fisher's life illustrates the costs which can come from not developing skills in thinking personally or experientially. Fisher married Ruth Eileen Guinness in 1917. They had 2 handsome boys and 6 attractive girls with charming photos of the boys with their father, and of the girls with their mother. The second oldest daughter, Joan, born in 1925, later Joan Fisher Box, wrote an heroically honest biography of her father, R.

A. Fisher: *The Life of a Scientist* (1978). After Fisher retired from Cambridge University he moved to Australia where there was support from former students. Unfortunately Fisher had become estranged from his wife in 1942 or so, after she had a religious conversion.

Fisher constantly smoked a pipe. He challenged the research coming out in the 1950s claiming that smoking causes cancer. He argued that genetic factors and environmental factors were not adequately considered. Some of his critiques led to more rigorous research designs. Fisher was diagnosed with cancer of the bowel by 1961. He did not tell his wife or any of his children. On July 21, 1962, he had surgery for the cancer, and died on July 29, 1962.

He left no will. He told no member of his family of his illness or of the impending surgery. His son was in England, his daughters were scattered in Asia, Africa and America; none was in Australia who might attend his funeral, none to make the decisions or take charge of his affairs.

How to understand this sad state of affairs? Some kinds of psychological or psycho-social interpretation seems needed. How much of a book does one absorb on first looking through it? I bought this biography of Sir R.A. Fisher on 3.18.1988 at Cody's Bookstore in Berkeley. The receipt is still in it. At the time I was thinking about the history of statistics. I would guess I jumped to the sections discussing his works in statistics and on the design of experiments. At the time, I didn't have time or interest to read the sections about his family background or about the early and middle years of his marriage.

I recently wanted to understand these better. Why? I was learning about the history of statistics at UC Berkeley. Fisher had just published *The Design of Experiments* in 1935 and was world famous. He was invited to Berkeley to give the Hitchcock Lectures in the Fall of 1936. This included a 3 or 4 week stay so that faculty and students could meet and talk with him. The visit did not go well. Fisher was seen as so arrogant by the search committee that they would not hire him, no matter how good a statistician he was (Reid, 1998, p 144). The search was back on. On November 10, 1937 a letter was sent to Jerzy Neyman (1894–1981) inviting him to teach statistics in the math department at U.C. Berkeley. Neyman built Berkeley into one of

“the largest and most important statistics centers in the world” in the years after WWII. (McGrayne, 2012, p. 98)

The world of statistics has long been bitterly divided between competing views of statistics. To simplify, there are at least two different views of statistics, a frequentist view, and a subjective expectancies view. This second view is often called a Bayesian view after the Reverend Thomas Bayes (1702–1761) who initiated this perspective. Neyman was a frequentist and Berkeley became an “anti-Bayesian powerhouse” (McGraham, 2012, p. 51). One effort to integrate these two views was in *Statistical Decision Functions* (1950) by Abraham Wald (1902–1950). Neyman was enthusiastic about Wald's new integrative framework, but Fisher strongly objected to it (Lehmann, 2008, pp. 166, 167). As an outsider from the world of psychology, I had naively assumed there might be more unanimity in what seemed more like a

“hard science” field. Jerzy Neyman, a leading frequentist held the view that the theory of probability an individual holds is a matter of taste. When asked in 1979 about the alternative Bayesian view, Neyman said “It does not interest me. I am interested in frequencies” (Reid, 1988, p. 274.)

However, tastes can change. Neyman initially objected to the idea of being the subject of a biography. He refused to read a biographical sketch of him done for his 80th birthday. He said it would be too much like an obituary. However, Constance Reid came to talk with him about his life on Saturdays in 1978. She was an experienced biographer and sister of an eminent mathematician. He came to love being interviewed. Near his 85th birthday, she said she needed to begin writing. He seemed disappointed that she would not be coming to talk with him next Saturday.

People can change in relation to their beliefs about biography and the study of lives.

3.4 Conclusion

In relation to scientific psychology, I believe that historical-interpretive inquiry or “human science” inquiry is an important part of the field, including the study of individual lives. Contemporary psychologists pay substantial attention to the relations of psychology to biology, including physiology, genetics and neuroscience. These are valuable fields. However, these fields need to be complemented by attending to shared interests between psychology and the humanities, as pursued in the “human sciences,” in psychobiography, and in the study of individual lives.

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and Method (1982), *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (1988), and *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* (Vol. 9, 2007), co-edited with Gardner Lindzey. “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives” in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005) outlines his understanding of the history of the field. A current project with the San Francisco Bay Area Psychobiography Group is *Examining Lives: Self-Reflections in Psychobiography*, Oxford U. Press, forthcoming.

Chapter 4

An Ethics Guide to Psychobiography: A Best Practice Model



Joseph G. Ponterotto and Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi)

Abstract Psychobiography is a research endeavor, and as in all psychological research ethical considerations are a critical component of the research process. Traditionally, psychobiographers have devoted more attention to the psychological theories undergirding psychobiography and to the diverse methodologies employed in the research, than to ethical considerations and challenges inherent in the research process. This chapter argues that ethics should be central to the psychobiography research plan and execution. The authors introduce a best practice ethics model for psychobiographers that is infused throughout the research, writing, and publication process. Addressed are ethical considerations at each stage of the research process, including: selecting one's psychobiographical research subject; navigating the initial proposal review and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process; considering informed consent procedures and options; having an ethical decision making model in place to address unanticipated ethical issues that emerge during the research; writing and publishing the psychobiography; and monitoring the impact of the psychobiography on those who may be impacted by the study. The authors consider ethics not as a distinct part of psychobiographical research, but as a living, evolving thread constantly intertwining in all facets of the study before, during, and after completion. The ethics guide presented will be valuable to psychobiographers at all levels of training, experience, and expertise.

Keywords Ethics in psychobiography · Psychological theories · Psychobiography as interdisciplinary enterprise

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4.1 Introduction

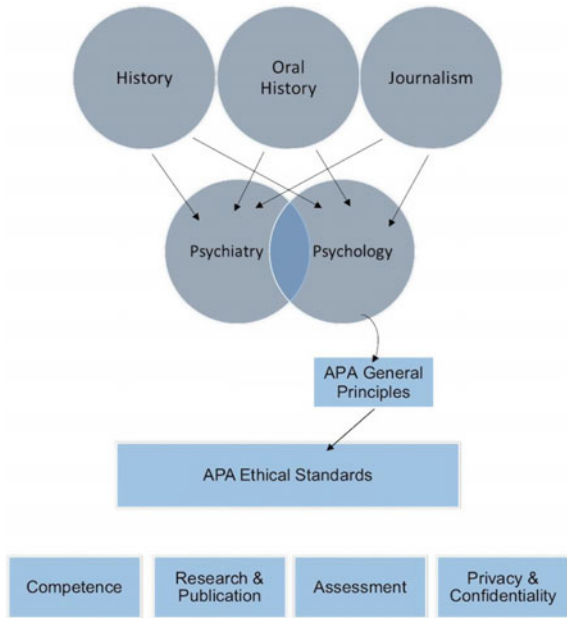
Issues of ethics have often been ignored in psychobiographical research, or at best they have been only a forethought or an afterthought in the study. Periodically, throughout the last century, both psychologists and psychiatrists have visited the topic of ethics in psychobiography, but such discussion has not been a common nor embedded thread in psychobiography scholarship. Some important ethical discussions in psychobiography were initiated by Sigmund Freud himself in his co-authored psychoanalytic profile of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (published posthumously in Freud & Bullitt, 1967); and by the American Psychiatric Association (1973, 1976) in their delineation of the “Goldwater Rule” which prohibits members of the association from offering psychological assessments of public figures they have never formally assessed. More recently, the topic of the “Goldwater Rule” reemerged with debate on the potential psychological fitness of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Candidates (Lilienfeld, Miller, & Lynam, 2018a, 2018b; McDaniel, 2016). This topic will be addressed in a later section of this chapter.

In the last ½ decade, particularly, modern psychobiographers have begun to include at least brief discussions of ethical considerations in their research reports (e.g., see special section of the *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, edited by Fouché, 2015). Recently, the American Psychological Association’s flagship journal, the *American Psychologist*, devoted a special section to psychobiography (Kasser, 2017; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017) that included a focus on ethical and legal issues (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

For the most part, however, when ethics is addressed in psychobiographical reports it is often as a brief “insert” or initial consideration, rather than being fully explored and addressed throughout the life of the study. The purpose of the present chapter is to urge psychobiographers, particularly those anchored in the mental health professions, to more fully address and integrate ethical considerations throughout the course of their research. More specifically, the present chapter serves two broad goals. First, a nomological network for integrating ethics into psychobiography is presented by anchoring the study of ethics in an interdisciplinary framework. This network is presented in Fig. 4.1. Specifically, the most recent ethical guidelines relative to psychobiography presented in the disciplines of history, oral history, journalism, psychiatry, and psychology are reviewed. It is believed an integrated, interdisciplinary perspective on ethics can guide competent and ethically vigilant psychobiography (see Fig. 4.1).

Second, an applied ethical guide to psychobiography is presented through an integration of ethical considerations across critical stages of the psychobiography research process: selecting one’s research subject; the initial proposal and Institutional Review Board (IRB) review; informed consent procedures; rigor of research methods; developing an ethical decision making model; writing and publishing the psychobiography; and monitoring the impact of the psychobiography after publication. It should be noted at the outset that the authors of this chapter live and work in the United States (U.S.), and therefore the contents of the chapter are anchored

Fig. 4.1 Nomological network informing ethical practice in psychobiography



primarily in a North American perspective. Such a perspective may not be fully generalizable across nations or continents, and we invite our international colleagues to extend and adapt the present work through their geographic and historical lenses.

4.2 Psychobiography as an Interdisciplinary Endeavor

Psychobiography is clearly an interdisciplinary enterprise as it combines psychology—the study of the mind, and biography—the study of the human life. Biography also has roots in the broader intellectual discipline of history. One comprehensive definition of psychobiography is “the intensive life-span study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology” (Ponterotto, 2015b, p. 379). The interdisciplinary nature of psychobiography presents challenges to the researcher. Most scholars, particularly in North America, are trained in quite specific disciplines, for example in psychology or history. Yet competent and impactful psychobiography requires deep skill sets in each of these disciplines.

William McKinley Runyan, a pioneering scholar in modern psychobiography (see Runyan’s, 2019), noted that psychologists are not trained in historiography and therefore are susceptible

to errors such as inadequate attention to primary source material, insufficient awareness of historical and cultural differences, and misinterpretation of the subject's social-historic context. (Runyan, 1982, p. 231)

On the other hand, historians are not usually well-schooled in theories of psychology and research on personality development, and are, therefore, at risk of relying “on lay psychology which may not be supported by systematic research” (Runyan, 1982, p. 231; see also American Psychiatric Association, 1976). Additional intellectual disciplines that inform psychobiography are journalism, guided by its search for truth and duty to inform the public, and oral history, which records history through the memories and voices of those who lived it. Each of these disciplines presents its own standards for ethical practice. It is important for psychobiographers at all levels of training and experience to be familiar with the key elements of these ethical principles, and these are presented below.

4.3 American Historical Association

Clearly, psychobiography is as much a historical discipline as it is a psychological one. Key elements of the American Historical Association's (AHA, 2011) Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct that directly relate to the work of the psychobiographer are as follows:

Historians should practice their craft with integrity. They should honor the historical record. They should document their sources. They should acknowledge their debts to the work of other scholars. They should respect and welcome divergent points of view even as they argue and subject those views to critical scrutiny. They should remember that our collective enterprise depends on mutual trust. And they should never betray that trust. (p. 6)

4.4 Oral History Association

Oral history represents the remembered history as told by individuals who lived that history or were closely associated with individuals who lived that history. Psychobiographers who profile contemporary historical figures, meaning here those still living or only recently deceased, will often interview individuals who lived in the inner circle of that individual. For example, psychobiographers often seek to interview family members, next-of-kin, colleagues, associates, and or students of the contemporary figure. Naturally the end goals of oral historians and psychobiographers differ: the oral historian documents events deemed important to the historical record, while the psychobiographer attempts to understand and communicate the inner psychology of significant figures to advance both the historical record and the profession of psychology. There are some ethical standards of oral historians that can be directly relevant to the interdisciplinary enterprise of psychobiography. Below are four best ethical practices that are included in the *Oral History Association's Principles and Best Practices statement* (OHA, 2009, pp. 2–5).

Oral historians insure that narrators (the interviewees) voluntarily give their consent to be interviewed and understand that they can withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time. (p. 2)

Interviewers are obliged to ask historically significant questions, reflecting careful preparation for the interview and understanding of the issues to be addressed.

Interviewers must also respect the narrator's equal authority in the interview and honor their right to respond to questions in their own style and language. (p. 2)

Oral history interviews are historical documents that are preserved and made accessible to future researchers and members of the public. (p. 2)

All those who use oral history interviews should strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline...This includes foremost striving to retain the integrity of the narrator's perspective, recognizing the subjectivity of the interview, and interpreting and contextualizing the narrative according to the professional standards of the applicable scholarly disciplines. (p. 5)

4.5 Society of Professional Journalists

A psychobiographer in practice is like a detective, trying to resolve a puzzle, unwrap a mystery, search for a deeper understanding or truth, or at least the most probable understanding or truth given the accumulated evidence. These work characteristics apply well to investigative journalists who uncover and report on critical events, issues, and people of the day for the benefit of educating the public. In societies that promote freedom of speech and reporting, journalists serve as a moral compass in keeping institutions and public figures accountable for their actions, behaviors, and decisions.

Portions of the ethical code of journalists can inform and enhance the work of psychobiographers. The *Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics* emphasizes that professional integrity serves as the cornerstone of journalists' credibility (SPJ, 1996). Journalists seek to enlighten the public through fair and comprehensive accounts of events, issues, and public figures. They "seek truth and report it" accurately through honest, balanced, and courageous information gathering, interpreting, and reporting. Journalists "act independently" of conflicting interests and are guided by the public's right to knowledge; they are "accountable" to one another and the public at large, and they strive to "minimize harm" through the fair treatment of subjects, sources, and colleagues (SPJ, 1996, p. 1).

In summary, ethical tenets that transcend history, oral history, and journalism and that are also shared with the ethics codes of various mental health professions (reviewed next) include the researchers' obligation to seek the truth in their research; adhere to the best methodological guidelines of their profession; carefully document data sources, noting any limitations there within; establishing respectful, trustworthy, and consultative roles with colleagues; awareness of one's potential biases and working to avoid conflicts of interest; and when possible, requesting and securing informed consent for study participation.

4.6 Ethical Principles of Mental Health Professionals

While the ethical principles and standards of history, biography, and journalism are relevant to and can inform research in psychobiography, the majority of psychobiographers are mental health professionals and as such are guided primarily by the ethical principles of psychology and psychiatry (as well as counseling and social work). Given that roughly 95% of psychobiographies focus on deceased historic and public figures (see data in Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, & Cheung, 2015) who cannot be libeled or harmed by descriptions or profiles of their lives, ethics has not been an active consideration in psychobiographical research and reporting.

In the field of psychology, for instance, ethical guidelines are geared for research on living subjects and do not even address psychological biography (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). It is instructive to note, however, that at least one pioneering psychoanalyst of the early 20th century who was engaged in psychobiography did intuit that ethical issues were most salient to this applied research enterprise. The founder of psychoanalysis, and one of the first psychoanalytic psychobiographers, Sigmund Freud, did reflect on the risks of non-anonymous psychological profiling and on informed consent procedures in his writing on President Woodrow Wilson in the 1930s. Freud co-authored with William Bullitt, one of his former patients from the 1920s, a psychoanalytic profile of President Woodrow Wilson (Freud & Bullitt, 1967). Bullitt was a career diplomat and a former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1933–1936) and France (1936–1940) who was known to have had political disagreements with President Wilson. In the Introduction to the book, Freud reflected on ethics relative to the relationship between the historical subject's lifespan and the writing of a psychobiography. He stated:

To publish the results of such a study of deep psychic mechanisms and to expose them to public curiosity so long as the individual concerned lives is certainly inadmissible.

That the subject would consent to publication during his lifetime is altogether unlikely.

Therapeutic analyses are carried on between physician and patient under the pledge of professional secrecy, all third persons being excluded. When, however, an individual whose life and works are of significance to the present and future has died, he [sic] becomes by common consent a proper subject for biography and previous limitations no longer exist.

The question of a period of post-mortem immunity from biographical study might then arise but such a question has rarely been raised. It would not be easy to achieve agreement as to the duration of such a period or to ensure its observation. (Freud & Bullitt, 1967, p. xiv)

Freud was true to his own ethical judgment, and the psychobiography of Woodrow Wilson, though completed in the late 1930s, was not published by Bullitt until 1967, 43 years after the death of President Wilson (in 1924), six years after the death of Wilson's second wife, Edith Bolling Galt (in 1961), and 28 years after Freud's own death in 1939 (Freud & Bullitt, 1967; see also Ponterotto, 2013b). Despite Freud and Bullitt's sensitivity to President Wilson's post-mortem privacy, the book was harshly criticized by both historians and psychoanalysts (see American Psychiatric Association, 1976; Erikson, 1967) for its methodological limitations.

In the United States, psychiatry has been the mental health profession that has most directly addressed ethical issues in psychobiography, and its history in this

regard is important to review. A milestone in ethical research in psychobiography was the formation by the American Psychiatric Association (1976) of a special Task Force on ethics in psychohistory and psychobiography. The motivation for forming the task force and a brief summary of its recommendations follows.

4.6.1 American Psychiatric Association's Task Force on Psychobiography and Psychohistory

The American Psychiatric Association began to address ethics in psychobiography as a result of U.S. political events in the 1960s. More specifically, in 1964 during the run-up to the Presidential election pitting Democrat incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson against Republican challenger, Barry M. Goldwater, FACT Magazine published the results of a one-item survey in which the complete membership of the American Psychiatric Association (N = 12,356) was asked “Do you believe that Barry Goldwater is psychologically fit to be President of the United States?” While only 20% of the membership completed the survey, 49% of the respondents indicated that Goldwater was not fit to be President. Twenty-seven percent thought he was fit to be President, and the remaining 24% indicated they did not have adequate information to render any judgment on his psychological fitness (Ponterotto, 2013b; Runyan, 1982).

The leadership of the American Psychiatric Association reacted swiftly to admonish that segment of its membership that offered an opinion of Goldwater (see Hofling, 1976; Lesse, 1978). Stimulated primarily by the Goldwater affair, the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 put forth the following ethical standard (Rule 7.3) in its formal code of ethics:

On occasion psychiatrists are asked for an opinion about an individual who is in the light of public attention or who has disclosed information about himself/herself through public media. In such circumstances, a psychiatrist may share with the public his or her expertise about psychiatric issues in general. However, it is unethical for a psychiatrist to offer a professional opinion unless he or she has conducted an examination and has been granted proper authorization for such a statement. (American Psychiatric Association, 2017; also cited in Lilienfield et al. 2018b, p. 8)

In addition to presenting a specific ethical standard related to mental health commentary on public figures, the American Psychiatric Association (1976) formed a special task-force on *The Psychiatrist as Psychohistorian* to further study the topic and provide methodological and ethical guidelines for best practice. The Association was concerned not just with the Goldwater controversy but also with a number of published psychobiographies, some written by non-psychiatrists, that reflected badly on the profession. These books included, for starters, Freud and Bullitt's (1967) *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study*, which the task-force believed to be negatively biased against President Wilson, reliant on psychological reductionism, and failing to account for historical and social factors related to the lifespan (1856–1924) of Wilson (American Psychiatric Association, 1976). Other specific books singled

out for concern included *The Kennedy Neurosis* (Clinch, 1973), *In Search of Nixon* (Mazlish, 1972), and *Nixon's Psychiatric Profile* (Chesen, 1973).

The task force set forth methodological and ethical guidelines for conducting psychobiography. As with Freud's view a decade earlier (Freud & Bullitt, 1967), the task-force emphasized the importance of informed consent and privacy rights in relation to the temporal life space of the historic figure. With regard to deceased public and historic figures, the task force stated:

there can be no question about the ethics of publishing psychohistorical studies or biographies of deceased persons when there is no problem about invading the privacy of surviving relatives though this fact must be meticulously determined. (pp. 13–14)

The task force, like Freud, did not address an appropriate post-mortem time frame necessary to protect the privacy of surviving family members and next-of-kin. Extending Freud's position, the task force linked informed consent procedures to more recently deceased public figures. Specifically, they stated:

In the case of recently deceased persons, in which there is definite possibility of harm to living relatives and friends ... informed consent should at least be sought from living next-of-kin and, if it is withheld, this fact should be stated, together with the author's reasons for going ahead without it. (p. 13)

In this statement the task force is indicating that ethical issues of privacy and informed consent are more salient when the subjects of interest are recently deceased. However, the task force does not explore what "recently" means in terms of an appropriate postmortem time frame. (Later in this chapter the authors address the time frame issue by distinguishing recently- from long-deceased.) Finally, with regard to contemporary historic and public figures still living, the task force is quite clear:

As to the basic question of whether it is ethical for a psychiatrist to write and publish a psychohistory, psychobiography, or psycho-profile of a living person, it is difficult for the Task Force to perceive how this could be done ethically without the written, informed, and freely given consent of the subject or subjects for personal interviews and publication. By informed consent we mean full disclosure to the subject or subjects of the way in which the material is to be used and published. (p. 13)

While psychiatry has clearly expressed its opinion with regard to ethics and psychobiographical research, the psychology profession had been relatively silent on the issue until most recently (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

4.7 Ethics of the American Psychological Association

Psychologists in the United States, particularly those 115,000+ who are members of the American Psychological Association (APA) (see www.apa.org), are bound to adhere to, and follow as best as is possible, the ethical principles of the APA in their practice, research, and service activities. Unfortunately, at this time, the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2017; hereinafter referred

to as the Ethics Code) fails to offer direct guidance for psychologists engaged in psychobiographical research. Nonetheless, psychologists in the role of psychobiographer, are bound to engage their research and writing in light of and in thoughtful consideration of the principles and standards of the ethics code.

4.7.1 APA General Principles

The General Principles of the Ethics Code are aspirational and intended to guide and inspire psychologists toward the highest ethical ideals of the profession. All five of the General Principles can inform the work of the psychologist working in the role of psychobiographer. *Beneficence* and *Nonmaleficence* guide psychologists to care for those they work with and do not harm. Psychologists work to safeguard the welfare of others and are considerate of how their actions may affect the rights of others in terms of personal, social, financial, and political factors. *Fidelity* and *Responsibility* guides psychologists to develop relationships of trust with all those they encounter in the course of their research, practice, and service. Psychologists clarify their roles with those with whom they work, accept responsibility for their actions, and consult with colleagues as necessary to promote best professional practices. Psychologists also are concerned with the ethical compliance and professional competence of colleagues and consult or intervene when necessary to promote within-professional accountability towards best practices.

Integrity relates directly to competent professional practice and the promotion of honesty and accuracy in the endeavors of research, practice, teaching, and service. In research, psychologists avoid deceptive practices whenever possible, and if deception in a study is necessary to advance the public good, the consequences of such deception are addressed and psychologists work to repair potentially damaged relationships. *Justice* guides psychologists to consider fairness and access to their services. Furthermore they operate within their boundaries of competence and work to understand and contain their biases in promoting fair practices. Finally, *Respect for People's Rights and Dignity* honors self-determination, privacy and confidentiality of those with whom psychologists work. Psychologists are attuned to the broad multicultural landscape within which they work and are sensitive to cultural differences in their research, practice, and service. Further, psychologists are aware of the safeguards necessary to promote individuals' rights and dignity if impairment or other factors prevent self-determination.

4.7.2 APA Ethical Standards

A careful reading of the Ethics Code reveals a number of ethical standards that may be quite relevant to the research of the psychobiographer, and a variety of these have been reviewed by previous researchers (Lilienfeld et al., 2018b; Mayer, 2010;

Mayer & Leichtman, 2012; Ponterotto, 2013b; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). For our present purposes we review select APA ethical standards that most relate to the work of the psychobiographer. These are organized along the standards of *competence*, *research* and *publication*, *assessment*, and *privacy* and *confidentiality*.

4.8 Competence

Methodological competence and ethical practice in research are inextricably intertwined. In a landmark article on ethics in qualitative research, Haverkamp (2005) stated:

It is difficult to imagine how one could establish a trustworthy research relationship, one that achieves a favorable balance of benefits and risks, without performing one's research role in a competent manner. (p. 153)

Experienced psychobiographers also emphasize that rigorous methodology is a prerequisite to ethical research practice (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 2015; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005a, b). Ethical standards of competence that inform psychobiography include the following:

Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study or professional experience. (APA, 2017, 2.01 Boundaries of Competence [a], p. 5)

Furthermore, psychologists must anchor their work in the latest psychological knowledge, must develop competence and be supervised in the research if they are new to psychobiography, and must maintain and continue to develop their competence as they engage psychobiographical research, as reflected in the following standards of competence:

“Psychologists’ work is based upon established scientific and professional knowledge of the discipline” (APA, 2017, 2.04 Bases of Scientific and Professional Judgments, p. 5); and if new to psychobiography:

Psychologists planning to provide services, teach, or conduct research involving populations, areas, techniques, or technologies new to them undertake relevant education, training, supervised experience, consultation, or study. (APA, 2017, 2.01 Boundaries of Competence [c], p. 5)

Finally,

Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence. (APA, 2017, 2.03 Maintaining Competence, p. 5)

4.9 Research and Publications

Psychobiography is clearly a research endeavor that anchors its investigative inquiry in established theories of psychology supported by rigorous psychological and historiographic methods. A core component of ethical research is the informed consent of the research participant, or if the subject is unable to give consent, as would be the case with a deceased historic subject, the consent is sought from a legally authorized person such as executor of estate or next-of kin (APA, 2017, 3.10 Informed Consent, [a, b], p. 7).

Specifically, when seeking informed consent, the researchers inform subjects about

- (1) the purpose of the research, expected duration, and procedures; (2) their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun; (3) the foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing; (4) reasonably foreseeable factors . . . such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects; (5) any prospective research benefits; (6) limits of confidentiality. (APA, 2002, 8.02 Informed Consent to Research, pp. 9–10)

Psychobiographers have rarely sought informed consent from their research subjects if still living, or legal representatives or next-of-kin, if deceased (Ponterotto, 2013a; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). For long-deceased historic figures, there may be no next-of-kin or legal executors still alive. For subjects still living, it is very uncommon for them to agree to be the subject of study of a psychologist. Given this probability, psychobiographers do not generally approach the public figure or their next-of-kin, if recently deceased, to request cooperation in the study. However, lack of informed consent does not necessarily preclude psychobiographers from engaging their research craft (Ponterotto, 2013a, 2013b). There is a provision in the APA (2017) Ethics Code that permits exemption from the usual research participant informed consent process:

Psychologists may dispense with informed consent only (1) where research would not reasonably be assumed to create distress or harm and involves . . . (b) only anonymous questionnaires, naturalistic observations, or archival research for which disclosure of responses would not place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or damage their financial standing, employability, or reputation, and confidentiality is protected. (APA, 2017, 8.05 Dispensing with Informed Consent for Research, p. 11)

Psychobiographies of deceased individuals cannot directly cause them distress or harm.

Furthermore the data for psychobiographers are often archival and publically available information on the subject and this form of research is usually exempt from informed consent procedures. However, psychobiographies can impact negatively the lives of living subjects, and for recently deceased public figures, they can impact the “identity interests” (reputation) and “memory interests” (of those close to the historic figure). Therefore, despite potential exemption from informed consent procedures, psychobiographers are obligated to weigh these considerations in the course of their work and write about their ethical decisions in the final report (Berg, 2001; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

4.10 Assessment

The assessment standards of the Ethics Code was written in the context of living clients and patients. However, it is incumbent for psychologists to consider their relevance to psychobiography. The first standard quoted below supports the spirit of the Goldwater rule (from the American Psychiatric Association, 1973) while the second standard addresses the responsibility of the psychobiographer to comprehensively discuss the sources on which conclusions and hypotheses are drawn

Psychologists provide opinions of the psychological characteristics of individuals only after they have conducted an examination of the individual adequate to support their statements or conclusions. When, despite reasonable efforts, such an examination is not practical, psychologists document the efforts they made and the result of those efforts, clarify the probable impact of their limited information on the reliability and validity of their opinions, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions or recommendations. (APA, 2017, 9.01(b) Bases for Assessment, p. 13)

When psychologists conduct a record review or provide consultation or supervision and an individual examination is not warranted or necessary for the opinion, psychologists explain this and the sources of information on which they based their conclusions and recommendations. (APA, 2017, 9.01(c) Bases for Assessment, p. 13)

It should be noted that most recently, a team of psychologists have advocated to reframe the “Goldwater Rule” as the “Goldwater Guideline” in that under certain circumstances when the common good may outweigh individual privacy rights (duty to inform), that psychologists can comment on the psychological fitness of a public figure. More specifically, psychologists should refrain from public statements about the mental health of public figures unless

(a) they have access to a substantial body of high quality information (e.g., extensive and extended behavioral observations) drawn from multiple data sources and (b) public welfare is clearly at stake, so that the risks of refraining from professional opinions potentially exceed the risks of voicing them. (Lilienfeld et al., 2018b, p. 35)

Readers, particularly members of the American Psychological Association (APA), should note that this suggested adaptation of the Goldwater Rule was presented by an independent team of psychologists and is not the official position of the APA, which continues to endorse the original Goldwater Rule (McDaniel, 2016).

4.11 Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are two constructs central to the ethical standards of every mental health profession. The ethical standard below guides psychologists in the role of psychobiographer to thoughtfully consider what private information on the historic subject is germane to their psychological profiling and necessary to include in the final published report.

(a) Psychologists include in written and oral reports and consultations, only information germane to the purpose for which the communication is made [and] (b) Psychologists discuss confidential information obtained in their work only for appropriate scientific or professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with such matters. (APA, 2017, 4.04 Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy, p. 8)

4.12 A Model for Best Ethical Practices

Having presented an interdisciplinary nomological network as a foundation for considering ethics in psychobiography, we now present a more practical component of our discussion by briefly outlining ethical considerations at various stages of the psychobiography planning, execution, and summary phases. Readers are also encouraged to read samples of the sequential methodological and procedural steps to conducting psychobiography, first outlined by Elms (2007), and then extended upon by du Plessis (2017) and Ponterotto (2017a). These methodological steps to psychobiography can be integrated with the ethical steps presented below.

4.12.1 *Selecting Your Psychobiographical Subject*

Naturally a first step in psychobiography is selecting a subject of interest. A psychobiography project, from conceptualization to final report, can range in time from a number of months to multiple years. Therefore, the subject chosen should be of deep interest and curiosity to the researcher. Considerations of ethical and legal issues in selecting one's research subject include assuring that the subject qualifies as a public figure, considerations of the lifespace of the subject (still living or deceased), and committing to provide a fair, balanced, accurate, and credible psychological profile.

4.12.2 *Defining Public Figure*

In the United States, federal courts have consistently supported freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and other First Amendment rights. Public figures, by nature of their public presentations and their potential impact on society, have been appropriate subjects for journalistic, historic, and psychological study. Such individuals, in part, give up access to some privacy through their direct involvement in influencing society. Psychobiographers should focus on public rather than private citizens in their non-anonymous research.

Generally speaking, a public figure is “a famous person whose life and behavior are the focus of intense public interest and scrutiny” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2009). In legal terms, a public figure is “either a public official or any other person

pervasively involved in public affairs,” and limited purpose public figures are “those who have thrust themselves to the forefront of particular public controversies in order to influence the solution of the issues involved” (Wikipedia, 2012). It is important to note that becoming a public figure or limited purpose public figure is not necessarily a voluntary process as one can become a public figure as a result of publicity that was not sought after (Larson, 2003, cited in Ponterotto, 2013b).

4.12.3 When Did the Subject Live?

As reviewed in previous sections when discussing Freud (Freud & Bullitt, 1967) and the psychohistory Task Force of the American Psychiatric Association (1976), considering the life period of the selected subject is of paramount importance. Psychologists in the role of psychobiographer must always maintain high ethical standards in their work, and when profiling recently deceased or still living research subjects, the ethical bar is raised even higher. Figure 2 presents a bar graph depicting the escalating ethical responsibility as the researcher moves from long-deceased, to recently deceased, to still-living persons (see Fig. 4.2).

Though Freud and the American Psychiatric Association did not indicate a time period demarcation from long-to recently-deceased, more recent psychologists have addressed this issue. Relying on statistical and actuarial modeling on how many years would typically be required for all of a person’s children and grandchildren to also be deceased, researchers have identified 80 years as a conservative and recommended estimate to delineate recently from long-deceased persons. The context for the actuarial modeling was the U.S. federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA, 1996) guidelines and state specific laws on release of confidential information in the postmortem context (Ponterotto, 2015a; see also Berg, 2001; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

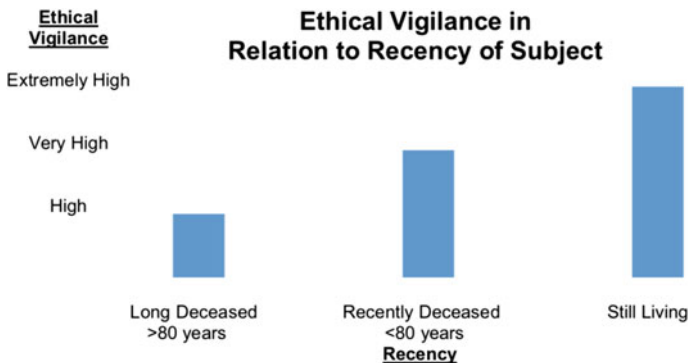


Fig. 4.2 Ethical Vigilance in relation to recency of subject

4.12.4 *An Objective Stance on the Subject*

It is not certain whether a psychobiographer can ever be fully objective in her or his approach to the psychobiographical subject. After all, a good deal of psychobiography relies on qualitative research in the discovery-oriented (constructivistic) research paradigm where researchers themselves are the instruments of research, and all instruments contain some bias (Ponterotto, 2014). Very often psychobiographers choose as their subjects individuals that they have long admired or been intrigued by (Freud, 1910). On the other hand, sometimes they choose subjects that are universally despised for their evil, such as serial killers, or Nazi leaders. It is rare that psychobiographers choose subjects they feel neutral about. Yet strong psychobiography has to be thorough, balanced, and fair, and the individual needs to be profiled in consideration of their socio-cultural-historic context.

Noted psychobiographer James William Anderson (1981a, 1981b; and Anderson & Dunlop, 2019, see Chap. 2) suggested that psychobiographers try to walk in the shoes of their historical subjects to feel as they did in their time period. Elms (1994, p. 5) advised that psychobiographers develop “a controlled empathy for the subject and a devotion to collecting solid biographical data.” Often a good choice for psychobiographical study is a person for whom one feels considerable ambivalence towards, and through the research process this ambivalence may be sorted through in developing an accurate psychological understanding of the individual (Elms, 1994). If selecting a subject one largely admires or dislikes, the psychobiographer should be open to shifting perceptions as the life story is engaged, and the psychobiographer must be careful to always consider disconfirming hypotheses and alternative explanations of observed behavior and events (Runyan, 1981).

In beginning the psychobiography, it can be helpful for the researcher to reflect on why they have chosen their particular subject and what their initial research questions are. It is suggested that psychobiographers “bracket” their perceptions and feelings on the subject by writing them down and processing them as they begin the research. Bracketing is a common qualitative methodology tool used to help researchers become aware of and limit bias in the research process (Morrow, 2005). Working alone, a psychobiographer can share their bracket with another colleague or two in psychology and history. In a team approach to psychobiography (which is quite common in journal articles, but less so in full-length books), the different members of the team can help monitor and bracket one another’s predisposing biases and perceptions of the chosen subject.

Psychobiographies can range on a continuum of objectivity and balance from an overly positive disposition such as in religious hagiography (praising saintly lives for the purpose of edification of the religiously faithful) and idealography (focusing mainly on the positive character traits and accomplishments of a highly admired figure), to a more negative stance on the studied life as in pathography (reducing the individual’s personality characteristics to a set of diagnostic criteria for the purpose of exploring possible mental or physical illness) to degradeography (a clearly negative

biased and non-objective critique of a life lived) (see discussions in George & George, 1973; Hoffman, 1984; Manis, 1994; Weinberg, 1991).

Strong psychobiography should be located at the center of the objectivity continuum, providing an accurate, balanced psychological profile and addressing both character strengths and personal achievements, as well as character flaws and life failings. Rigorous methodological procedures promote balanced and substantive psychobiographical profiles, as well as best ethical practice (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b, 2019; Elms, 1994; Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005b; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017).

4.12.5 Initial Proposal Review and the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Psychological researchers are expected, or required if working in federally-funded institutions, to have their initial research proposals reviewed by an interdisciplinary committee of scholars and community representatives. The goal of such reviews is to consider any risks of harm or distress subjects may face by participating in the research; and if there are potential risks, whether potential benefits to science outweigh the risks. IRB committees often provide sage guidance to researchers and can serve as consultants at various points in the research process as unanticipated ethical issues emerge. Historically, psychobiographers have not submitted their research proposals for such review (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), and there are a number of reasons for this tendency. First, under the federal definition of research presented by the Department of Health and Human Services, research involving human subjects is “a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” and focused on living individuals (DHHS Common Rule, 1981, 45 CFR 46). Psychobiographies are not designed to produce generalizable knowledge as they are person-specific and descriptive. Furthermore, most psychobiographies focus on deceased individuals. For these reasons, some IRBs will not even agree to review a psychobiography proposal. If an IRB consents to review a psychobiography proposal, they are often evaluated as “Exempt” from review given the data for such studies is often archival in nature and in the public domain.

Though such review decisions by IRBs may be welcome news to researchers who are eager to begin their research as soon as possible, it is our recommendation that psychobiographers submit the research plan to their institution’s IRB. Ideally such a review panel would consist of others psychologists, a historian, journalist, legal scholar, and a community representative. In many cases such reviews may fall under the “expedited” review category and will not unduly delay the start of the study. A further recommendation, particularly if one’s IRB declines to review the study or finds it “exempt” from review, is to submit the research plan to an independent group of interdisciplinary psychobiographers. Two possible groups in the United States

would be the San Francisco Bay Area Psychobiography Study group on the west coast, and the Psychohistory Forum group on the east coast (reviewed in Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). The South African University Consortium on psychobiography organized by Fouché (2015) and Fouché et al. (2019) could be another valuable source of research guidance for both junior and experienced psychobiographers. These groups meet regularly to read and provide feedback to members' ongoing research. Such collaborative discourse enhances rigorous ethical and methodological practice. Additional consultation groups such as these could be set up internationally to advance psychobiography research and reporting.

4.12.6 *Informed Consent Procedures*

Seeking informed consent in psychobiographical research is a complicated enterprise. In the case of long-deceased individuals, seeking informed consent from the subject is of course impossible, and receiving informed consent from possibly surviving next-of-kin is highly unlikely. In the case of more recently deceased public figures, seeking informed consent from surviving family members or next-of-kin may be possible but is most often unlikely. Generally, family members are cautious of psychologists wanting to profile their deceased loved one. At times, family members may approve of a historian writing a more authorized biography of the dead family member, but they are less likely to extend such an invitation to a psychologist.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that working in cooperation with a subject's next-of-kin can pose risks to the study. That is, though the support of family members and associates can be very helpful to a researcher, as in access to private documents and personal stories, such relationships can threaten the objectivity of the researcher who may feel somewhat beholden to the family. For historians and psychobiographers who request and receive cooperation from their subject's next-of-kin and surviving associates, it is important to be clear with these individuals at the outset about the purpose of the profile and the researcher's duty to be truthful and comprehensive in their written reports. Finally, in the case of research on still living public figures, it is often quite difficult for a psychobiographer to even have access to such individuals to request study participation.

In light of these many challenges and in review of the *APA Ethical Standard of Research and Publication*, we recommend the following. For still living and recently deceased subjects, the researcher can consider attempting to contact the subject if alive, or next-of-kin if deceased, to explain the nature of the study and request informed consent to be studied. If informed consent is not requested or cannot be attained, the psychobiographer can discuss in their report reasons for exemption from informed consent or a rationale for proceeding without consent. For long deceased individuals, psychobiographers can proceed without informed consent and can be guided by APA's (2017) General Principles and the Ethical Standard of Competence. It is suggested that when interviewing family members or associates of psychobio-

graphical subjects, the researcher seek informed consent for the interview, preferably in the form of written consent, and at least verbal consent.

4.12.7 Rigorous Research Methods

Psychologists' responsibility to conduct their research competently and to consult with colleagues as necessary throughout the research and writing process is an ethical standard that transcends all points put forth in this section. Poorly planned and executed psychobiography is the foundation on which ethical problems and potential violations are built. Fortunately, over a century of psychobiographical writing, from Freud's (1910) *Leonardo da Vinci* to this present edited volume by Mayer and Kőváry (2019), has provided both novice and experienced psychobiographers with firm guidelines for conducting methodologically rigorous psychobiography (e.g., Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; du Plessis, 2017; Erikson, 1968; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005b; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017).

Among the tenets of strong psychobiography are a deep understanding and application of psychological theory; knowledge of the socio-cultural-historic period of the subject being profiled; in-depth biographical research and the study of first-person (e.g., letters, diaries, journals, drawing, paintings, audio or video recordings, and now social media posts), second-person (recorded memories or interviews with those who knew the subject very well), and more distanced third-person (e.g., biographies, journalist reports, FBI files) data sources; multi-lingual skills; and knowledge of ethics in psychology and sister disciplines (reviewed earlier) (levels of document sources used in psychobiography are discussed in Ponterotto, 2017a).

4.12.8 Have an Ethical Decision Making Model in Place

The General Principles of the APA Ethics Code are aspirational, intended to guide psychologists to strive for best ethical practices. The Standards of the Ethics Code are more specific guidelines for APA members that are enforceable by the association. However, as discussed previously the ethical standards were written within the context of research with living human subjects that is meant to garner generalizable knowledge. Thus, while psychologists in the role of psychobiographer are bound to work under the umbrella of the APA Ethics Code, it is up to their judgment on how to best apply the Ethics Code in their ethical decision making processes.

Psychobiographers often encounter ethical challenges and dilemmas in the course of their research that they could not have anticipated. Qualitative researchers have labeled such challenges "ethically important moments" which represent the "difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable situations that rise in the practice of doing research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262). Haverkamp (2005) has emphasized that such moments call for the researcher's awareness that an action or decision

has ethical dimensions that must be carefully thought through. For example, it is not uncommon for psychobiographers to come across very personal and private documents related to their subject that were never intended for public release (e.g., psychiatric records, orphanage records, paternity tests). At times, the subject's own family and closest associates may not have been privy to the information (see Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2013a). This is an example of an ethically important moment for the psychobiographer, who must work within ethical guidelines to balance the subject's postmortem privacy rights with their duty to publish a comprehensive and well-informed psychological profile (Ponterotto, 2015a). It is important that psychobiographers have in place a decision making model to help them navigate thorny ethical issues that may emerge in the course of their research.

Haverkamp (2005) has outlined a professional reflexivity model of researcher awareness that integrates the concept of ethically important moments with tested ethical decision making models such as that presented in Kitchner (2000), and by the Canadian Psychological Association (2000) in their Code of Ethics for Psychologists. The present authors, in their previous work (Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), have adapted these general research models for psychobiography in designing a six-step ethical decision making model. The specific steps are as follows:

- Identify an issue or course of action that may constitute an ethically important moment during the psychobiographical research.
- Consider this moment in light of the Ethics Codes of the American Psychological Association or other mental health associations (e.g., social work, counseling, psychiatry) the researcher may belong to. Furthermore, reflect on the ethically sensitive moment through the lens of ethical guidelines in history, oral history, and journalism presented earlier. The psychobiographer is an interdisciplinary researcher and should consult across disciplines throughout their work.
- In consideration of the ethics codes, and in the context of ongoing consultation, weigh possible courses of action with regard to the ethically sensitive moment.
- Decide on and implement the course of action.
- Monitor the impact of the course of action and follow-up as necessary.
- Debrief and process with colleagues and students the ethical decision making process and outcome for the benefit of continuing education for the profession of psychobiography.

(For a detailed example of this six-step model in action see Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

4.12.9 Writing up and Publishing the Psychobiography

With any ethically sensitive moments addressed and monitored throughout the research, the psychobiographer is now ready to write the final report. One important goal of psychobiographical research is writing up a clear, lucid, and interesting psychological profile that will be of interest to a wide interdisciplinary audience. The

researcher has a goal of advancing the historical and psychological record through a published profile of the historic figure. Best ethical practice would dictate that care and consultation in writing and presenting the final report is important. Among the strategies used by the present authors as well as other psychobiographers (e.g., Elms, 1994, 2007) are the following. First, exposing developing drafts of the psychobiographical report to other psychobiographers for comment and constructive criticism is helpful. Second, sharing the developing work with psychologists who are not psychobiographers can help shed light on aspects of the life story that the researcher may have missed. Consulting with historians and journalists who also have studied the same historic figure can add both depth and breadth to the emerging psychological profile.

In profiling recently deceased or still living public figures, it can be very helpful to have contemporaries who knew the public figure well (e.g., family, colleagues, friends) read drafts of the report for reactions, questions, and clarifications. The psychobiographer should be prepared, however, for strong reactions, both positive and negative, from intimates of the historic subject. It is important to be clear at the outset how their suggestions may or may not be integrated into the final report.

When the psychobiographer or psychobiography team is satisfied they have produced the best report possible, it can be submitted for peer review for publication, where an objective, anonymous team of experts will critically evaluate the study. Naturally, peer and blind reviewed academic journals are an ideal (and highly respected) source for publishing shorter psychobiographical profiles. Psychobiographers also have the option of publishing their psychobiographies as chapters in edited books on psychobiography, or if a longer and more expansive project as a full-length book. Finally, psychobiographers may opt to also prepare aspects of their research for a general lay audience such as in magazines or newspapers. It is not uncommon for documentarians, television and film producers to approach psychobiographers for assistance when researching and preparing productions on the same historic figure. Psychobiographers should think through such invitations thoughtfully, as often they will have limited say in the final production and film editing.

4.12.10 Monitoring the Impact of the Published Psychobiography

A final ethical duty of the psychobiographer is to monitor the impact of their published report. For still living and recently deceased public figures, the psychobiographer may be able to gauge from public statements how surviving family, next-of-kin, and associates of the subject have reacted to the report. Are individuals upset or distressed by the published psychobiography? If so, are there possible steps the researcher can take to lessen the distress?

Finally, psychobiographers also have an ethical obligation to educate other psychobiographers, students, and the profession at large about ethical insights or knowl-

edge they gained from working on the psychobiography. Though the ethical decision making model presented earlier recommends psychobiographers educate others about ethically sensitive moments in their research, the point here is broader. Psychobiographers can present their larger study to provide insights, theoretical choices, and methodological developments to educate others on developing best practices in psychobiography.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter has brought ethics front and center in the psychobiography research process. An interdisciplinary nomological network was presented as a template to guide psychobiographers, particularly those trained in the mental health professions, in vigilant ethical practice. Particular stages of the psychobiography process where important ethical considerations emerge were highlighted. It is hoped that the study of ethics can be more fully integrated into psychobiography research and training (Ponterotto 2017b; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

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Chapter 5

Abstractions of Intent: How a Psychobiography Grapples with the Fluidity of Truth



Robert F. Mullen

Abstract A psychobiography is a well-researched, comprehensive, multi-method presentation of a series of occasions through the documentation of events and the explication of the causes, motivations, and consequences thereof. In the fashion of Whitehead, occasions are dynamic and ongoing activities unfolding or producing themselves through time. The creative events that precipitate—originating, anchoring, and turning points—are fixed in time as opposed to the unfixed spatial-temporal reality of an occasion. The psychobiography uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis because of their interactive objective and subjective contributions. The psychological aspect of the qualitative system allows for the in-depth case study, which presupposes that the issues under investigation are best understood from a perspective inclusive of the subject's personal, subjective and phenomenological world. The quantitative study utilizes verifiable occurrences and statistics to determine the validity of interpretation. An accompanying facet of a carefully crafted psychobiography is the hermeneutic circle, another component susceptible to error due to the varying definitions and understandings that accompany all manner of texts. These potentials for misinformation are aggravated by the researcher who is susceptible to (1) incorporating personal sensibilities, (2) bias and misinterpretation due to the nature of the investigation, (3) the suggestiveness of the subject and (4) the researchers own condition. A psychobiographical study is also subject to misinformation revealed by the subject, sources, and contemporaries. Awareness of these potential impediments to veracity is essential; however, the researcher cannot allow the search for truth to overwhelm the authenticity of the product.

Keywords Occasions · Misinformation · Gestalt · Integrality · Truth

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5.1 Overview

Adopting multiple strategies can provide a more comprehensive overview of a subject, whose diverse aspirations and plentiful activities warrant a broader exploration. A consequence of the mixed methodology, however, are the opportunities for misrepresentation that result from the adoption of vulnerable systems, especially in the psychological realm which solicits speculation, inference, and other subjective calculations.

In May 1886, Georges Seurat unveiled his 70 square foot *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand*. The painting depicts fashionable Parisians enjoying a Sunday afternoon on an idyllic island in the River Seine between Neuilly and Levallois-Perret. The canvas is replete with some forty stereotypical Parisian figures—women of fashion, men in bowler hats, prostitutes, children, umbrellas, dogs, soldiers, boats, a rowing team, a monkey, and a musician. Individually, the rigid and somewhat indistinguishable images are ill-designed to be the focus of singular attraction but are integral and essential to the panorama. The technique Seurat adopted, Pointillism, involved the use of small touches of pure color intricately placed side-by-side on the canvas. When viewed from a certain distance, these colored spots blend into figures of aesthetic clarity. Move closer, and the portraits dissipate, rendering the composition unintelligible. Move away, and each part asserts its relevance to the whole, but the whole is not its parts, and the parts do not constitute the whole. The painting, viewed from afar as intended, is a gestalt: the whole is other than the sum of its parts, albeit dependent upon their participation. The individual figures and the finished work resonate in codependence with one another, manifesting a masterpiece abstractly detached from the components that constitute the work. The truth of *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand* is in the exactness of the colored spots, their placement on the canvas, and the changeless final masterpiece which the artist deemed worthy of display.

In an abstract sense, the similarities between this artistic masterpiece and a psychobiography are appealing. The methodology incorporates seemingly inconspicuous elements of a life history that, when placed side-by-side on an academic canvas, blend into events and occasions that are, by themselves, imperceptible to the final product. Step back to observe the multiple entities rendered by this method, and one begins to sense their integral relationship to the cohesive whole of the presentation. One only needs canvas, the painted background (the subject's ethos), and figures, pronounced and ambiguous (entities and occasions), assembled by numerous points of color (causes and consequences) that coalesce into an integral and homeostatic final product.

5.1.1 *Understanding Events and Occasions*

Every evolution—ethos, philosophy, activity, and so on—is an occasion. Occasions are akin to Alfred North Whitehead's actual entities, defined as dynamic and ongoing activities unfolding or producing themselves through time (Hosinski, 1993). The events that participate in the creative unfolding of an occasion are fixed in time as opposed to the unfixed spatio-temporal process of an occasion. A psychobiography is a well-researched, comprehensive, multi-method presentation of a series of occasions through the documentation of events and the explication of the causes, motivations, and consequences thereof.

Pillemer (1998, 70) suggests three significant or seminal episodes central to a psychobiography. Originating events are the momentous events that are responsive to the genesis of a subject's enduring beliefs or attitudes. Anchoring events represent the milestones that perpetuate these values, as evidenced by the subject's life-story. The third episodes, turning points, mark specific series of events and occasions that augment the subject's passion. This triumvirate of causal relationships is not a one-off but is integral in the evolution of all substantial beliefs and activities.

Throughout this chapter, a published study developed and produced employing a psychobiographic methodology is exemplified. The overarching focus of the study is a contemporary theorist with diverse aspirations and activities. Convinced that the sheer volume of life occasions merited multiple avenues of investigation, a mixed-message methodology of both quantitative and qualitative research was adopted. Personal philosophy bore significantly on the relevance of abundance. A scholar grasping a singular view denies the creative capacity that flourishes in the enlightened awareness of human ingenuity. The errant belief that there is only one truth and that any one individual is in possession of it is the root of all malevolence that plagues the world. A theorist of any mettle studies systems and embraces a collective. Any theory or philosophy is based, intentionally or unwittingly, on an amalgam of grounding belief systems. In any theory, the tenets that form its ground are particular, relative, and essential constituents; their axiomatic completeness equal to (or other than) the sum of values and beliefs. One cannot be a rationalist without experientialism, logic, and discursive reasoning. Utilitarianism needs the participation of reductionism and forms of naturalism.

Michael Murphy (See Runyan's, 2019) is co-founder and Director Emeritus of Esalen, nestled in California's Big Sur. The progressive Institute is the acknowledged birthplace of the human potential movement (Tomkins, 1976), inspired by Abraham Maslow's psychology of peak experiences, which underscores humanity's potential for the metanormal expansion of consciousness. Murphy's search for meaning—and his exploration of wide-ranging and diverse fields to validate that search—underscores multifaceted constituents that support his philosophy and productivity much like pointillism colors its canvas. At least four philosophical components undergird Murphy's world vision and activities: existentialism, experientialism, humanism, and universal integrality. His research into and conviction of deliberate human advancement—heralding a higher complexity of human consciousness—is underscored by

these fundamental philosophical concepts, which required extensive study rendered by multiple available means. A mixed-methodology of quantitative and qualitative research proved optimal. However, the permissiveness afforded by a psychobiography—its hermeneutics, its in-depth case study, narrative, etcetera—lends itself to error and misinformation. The relevance of this theme reveals itself throughout this chapter.

A psychobiography differs from a simple mixed-methodology in scope and magnitude. The use of multivalent systems in the Murphy study ensured an integrally comprehensive presentation. The end-product was not without its faults, however. Upon publication, the validity of certain conclusions became questionable to the researcher. Was the result true to the subject's values and contributions? Was the justification of his belief system well defined? Was his integrity underscored in the conclusions? How are truth and authenticity best served and what impediments require accommodation? How does the truth factor in a psychobiography as opposed to other methods of inquiry? Does the broad scope of a psychobiography deliver more forthright conclusions than other, less inclusive methods?

The attractiveness of the broad and inclusive multivalent methodology is due to the number of available options, tolerance of structural fluidity, and the contemporary inclination to adopt and adapt to the latest, cutting-edge methodology. Abundance, however, is a distraction that demands judicious evaluation and editing to avoid superfluous corroboration and unnecessary explication in a study already comprehensively substantive. A psychobiography is not an all-you-can-eat-buffet but a system that offers multiple options which necessitate good choice, careful determination of value, and moderation: attributes of most established writers but difficult to grasp for the novice academic.

5.1.2 *What Is a Psychobiography?*

Simply defined, a biography is an account of someone's life written by someone other than the subject. According to William McKinley Runyan (1984, 36), a biography is "a portrait painted by a specific author from a particular perspective, using a range of conceptual tools and available data." Erickson (2003, 35) quotes historian Collingwood (1946) from *The Idea of History*, who defines biography as "the discerning of the thought which is the inner side of an event." Biographical narratives foster a keen understanding of characteristic adaptations, a concept coined by Northwestern psychologist Dan McAdams (2001, 126), to include:

such personal goals and motives, defense mechanisms and coping strategies, mental representations of self and others, values and beliefs... domain-specific skills and interests, and other personal characteristics contextualized in the time, place, or social role.

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The psychology in a psychobiographic study inserts itself through aggregate-level social sciences such as social structure and personality interpretation, history, sociology, psychological anthropology, and political psychology. The study maintains its flexibility by drawing upon the knowledge of many schools of thought while devising new concepts as they become necessary for evaluation. Extensive and often exhaustive research is required to remain faithful to the subject's intersubjectivity.

Runyan (1988, 285) advocated for the use of psychology in psychobiography,

mediated through the aggregate-level social sciences, including such scientific 'substratum' as social structure and personality, historical sociology, psychological anthropology, and political psychology.

Atwood (2019) and Stolorow (see his contribution in Foreword) (1993, 9) also campaigned for the use of multiple perspectives, promoting

a psychobiographical method capable of flexibly drawing upon the knowledge of all the different schools of thought, and also of devising new concepts as it goes along.

In the published study exemplified throughout, this correlated well with the data-driven research of extraordinary events and occasions which, as Murphy points out in *The Future of the Body: Explorations Into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (1992, 2) demands

a synoptic acquisition of soundly verifiable data that draws at once upon the natural and human sciences, psychical research, religious studies, and other fields.

The methodology of Erikson's (1958) *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* is the genesis of modern psychobiography and its foundation of psychological analysis. To Atwood and Stolorow (1993, 13), Erikson was the first pure psychobiographer because he was able to synthesize aspects of the psychology of knowledge (personal-subject relativity) and the sociology of knowledge (historical-cultural relativity).

Although each field [psychology of knowledge and sociology of knowledge] can make a certain degree of independent progress, their analyses are allied and complementary.

What evolves from these cooperations are syntheses of material that coalesce into a verifiable, historic narrative. These sciences include sociology, biology, psychology, religion, phenomenology, history, and so on.

Psychoanalytic histories bridge the gulf between the concrete particularity of individual life and the experience of being human in universal terms ... providing the initial basis of comparison for describing the pattern of the individual's life as the realization of shared human possibilities (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, 7).

Murphy's theoretical constructs emerge from both Eastern and Western spiritual philosophy. He is a barometer of humanity's temperament, including its mental, physical, and spiritual aspects. The events and occasions of his life are integral to his ethos, worldview, and subsequent activities. These include: (1) research and analysis of philosophical and scientific apperceptions of advanced metanormal potential, (2) data-driven evidence of advanced human potential, (3) efforts to bridge the gaps among science, religion, and mysticism, while identifying the comparability of religious teloi, and (4) humanitarian efforts in education, health, politics, and religion to address the disenfranchised through international diplomacy (Mullen, 2014, 175). The plenitude of Murphy's contributions made it expedient to employ many investigative approaches; a more restrictive methodology would have failed to adequately accommodate the magnitude. Combining qualitative and quantitative inquiry made it easier to research and document the scope of Murphy's life, ethos, goals, productivity, and so on. The construction of the whole, the final product, was achieved through a thoughtful and scholastic synthesis into a final gestalt. In hindsight, success was only partial, and conclusions flawed, a complication arising from the ambiguities of truth and the freedom accorded by the use of multiple methodologies.

Quantitative research involves the empirical investigation of observable and measurable variables. It is used for testing theory, predicting and illustrating outcomes, and determining integral relationships. Quantitative research takes a particular approach: answering research questions, generating hypotheses, setting up research strategies, offering conclusions, and so forth. Analysis of data-driven research is quantitative, as are surveys, and comparative or correlational studies. Although generally conceived as focusing on data articulated numerically, Quantitative analysis is also used to study events or magnitudes of occurrence.

Qualitative research focuses on examining topics via cultural phenomena, human behavior, and belief systems. A comprehensive study of the life and productivity of an individual can make use of interviews, open-ended questions, opinion research, and so on to gain insight into certain beliefs, concepts, and systems. It provides an overview of the human side of an issue concerning behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships, supported by such intangible factors as social norms, esoteric beliefs, ethnicity, socio-economic status, philosophy, religion, ethics, etcetera.

A psychobiography is constructed by engaging qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their subsidiaries—the empirical and non-empirical, ontological and epistemological, narrative, interview, in-depth case study, hermeneutics, the social sciences, and so on. Even so, while this mixed-method study meets the criteria of an adequate psychobiography it, by no means, promises the most comprehensive, which demands a more robust and radical adoption of multivalent ingredients and methods to subsidize the gestalt. The components of a good psychobiography are more fluid, fragmented, and decentralized in its pursuit of authenticity. The good psychobiography will not shy away from seemingly disparate components but will embrace them as means to provide a more thorough investigation. Resoluteness and flexibility, concreteness and fluidity, proof and conjecture, reason and intuition, exclusion and inclusion—all become academically acceptable grist for the mill. A quantitative approach creates a blueprint that establishes the parameters of the study,

a logical order that provides the foundation for the various components necessary to the evolution of the product. The qualitative element, more reflexive and evolving, adds texture and nuance to the structure. The quantitative architecture strategizes the product; the qualitative animates it.

Picture a fan in the stands at a baseball game, seated in one of multiple sections offering an angular and myopic view. To fully appreciate the game, the fan listens to the statistician and color-commentator on the radio, one actor providing hits, runs, and innings, the latter, personality profiles and stories. Awash with the sticky smell of beer and hotdogs, inclement weather, ear-shattering insults and enthusiastic roars, and the mingled sweat of thousands, full appreciation of the game is experienced though the combined components that contribute to the festive totality of the event. Remove a singular sensation—the sound, the smell—and the experience is different. The game is a more dynamic and thorough experience because of the multivalent stimuli—coalescing conflicting forces that converge to narrate nine or more innings.

5.2 The Case Study

A psychobiography is an in-depth case study, according to Atwood and Stolorow (1993, 27–28), an integral and comprehensive presentation of a personalistic, phenomenological, historical, clinical, and interpretive investigation. Its methodology allows the gathering of as much information as possible, using multiple disciplines. Three general characteristics distinguish an in-depth psychobiographical case study from other methodological orientations and approaches. First, the in-depth case study is

inherently personalistic and phenomenological because it presupposes that the issues under investigation can be best understood from a perspective inclusive of the subject's personal, subjective and phenomenological world.

Second, psychobiography is historical, albeit the fluidity of occasions mitigates the opportunity for a purely linear presentation. Third, the in-depth case study is both “clinical and interpretive.” This overarching requisite for interpretation is a double-edged sword as the researcher is highly susceptible to (1) incorporating his or her sensibilities, (2) bias and misinterpretation due to the vicariousness of biography, (3) the suggestiveness of the subject, and (4) the researcher's own condition. Condition is one's current state-of-being as consequence of reaction and adaptation to experience and circumstance. The study is also subject to bias and misinformation supplied by the subject, sources, and contemporaries. Awareness of these potential impediments is essential; however, the psychobiographer cannot allow the search for truth to overwhelm the authenticity of the work, which implies being genuine or as real as possible.

Case study research allows the exploration and understanding of the motivations, events, and occasions that impact the subject's life history. This holistic, in-depth investigation specializes in analysis of the subject's social, moral, ethical, and

behavioral underpinnings: schooling, faith instruction, socio-economic status, family structure, and other influencers which motivate sociological concerns. This method was particularly relevant to Murphy's focus on education, health, religion, and other humanitarian efforts.

A good psychobiography is

committed to a narrative mode of truth arrived at through [the] in-depth, case study approach to biographical and psychological knowledge. (Erikson, 1958, 39)

The case study nourishes itself through intersubjective methodology, which aids in clarifying relationships and motivations. Intersubjectivity is the psychological relationship between people—how common-sense, shared values are used to interpret mutual compliance within social and cultural life. It is the trademark of systems and institutions which share a particular ideology. It also highlights how unilateral groups alienate disagreeable groups through self-preservation, which incurs bias, prejudice, truth-distortion, and other extensions of inherent territorial emphasis. Intersubjective investigation addresses these temperaments, as well as those of others who offer significant support or opposition as evidence of motivation.

5.2.1 *Interviews and Review of Materials*

Among the sources of data the psychologist is likely to turn to when carrying out a case study are interviews with the subject and contemporaries, diaries, personal notes, letters, documents, and so on. In psychology, case studies often confine themselves to the examination of a particular individual; a psychobiographic researcher is inclined to extend this research to contemporaries and other influencers. Murphy's firm conviction of the inherent human potential to access the metanormal required the theoretical study of phenomenon to describe the subjective reality of events, and philosophical research and analysis, which involved clarification of definitions, prevailing wisdom, and norms. The perusal of the books, essays, and articles written about the subject was necessary. Esalen's (2013, 2014) extensive website was an excellent source of corroboration. Multiple sources about issues and values addressed by Murphy had to be analyzed, as did his published fiction, nonfiction, and works-in-progress.

The interviews were of inestimable value, first to set the boundaries of a good working relationship and then as a forum to address topics that required further explanation. These one-on-one interviews, structured by specific lines of questioning, were generously enriched by Murphy's extemporaneous flow of vision and thought. On average, these meetings lasted approximately two hours. Some issues were explored in person; others via phone and email. Recordings of interviews were professionally transcribed, results reviewed, and submitted to Murphy for approval. The rich material from these interviews informed multiple aspects of the study.

About halfway through the process, however, findings antithetical to the researcher's secular sensibilities began to manifest. *An Actual Man* (2010) is a series

of essays in honor of Murphy's 80th birthday. Among the stories and anecdotes were short biographies describing Murphy's humanitarian works in Russia, and Esalen's part in Yeltsin's 1991 ascension to the presidency. Tompkins' (1976) extensive profile in *The New Yorker* was a highlight, as was evidence of the metanormal in everyday experience, a tribute by Huston Smith, and Ken Wilber's encomium to an exemplary human being. In the midst of these and other profound contributions was a story about Murphy's paranormal escapades with the San Francisco 49ers. The essay asserted that the ritualistic burying of football gear and Murphy's ability to manipulate Universal order was instrumental in the 1981 success of the fledgling upstarts that led to their first Superbowl. Numerous texts supporting research into paranormal were analyzed, including Myer's (1907, 1918) early 20th-century evidence of levitation and life-after-death and Thurston's (1951) descriptions of stigmata, luminous phenomena, and bilocation. Murphy's penchant for metaphysics and other esoteric practices cornered the psychobiographer into a self-created abyss of intellectual superstition, confirmation of how a researcher is subject to personal bias and singular perception. The football story was omitted from the study for fear it would unduly prejudice readers against the merit of Murphy's contributions to natural science. The paranormal corroborations of Myers and others of his ilk were minimized for the same reason. Was that the right choice? In forethought, these arbitrary exclusions may have slightly repudiated Murphy's authenticity. Later introspection revealed the story of the 49ers as a tongue-in-cheek, piece of smart fiction or, at the most, an illustration of over-inflated egos. In his forward of *Cosmos and the Psyche*, Tarnas (2006, xiii) writes:

Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect ... The mind that seeks the deepest intellectual fulfillment does not give itself up to every passing idea... Only with that discernment and inward opening can the full participatory engagement unfold that which brings forth new realities and new knowledge.

Murphy has authored and collaborated on numerous novels and works of nonfiction. Incorporated into the study was an assessment of his fiction as evidence of his predilection for mystic spiritualism, Eastern and Western collaborative thought, and metanormal human capacity. Elements of his appreciation for the interrelationship of science, mysticism, and esotericism began in novel form then neatly transcribed themselves to his most crucial nonfiction work: the data-driven research on transformative human capacity, *The Future of the Body: Explorations Into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (1992).

A subject's worldview is both implicit and definitive exposition of philosophical and religious lineage. It was essential to look at the significant contributions influencing Murphy's evolution of thought—paranormal research, Catholic miracles, esoteric documentation, the evolution of psychology, Huxley, Maslow, and Teilhard de Chardin, cross-cultural religion and metaphysics, process and evolutionary philosophy, science, and so on. This abundance of research material provided a more formidable and daunting diversity of interests that served as the foundation for study, and informed the substratum of Murphy's ontological development. Mainstream academic research was enlisted to solidify, confirm, or offer alternative viewpoints for

the subject's theories. Murphy (1992, 15) defines this method of data-driven research, analysis, and interpretive documentation as:

synoptic, multidisciplinary, or integral empiricism (remembering, of course, that empiricism usually refers to data acquisition and verification limited to sensory experience).

5.2.2 *The Narrative*

Embracing individuality within a history of events and occasions is, of course, a key component to any study of a person. The primary method for doing so is through narrative. As personality psychologists begin to turn attention to the subjective nature of peoples' life histories, the story becomes more valid in "conveying the coherence and the meaning of lives" (McAdams, 2001, 102). In a psychobiography, the narration is the method of presentation incorporating the elements relative to the construction of the final product into a stimulating and understandable rendition of the subject's evolution of thought, and activity. Storytelling is a method of making the study readable, comprehensive, and appealing. Pillemer (2008) defines narrative truth as the criterion used to decide when a particular experience is captured satisfactorily; it depends on continuity and closure and the extent to which the fit of the pieces takes on an aesthetic finality. It is left to the researcher to determine, through judgment and scholasticism, the primary experiences that factor into decision-making and lend themselves to the subject's worldview.

In *The Rise of Hermeneutics* (1972), Dilthey and Jameson caution that ascertaining truth through narrative biography will incite debate, a desirable component of any presentation. To them, narrative truth is a razor's edge because of the many factors that instigate misinformation. Since narration is a composite of many differing and supporting collegial contributions, this unpredictability is even more prevalent.

One of the more unique qualities of Murphy's body of written work is the transposition of his fictional accounts of metaphysics, science, the spiritual, the magical, and the mystical to his later nonfiction that complements and enhances the actuality of many conclusions, the plausibility of more, and possibility of the remaining. This evolution originates with his fantastical creations of the metanormal in his best-selling *Golf in the Kingdom* (1972), continues throughout his other novels, and culminates in his data-driven, natural science exploration *The Future of the Body: Explorations Into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (1992). In other words, Murphy's concentration in the natural history of metanormal accession and evidence thereof does not diminish in the transition from novel to nonfiction but expands and substantiates itself. It is a textbook example of how, in the words of Cyril,

Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life, and I feel sure that if you think seriously about it, you will find that it is true. (Wilde, 1909, 10)

Michael Murphy has written or contributed with significant impact to more than half-a-dozen additional works of nonfiction, which address the codification of transformative capacities, the evolution of humanity's potential, extraordinary capaci-

ties within sports, studies of yogis and Zen masters, cardiovascular and metabolic changes, and psychological, physiological, and spiritual transformation. These are illustrated to corroborate the vast diversity of materials that were considered, and as evidence of how Murphy's forays into fiction implemented his later works. In an article in "The American Society for Aesthetics," Sparshott (1967, 3) argues against those who contend that works of fiction cannot be considered the embodiment of claims to tell any truth about the real world. Truth in fiction is

the explicit content of the fiction, and a background consisting of either of the facts about our world ... or of the beliefs overt in the community of origin.

5.2.3 *The Historical*

A singular substance cannot exist without its interrelationship with other substances. Everything, every entity is a creation—intertwined, interconnected, and interdependent with and within other creations. It is therefore prudent to engage Pillemer's (1998) three significant or seminal events as central to the evolution of occasions. To iterate, it is impossible to provide a purely linear exposition of a subject's history because of the non-temporal fluidity of occasions.

History is primarily concerned with the knowledge of the mind and the thoughts it generates, which motivate an individual's philosophy and action.

The task of the historian is penetrating to the thought of the agents whose acts they are studying. Collingwood (1946, 25)

The evolution of Murphy's occasions is paramount to this study, as is his place in contemporary studies of a natural history that combines science with religion and metaphysics. William McKinley Runyan's (1984) *Life Histories: A Field of Inquiry and a Framework for Intervention* served as a support vehicle for inquiry into the role of Murphy's life-history. Particularly germane were the investigations into: (1) the philosophical growth and conclusions resulting from Murphy's intensive study, and experiential activities, (2) his ethos and set of mental characteristics, (3) analysis and insight into the psychological motivations of his ethos and activities, and (4) the practical implementation of these motivations and activities in interactions with others. The study provided special consideration to Murphy's research into human transformative capacity—his conviction of the potential for metanormal functioning as evidenced by his participation in, and investigations into events, occasions, practices, and phenomena affected by and affecting the human person. Dilthey and Jameson (1972, 227) write:

There can indeed be no history worthy of the name that does not breathe something like his spiritual enthusiasm for the traces that life has left behind it, something of the visionary instinct for all the forms of living activity preserved and still instinct within the monuments of the past.

Murphy's fundamental philosophies staunchly lend themselves to the theory of advanced innate human potential. His existentialism underscores the human faculty to determine its motivation and development, especially essential to its inherent ability to deliberately evolve by way of metanormal events and occasions. His experientialism is manifest by his actual experiments to affect extraordinary events and occasions. Humanism is evident by his belief in involution and evolution, a doctrine that asserts the self-creativity and self-reliance of each person, imbued by divine allowance and participation. Finally, universal integrality posits that all entities are creatively bound to all other entities, intertwined, interconnected, and interdependent. It is these systems that motivate the events paramount to Murphy's occasions. As the theory maintains, occasions are not only evolutionary but interdependent upon all that precedes and proceeds them. One cannot fathom their causes without understanding the relevant factors of the creative process; it is the task of the researcher to make best efforts to investigate and comprehend this process through abundant research and thoughtful explication.

5.2.4 *Hermeneutics*

The interest in psychobiography slowed between the great wars of the Twentieth Century to witness a resurgence in Dilthey's (1961) adoption of hermeneutics (see also Kóváry's, 2019 and Knight's, 2019). The hermeneutic circle is similar to gestalt in that the parts are "accessed in relation to a totality while knowledge of the whole is constituted by study of the parts" (Atwood and Stolorow, 1984, 3). The ultimate goal of the hermeneutic process is to discover how the subject's philosophic, spiritual, and religious subjects of inquiry facilitated his or her ethos and subsequent activities. In *Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry* (1983, 221), David Polkinghorne advocates for the use of hermeneutics to better understand what canon and tradition mean to a specific element of philosophy.

Hermeneutics is possible here because ... there is here the relation of the parts to the whole in which the parts receive meaning from the whole, and the whole receives meaning from the parts: these categories of interpretation have their correlate in the structural coherence of the organization [and subject], by which it realizes its goal teleologically.

Hermeneutics is a system of rules, "a whole whose parts were held together by the aim of giving an interpretation of general validity" (Dilthey and Jameson, 1972, 240). One's spiritual and philosophical evaluations are products of interconnected parts, which are in turn constituents of the whole; again, the parts without the whole—as well as the whole without its parts—inadequate to conclusive evaluation. Scholars later expanded the system of hermeneutics to apply to any literary text, which broadened the scope of influence on a particular ethos or philosophy while maintaining the integrality of hermeneutic tenets. Polkinghorne (1983, 221) warns that one of the considerations of hermeneutic knowledge is that it is difficult "to attain a degree of intersubjective agreement and certainty that one has understood an

expression accurately,” additional evidence of how bias and misinterpretation factor in a multi-discipline psychobiography. The researcher’s cognizance of hermeneutic compatibility to the ethos and philosophy of the subject is highly susceptible to error due, much in part, to the varying definitions and understandings that accompany all manner of texts. A psychobiographer is compelled to identify the extent of the hermeneutic contribution to the subject’s worldview but is, likewise, influenced by those sources relied upon for evidence and affirmation. To Esalen biographer, Kripal (2007, 61), hermeneutics is “a model that recognizes a truly profound engagement with a text [that] can alter both the received meaning of the text and one’s own meaning and being.”

Murphy’s broad expanse of interests is served well by the hermeneutic circle as his belief system compliments his concept of advanced human potential. AHP is closely tied to the theory of involution-evolution which posits that the energy and capacity of divinity are thrust into the basest of evolutionary particles, expanding in sympathy with human consciousness. Hermeneutic evaluations were essential to Murphy’s theme of religious, spiritual, metaphysical, and scientific comparability. Ghose’s (2006) cultivation of a multi-runged ladder to Supermind corroborates the evolution of human consciousness which supports advanced human potential. Exegetical scrutiny evidences the symbiotic relationship of Teilhard de Chardin’s (1974) Omega Point to Ghose’s Supermind (2006), and Murphy’ (1992, 2012) Supernature. A review of relevant religious, spiritual, and philosophical commentaries grounded the study’s construct and allowed comparison with Murphy’s ethos and activities. Cooper (2006) was particularly helpful in understanding various interpretations of evolutionary panentheism; Myers (1907, 1918) and Thurston (1951) assisted in the information and documentation of metanormal human potential.

5.2.5 Interpretations and Intuitions

The psychobiographic, in-depth, case study is a reconstructive, intuitive, interpretive method based upon the synthesis of all available evidence culled from all available sciences providing systematic analyses of information on the life and life’s works of a single individual (Erickson (2003, 40).

This conclusion is supported by other theorists (Runyan 1984; McAdams 2001) and by the methods of personality comprehension enabled by the psychological in-depth case study. It is within this context that things get rocky as the constituents of misinformation (speculation, intuition, interpretation, inference, and so on) are subject to bias, error, and misinformation. Runyan (1984, 47) offers the following benchmarks to mitigate explicit misinformation:

Explanations and interpretations can be evaluated in light of criteria such as (1) their logical soundness, (2) their comprehensiveness in accounting for a number of puzzling aspects of the events in question, (3) their survival of tests of attempted falsification, such as tests of derived predictions or retrodictions, (4) their consistency with the full range of available relevant evidence, (5) their support from above, or their consistency with more general knowledge

about human functioning or about the person in question, and (6) their credibility relative to other explanatory hypothesis.

It is evident that much misinformation results from poor choice and poor judgment, a lack of thoroughness, and/or ignorance. Hubris and bias also factor in misleading and erroneous conclusions. McAdams (2001, 114) asks:

To what extent are memories for personal events accurate renditions of what happened or biased reconstructions of the past?

Occasions mature as events happen and vice versa. It is nigh on impossible to maintain a firm grasp on their evolutions. Individuals rarely retain accurate recollections of the day, time, circumstance, or other exacting details of Pillemer's triune events in the creation of an occasion. However, memories and their interpretations, whether correctly recollected or not, should not be taken as false or intentionally inaccurate. In the best case scenario, one creates the best and most honorable recollection of which one is capable.

For we can always make mistakes about the motivation and the principal actors in a study; they can indeed spread misconceptions about their motives. However, the work of a great poet or innovator, religious genius or philosopher can never be anything but the pure expression of the individuals spiritual life; in that human community delivered from all falsehood, such a work is ever real and unlike every other type of expression registered in signs; it is susceptible to complete and objective interpretation; indeed, it is only in the light of such works that we begin to understand the other contemporary artistic monuments and historical actions. (Dilthey and Jameson, 1972, 233)

How close to the fire must a researcher's feet be held? Many insist that academic sources used in support of an argument ease the propensity for misinformation but that is not the case. Any decent researcher can glean sources that support any conclusion one chooses to deliver. A standard academic practice requires the grad-student render a coherent paper, which conclusions are in opposition to the student's ethos and convictions. A researcher must always consider the multiplicities of truth. Truth means different things to different people. It is contingent upon the validity of recollection and information provided by the subject, sources, and contemporaries. The researcher is highly susceptible to incorporating personal sensibilities, and is subject to misinterpretation due to the vicariousness elements of investigation, the suggestiveness of the subject, and the researchers own condition. As beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so also does truth evidence its ambiguity.

5.3 Conclusion

The psychobiography employs many methodologies, its conclusions subject to researcher's ability to locate fact within abundance. Qualitative research focuses on examining a topic via cultural phenomena, human behavior, and belief systems. A comprehensive study of the life and productivity of an individual can make use

of interviews, open-ended questions, opinion research, and so on to gain insight into certain beliefs, concepts, and systems. It offers a close-up look at the human side of an issue concerning behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships, supported by such intangible factors as social norms, esoteric beliefs, ethnicity, socio-economic status, philosophy, religion, etcetera.

The inherently personalistic aspect of the in-depth case study opens up avenues of misinterpretation as does the study of the phenomenological which is inherently subjective. Add to this the interpretative nature of a psychological inquiry, which is formulated by instinct, speculation, and inference. These overarching requisites for interpretation provide ample room for misinformation. The tenets within any hermeneutic are extremely difficult to fathom. Many texts subject to evaluation are products of another age and civilization, originating in a language open to interpretation. Take, for example, Buddha's Noble Truth. The word "dukkha" or suffering that underscores the Four Noble Truths is translated in multiple ways including anxiety, constraint, distress, and so on. Suffering connotes a purgatorial existence of physical torture, which is counterproductive in its gravity of message. The more reasonable condition of humanity is a state of disillusionment. For the record, this view is a perfectly valid and reasonable consideration. It's a rational and intelligent revision and is theoretically correct. Many will disagree, some may call it cavalier.

So do these predilections to misinformation and misinterpretation render a study obsolete? The contrary is true. A subject, researcher, or source is not without fault; it is this susceptibility to error, mistake, bias, motivation, and so on that establishes the humanness and authenticity of the participants. A multivalent psychobiography does not diminish the final product but enhances it through its complexities of comprehension. It is always fortuitous that a good psychobiography not end-up in the academic wasteland of the unforgettable, but rise into forums of debate and commentary.

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Part II
Theoretical, Methodological
and Conceptual Approaches
in Psychobiography

Chapter 6

Psychobiography, Self-knowledge and “Psychology as a Rigorous Science”: Explorations in Epistemology, Clinical Practice and University Education



Zoltan Kovary

Abstract In 1911 Edmund Husserl declared, that philosophy—due to false commitments to naturalism or historicism/world view philosophy—had not been able to found itself as a “rigorous science” by identifying its own real topics, epistemology and research methods. “Naturalistic attitude” with its explicit methodological and implicit epistemological/ontological consequences influenced psychology similarly in the 20th century, which is continuing nowadays with the growing expansion of neurosciences or “evidence based” therapies. Psychology—instead of trying to define its own real topics, own methods and declare its real scientific position—is still compulsively intending to accommodate to natural sciences, while, as a contradiction, practicing psychologists mostly use “human science psychology” approach, because the real nature of their subject forces them to apply contextualist and historical-interpretative methods. Psychobiography as an idiographic, qualitative, contextualist method – beside its usefulness in creativity research—can be beneficial for psychology in general. It might help psychologists to realize what their science is really about with ontological, epistemological and methodological consequences (“psychology as a rigorous science”). Psychobiography can fill the gap between the academic approach of university training/research and clinical practice, and also supports the development of therapeutic attitudes. Studying an individual life in depth always shows what human existence is about, and the necessary self-reflections during psychobiographical researches facilitates self-awareness and self-understanding too.

Keywords Psychobiography · Epistemology · Scientific research · Therapeutic activity · University training of psychologists

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6.1 Introduction

Fourteen years ago Dan McAdams (2005) emphasized, that psychobiographers should learn methodological precision and other skills from empirical personality research in order to fit contemporary scientific expectations better. Alan C. Elms (1994) examined the other side: What can psychobiography do for psychology? Elms named four important aspects: (1) psychobiography can teach psychology how to test the personally significant instead of the statistically significant; (2) with the use of it we can make comparative analyses of an individual case through use of public data; (3) it also helps us to gain new ideas or hypotheses; and (4) it supports our understanding of important single cases. W. T. Schultz (2005c) asserted that studying a case of eminent creativity—beside that it helps us to understand that person better—develops our knowledge about creative process in general and about human mind at its best. And if we learn how creativity contributes mental health, we can utilize this knowledge in a much broader sense.

I believe that the benefits are even more fundamental. Epistemological reflections in qualitative research like psychobiography (Willig, 2008) can illuminate what human psychology is really about (ontological level), and how we gain real, relevant knowledge about it (epistemological level). The method that we choose in our research always has to fit the real nature of our subject, and not to some scientific ideals borrowed from other paradigms (Husserl, 1965/1910–11). After decades of accommodating to biology, psychiatry, neurology and other natural sciences on one hand, and sociology, economics and other social sciences on the other we have to get ready think about “psychology as a rigorous science” on its own, based on its own ontology, epistemology and methodology. Using psychobiography might make us realize what psychology is really about (Yanchar & Hill, 2003).

Teaching psychology students I experience that there is the huge scientific contradiction between the ideas of academic research/education and psychological practice. Students learn a lot about “natural science psychology” (Walsh, Teo, & Baydala, 2014): positivistic empirical research methods and naturalistic theoretical models. When they are about to conduct institutional practice at psychiatry departments, they often realize that dealing with single cases requires a different kind of knowledge: an idiographic, qualitative, contextual and holistic approach called “human science psychology”. Psychobiography as an idiographic, qualitative, contextual and holistic method is really close to “case studies”, so its utilization in education of psychologist would be beneficial. It could fill the gap between research-focused education and practice, and could teach psychology students how to deal with a single case within its contexts. It develops therapeutic skills and attitudes, because understanding a “life” requires empathy and intuition, compelling the psychologist to go beyond the clinical, discovering the existential.

The third dimension I will display in this chapter is psychobiography and its relation to self-knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey, the father of modern hermeneutics and the philosophical forerunner of psychobiography (Kóvály, 2011) declared that understanding is the discovery of the I in the Thou (Dilthey, 2002/1910). During this

research process the psychologist is getting involved intellectually and emotionally, that is why s/he has to apply personal (and epistemological) reflections (Willig, 2008). Not only to avoid the distorting effects of subjectivity, but to realize that reflected subjectivity is the inherent part of psychological work as a hermeneutic process. So instead of chasing the illusion of objectivity we'd rather develop “educated subjectivity” and construct our “personal knowledge” (Polányi, 2005/1998).

6.2 Psychobiography and the Science of Psychology

Psychologists who conduct psychotherapy, counseling or write an expertise are all “psychobiographers” in a way, rather than “natural scientists”. They take different human “products” (behavior, fantasies, dreams, notes, etc.), and within a framework of a special dialogue with the protagonist they interpret the products in order to understand their personal meaning. They have to find interrelations between the psychologically meaningful products, personality dispositions, experiences and life historical events. In the end a structure or a narrative will emerge, integrating the information into meaningful patterns. If we try to clarify, that what kind of knowledge constitutes the basis of psychobiographical research (and similar activities), it might help us to clarify “what psychology is about” (Yanchar & Hill, 2003), especially in real life.

Similar to individual psychotherapy psychobiographical research is focusing on the personal and the unique, and although it might use some general concepts (nomothetic approach), it is rather based on idiographic perspective (Allport, 1961). To unfold the unique pattern of an individual life we have to consider the influence of life-historical, cultural, social, interpersonal and intersubjective contexts. Without these contexts a life will never be understood, neither in psychobiography nor in psychotherapy. In psychobiography we obtain data about the protagonist's behavior and subjective experiences by using—mostly written—first person and third person documents (Allport, 1942). In psychotherapy it is not fully different. For example dream interpretation is an important part of dynamic therapies for ages; but what the therapist is learning about in a session is not the dream, but an oral report about the dream-experience, a text. Ricoeur (1981), who emphasized that, declared that one of the most important consequence of Freud's discoveries is that psychological phenomena that are being interpreted by psychoanalysts (symptoms, dreams, parapraxes, jokes, works of art) are all “language-like”.

So actually (psychobiography) and figuratively (psychotherapy) a psychologist's activity epistemologically is much closer to text-analysis than to natural scientific research. In addition psychological facts are not physical “things” that can be measured, photographed or dissected with the use of natural scientific methods; they are “phenomena” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). In mental sciences Karl Jaspers (1997/1913) was the first, who emphasized that psychopathologists in fact use phenomenology when they identify the meaningful units of their patient's behavior and experiences. After that they have to interpret the meaning of these units by putting

them into context and finding their interrelations with other phenomena. The model of this activity is text interpretation; which is conducted under the rules of the hermeneutic tradition. (See Knight, 2019; Mullen, 2019) These rules are the part of every kind of interpretation (Dilthey, 1996/1900); the relevance of this in psychoanalysis and psychology has been discussed for ages (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984).

The epistemological horizon of psychobiographical research (and similar psychological activities) is significantly designated by phenomenology and hermeneutical traditions. When psychologists interpret their patient's behavior and subjective experiences in life historical context they are carrying out phenomenological and hermeneutical activities—no matter if they are aware of it or not. These kind of activities in psychology are based on the application of qualitative and historical-interpretive methods (Runyan, 1997), following the strategy of discovery (Babbie, 2008). It is based on a dialogue: the first person perspective of the protagonist here is equally as important as the third person perspective of the professional, who is aware of the fact that “objectivity” is an illusion. So with the use of epistemological and personal reflections (Willig, 2008) s/he is rather trying to achieve “educated subjectivity”. The most important aim is understanding (*Verstehen*), and not explanation. This “human science psychology” (Walsh et al., 2014) is based on the narrative construct of reality (Bruner, 1986) and the contextualist view of the world and man (Sarbin, 1986). Its meta-theory is not positivism but methodological hermeneutics (Rennie, 2007), and—according to the nature of the subject—existential philosophy can provide a proper ontological base for these researches, (Maslow, 1998/1962).

Mainstream and academic psychologies—dominating the world of research and higher education—are radically different. “Scientific” in here is equal with the application of natural scientific theoretical framework and positivist scientific methods. These psychologies are nomothetic, formulating general laws about personality and behavior. They are not holistic but reductionist, decontextualizing the investigated phenomena. In research—after identifying manipulable “variables”—scientists are using experimental/correlation studies and quantitative methods in order to test hypotheses concerning the supposed interrelations. The aim is “objectivity” at any cost, so the third person perspective (the perspective of the scientific authority) is superior, while the first person perspective is often excluded as unreliable. The goal is explanation, in which scientists often switch to an ontological level that is different from that of the observations. For example the diagnoses of disorders are based on the interpretation of observed behavior and verbal reports, which in fact does not have much to do with natural sciences. But if we take a look at the explanations of disorders in the actual literature, these are often dominated by neurological and neurobiological concepts (Kiehl, 2006). We call this approach “natural science psychology” (Walsh et al., 2014). Natural science psychology is based on paradigmatic/logical scientific construct of reality (Bruner, 1986), mechanistic view of the world and man (Sarbin, 1986), and its meta-theory is logical positivism.

There is a huge contradiction between the way we use psychological knowledge when we approach “real” individuals (in psychobiographical research or in psychotherapy) and the way that we conduct widely accepted empirical/quantitative researches and construct scientific explanations about behavior and mental processes.

Do we suppose that concepts and methods that really fit ontologically and epistemologically the nature and complexity of our subject are not scientific enough? So if we want to be “scientific” in psychology, we must switch to the ontological level of natural sciences? Laing (1990/1953) emphasized that one can approach humans as biological organisms or as persons, which require different concepts, models and methods. But somehow “there is a common illusion” that the science which remains within the realm of the “person” is not scientific and objective enough, so we must translate our observations to “it-processes” using “mechanical or biological analogies” which leads to the objectification of humans (pp. 22–23).

At the end of the 19th century psychology started its struggle for its recognition as a “real” science by adapting hard science methods (Walsh et al., 2014). With this intention psychology implicitly adapted reductionist, naturalistic and mechanic ontological assumptions, and failed to elaborate an ontology that would represent the real nature of human psychological existence (Yanchar & Hill, 2003). Freud for example developed human science approach to clinical phenomena with interpretation, while in theorizing he clung to his positivistic presuppositions (Szummer, 2014). But his mistake was highly influential: in the 1920’ Swiss dynamic psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger rejected Freud’s scientism and began to orient himself towards phenomenology and Heideggerian philosophy (Condrau, 2014). Binswanger and colleague Medard Boss had impact on European mental sciences, and later authors like Raymond McCall (1983) tried to introduce this approach to the American scientific public as well. The “phenomenological contextualism” and “post-Cartesian psychoanalysis” of Stolorow (see his contribution in Foreword) and Atwood (1984, 2019) is also an important contribution to this field. Besides they are related to Henry Murray’s idiographic, qualitative, holistic and life historical trend called personology (Stolorow & Atwood, 2013), that enjoys a welcoming renaissance since the 80s (Alexander, 1990). These trends, along with the success of narrative psychology all supported the current renaissance of psychobiography (Kőváry, 2011).

Psychobiography is a useful research method, which is very close to psychological assessment, expertise writing and even psychotherapy epistemologically. Clarifying its ontological and epistemological background might help us to realize “what psychology is about”. It can support psychology to become a human but rigorous science -not by accommodating to other paradigms but based on its own standards. It also has to influence the way we get future generations prepared for psychological work. In the next subchapter I will examine, how psychobiography could support the university training of psychologists.

6.3 Psychobiography and Becoming a Psychologist

During the years of education psychology students learn a lot about “natural science psychology” but very little about “human science psychology”. One can say that according to the widely accepted “scientist-practitioner model” of clinical psychology (Trull & Phares, 2000) it’s not a problem; students become “scientists” during

their university education, while their “practitioner” side will develop during their institutional practice and post-gradual years. But do mental health institutes, the venues for psychologists’ institutional practice grant this development?

21st century psychiatry identifies itself as “biological”, a part of natural sciences and medicine (Buda, 2011). Biological reductionism, medicalization and psychiatrization of psychological problems are the inherent parts of the medical discourse (Foucault, 1994). Relying on the authority of medical sciences psychiatry represents itself as something “more scientific” than (clinical) psychology. Although psychiatry is grounding its scientific authority on referring to hard sciences like neurobiology, in clinical practice a psychiatrist is using this knowledge only in pharmacotherapy. Everything else, the process of diagnosis or supporting the patient psychologically is based on a totally different knowledge, which is in fact not natural scientific (Kóváry, 2018).

During institutional practice psychology students get into a realm intellectually dominated by the medical discourse. Later they have to make case reports for the classroom practice; that’s when they start to realize, that natural science influenced concepts and methods are not too helpful if they try to understand the dynamics of a real person’s problems in life historical context. They can use the medical diagnosis as an organizing principle, and evaluate all the activities of the patient as a symptom of an illness—the same happens in “pathographies”, which is regarded as a bad psychobiography marker (Schultz, 2005a). Medical diagnoses like “bipolar disorder” sometimes have detrimental effect on the process of understanding, because they cut it short by narrowing the horizon of interpretations. Students can also start to identify meaningful phenomena using the data that revealed itself during the interview. After that they can interpret them by finding interrelations between the behavioral units, subjective experiences and life-history events. (Just like in psychobiography). So they have to rely on phenomenology, hermeneutics or structuralism—unreflected and naively, because these were not included in their education. In their interpretations they have to go back to the “old fashioned” ideas of dynamic psychologies; there is no other way to conceptualize these complex phenomena psychologically. The same happens later in therapeutic practice; it is also not based on positivist quantitative research.

Therefore human science psychology, its theories, methods, ontological and epistemological aspects have to get more space in the education of psychologists. Getting students prepared for institutional practice in the classroom we have to emphasize that (1) psychiatric (medical) and psychological/psychotherapeutic diagnoses are different from each other, (2) their activity is going to be directed to the unique and individual (idiographic approach), (3) they are about to understand the structure and meaning of the client’s behavior and subjective experiences in their contexts, so they will have to choose the proper personality and psychopathological theories for interpretation, and the anti-theoretical attitude of empirical researches is not useful in this context, and finally (4) they need to understand the nature of their own activity, so they have to apply epistemological and personal reflections during their work, like in qualitative researches.

The integration of psychobiography could support these necessary changes in education. Although there are very few university trainings (in the US) where psychobiography is the part of the curriculum (Ponterotto et al., 2015), the advantages are so obvious, that the integration worth considering. (1) Psychobiography research forces students to integrate, use and exercise psychological knowledge on a very high level. (2) It supports the emergence and development of “therapeutic wisdom”, which is different from therapy as a “set of techniques”, which the part of scientism in psychotherapy (Stolorow, 2012). (3) Psychobiographical research supports epistemological awareness (as we discussed above). In addition there are no ethical issues in this research process, opposite to clinical case studies. The analysis is based on public data that is available for everyone, and data sources are not limited to the clinical situation. The evaluation of the interpretations are easier and more apparent, because it is not only the report’s author who knows who the protagonist is. Psychobiographies can also compel students to go beyond the clinical/medical dimensions and discover the existential and human. (4) In qualitative researches, says Willig (2008), beside epistemological reflections one always has to make personal reflections as well. Why did I choose this particular subject? What does s/he mean to me? How does my involvement influence the process of my interpretation? In the last subchapter I will focus on the self-knowledge dimension of psychobiographical research, displaying some “psychohistorical” aspects as well.

6.4 Freud, Psychobiography and the Necessary Self-analysis

To understand personal involvement and to gain self-knowledge—these are major requirements for psychologists for ages. This topic appeared first as Freud’s famous self-analysis (Anzieu, 1986), followed by the discovery of counter-transference and the introduction of compulsory training analysis (Ferenczi, 1931). These elements shaped the evolution of psychoanalysis and psychology massively. I will focus on Freud’s self-analysis, because it longitudinally contributed the emergence of psychobiography.

As a young scientist Sigmund Freud intended to be a neuropathologist. His boss Ernst Brücke warned him that due to his Jewish origins and the rise of anti-Semitism in Austria he had no chance to achieve academic career. In order to earn enough money for his prospective family Freud started a private practice as a doctor of nervous illnesses (Jones, 1975). He met numerous cases of hysteria, and experienced that regular medical approach wouldn’t help him in understanding and treating his patients. He started experiments with hypnosis, and by 1895 with colleague Josef Breuer they discovered the first “language” of the unconscious, neurotic symptoms. They realized that symptoms have meaning, and by working on the symptoms psychologically they could help the suffering patients to recover (cathartic therapy). This discovery was the first step from neuropathology to depth-psychology. The

consequences took even Freud by surprise; he wrote that—due to the nature of the subject—case histories could be read like short stories. Only the detailed description of mental processes—that was typical in literature, but not in science—helped him to understand the nature of neuroses (Freud, 1955/1893–95).

Although it contributed the emergence of narratology and his interpretive method related him to human sciences, Freud insisted that psychoanalysis was a natural science for life. But it is notable, that in the same year Freud rejected his “Project for Scientific Psychology”, in which he intended to explain psychopathological and psychological phenomena with the use of neurophysiological formulas (Sulloway, 1979). One year before this Dilthey (1977/1894) formulated the differences of “analytic” and “descriptive” psychologies: the former is based on natural sciences and directed to explanation, while the latter is based on human sciences with the aim of understanding (*Verstehen*). Freud’s works of the same year, the “Project” and “Studies on Hysteria” and the rejection of the former are also referring on the incompatibility of these different approaches. As Laing (1990/1953) stated later: it is like the perception of the Rubin-vase, an either/or situation. You can take the other as a biological organism with the use of natural sciences (or “analytic” psychology), or as a person, with the use of existential phenomenology (or “descriptive” psychology).

1895 was only the beginning. In 1896 Freud’s father died, which caused him neurotic symptoms (Jones, 1975). Freud was aware of the fact that neurotic symptoms were coming from unconscious conflicts, which had to be explored in psychoanalytic therapy. Being the only psychoanalyst in the world at that time he couldn’t put himself on the couch, so he had to find another way. In his therapeutic sessions his patients spontaneously began to reflect on their dream contents, made Freud realize that with the use of free associations dreams could be understood similarly to symptoms (Freud, 1957/1914). This led to the discovery of the second language of the unconscious: the visual language of dreams. That dreams are being structured like symptoms later helped Freud to expand his researches from the field of psychopathology to everyday phenomena like parapraxes, jokes, creativity and arts, religion and culture. It also supported him to conduct his famous self-analysis by interpreting his own dreams (Anzieu, 1986). Freud’s personal involvement, his crisis determined the development of psychoanalysis and his own creativity. As countless dream examples in “Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1953/1900) were coming from Freud’s self-analysis, this book in a way is a personal confession in disguise, a testimony that reflects on Freud’s personal struggling journey through his private underworld (the unconscious). Freud’s evolving personal scientific creativity was at least partly the result of the successful elaboration of his own private psychological crisis. Creative urge and personality development are walking hand in hand—as Freud’s disciple Otto Rank (1932) declared it in the subtitle of his famous book “Art and Artist”.

A switch from “natural science” to “human science” also happened in the case of Henry A. Murray, the great American personality psychologists. Murray was a physician, doing research in biochemistry, when in his 30 s he was hit by an “early midlife crisis” (Kóváry, 2019). Three encounters helped him to cope with this crisis, and supported the emergence of his scientific creativity. (“Encounter” is an important aspect in the development of creativity, see May, 1959). In this dark

period Murray met Christiana Morgan, a young woman who had been the patient of Carl Gustav Jung before. Morgan introduced depth-psychology to Murray, who later made friends with Jung, and got involved in the psychobiography of Henry Melville for life. He went on becoming a school founder personality psychologist establishing personology, which is about the in-depth exploration of single cases. He constructed the world famous Thematic Apperception Test together with Morgan (Anderson, 1988). Their collaboration made Murray formulating the idea of “dyadic creativity” (Murray, 1959), an important forerunner of intersubjective approach in psychology. Like Freud, Murray solved his personal crisis by elaborating it creatively: he founded a psychological trend which is idiographic, dynamic and life-historical. Similar to Freud, Murray remained faithful to his original scientific roots by emphasizing the importance of biological motivation forces he called “needs” (Kőváry, 2019).

Some might say that it’s ok, but not generalizable. But generalizability is natural science psychology’s criterion; human science psychology rather tends to understand the particular in real life context. According to Dilthey (1989/1883) in human sciences if we manage to identify a meaningful structure in a significant case, we can draw conclusions from the particular to the particular. If a structure element appears in another case, it is likely that the other parts of the structure will appear too. It also happens in clinical work. When we talk about clinical single cases in group supervisions, we often do the same, saying: “Oh, once I had a similar case...”. We tend to believe that it is illuminating, a proper way to interpret and understand an actual clinical situation. In psychobiography the idea of “multiple case psychobiography” (Isaacson, 2005) represents the same approach.

So dreams opened the door for Freud to understand everyday phenomena like slips of the tongue (Freud, 1960/1901), and as they sometimes make us laugh, he began to investigate humor as well. “Jokes and Their Relation to Unconscious” (1960/1905) was the first psychoanalytic work about aesthetics, because jokes belong to comedy as a literary genre. Freud emphasized that jokes—similar to therapy—can cause catharsis because of their content, but a special language formation is always necessary for that. It is about the transformation of unconscious material by joke-work, similarly to dream-work executed by primary processes of the unconscious mind. As jokes belong to the realm of aesthetics, it obviously led to discovering the “language of the arts” in the following years (Kőváry, 2017). Freud realized that the investigated psychological phenomena (symptoms, dreams, parapraxes, jokes, works of art) are all related to unconscious fantasies. It is always necessary to transform the original fantasy material by the mentioned primary processes in order to bypass egos’s censorship, making wish-fulfillment and enjoyment possible. In the case of artistic creative transformation—analogue to dream-work and joke-work—Kris (2000/1952) later formulated the concept of “art-work”, a psychoanalytic expression that describes the creative process. So fifteen years after rejecting “Project”, in 1910 Freud arrived to the investigation of artistic creativity in life historical context, creating the epoch-making “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood” (Freud, 1957/1910).

“Leonardo” is the first ever written psychobiography and the first systematic psychological analysis of an outstanding creative person (Kőváry, 2017). Besides Freud also introduced some new ideas in this writing that later became highly important in

psychoanalysis and psychology. He introduced the concept of narcissism, which he discussed in details only some years later, and according to Blum (2001) the father of psychoanalysis also anticipated the idea of early object relations approach in this essay. Blum also emphasizes that the “Leonardo” was a chance for Freud to expand psychoanalytic research (which is related to the development of his scientific creativity), and according to his personal involvement, the process of interpretation was also an eventuality for him to carry on constructing his own self.

This personal involvement is particularly important; it is well-known that Freud identified himself with Leonardo (Jones, 1975). So his interpretation of Leonardo’s personality and creativity was at least partly an indirect self-analysis, the continuation of the process that Freud had started formerly due to the death of his father leading to the birth of “Interpretation of Dreams”. Critics like the Wittkower and Wittkower (1963) or Elms (2005) refer to indirect self-analysis as a scientific mistake, but from the perspective of human science psychology (based on phenomenology and hermeneutics) subjectivity is inevitable, an inherent part of the process. Quoting Dilthey again: “understanding is the discovery of the I in the Thou” (2002/1910). Dilthey identified this process as “losing ourselves in a strange existence”; he believed that this is the only way to achieve deep “historical” insights.

It means that the creative process of writing a psychobiography is preceded by a period of reception/inspiration, which has its own dynamics. We are receiving the life histories and life-works of our protagonists, re-experiencing their original impressions. This reception or influence is always containing interpretations; according to Norman Holland (1976) this process is based on “countertransference” and (mostly indirect) self-analysis. First we have expectations, anticipations. After that we select the material partly unconsciously, according to our dispositions and fantasies, and this selection always has self-defensive aspects. Following that we project our desires onto the selected material (the phase of fantasy), and in the end we transform the emerging fantasies into meaningful and sharable themes.

So the received and interpreted material—that later will take the form of a product, for example a psychobiography—always contains self-analytic aspects. This process includes “regressive” elements (according to psychoanalysis) that can be described with different concepts like identification (Freud, 1964/1932), from the perspective of ego-psychology and object relations theory it’s a symbiotic re-fusion with the object (Mitchell & Black, 1995), we also lose ourselves in a strange existence (Dilthey, 2002/1910) or experience “participation mystique” (Levy-Brühl, quoted by Jung, 1928). In the cases of mental problems regression is a malevolent phenomenon that leads to the disintegration of the self, but this kind of regression is standing the service of the ego (Kris, 2000/1952). This regression as inspiration is followed by the phase of elaboration: we create artistic/scientific products and also ourselves. The starting point of this process is never accidental; according to Hungarian psychoanalyst Imre Hermann (2007/1930) the emergence of creativity (beside talent and motivation) always depends on external “causing forces”. Causing forces can be traumas, conflicts, crises, limit situations (Jaspers, 1970), prototypical scenes (Schultz, 2005b), encounters with reality and others (May, 1959) or peak experiences (Maslow, 1998/1962). According to Maslow these latter are always “acute identity

experiences”, affecting not only creative activity but also the (re)formation of the self.

The structure and the dynamics of the creative process are very similar to dream formation, and their function is also comparable. In dreaming the unconscious is selecting some daily residues from the hundreds of everyday experiences that are ready to bear the projection of wishes, fears, conflicts that are partly coming from the past. Primary processes (condensation, replacement, symbolism, representation) transform these impressions into dream-products, which represent our deepest unconscious wishes and conflicts. But according to Freud (1953/1900) it always happens in disguise, as a compromise formation, and if dream-work is successful, dream contents will be in an “optimal aesthetic distance” (Scheff, 1979) from the self that helps us to bear and handle the emotional experiences they represent. “Art-work” (Kris, 2000/1952), the creative process is similar: it helps the creator to rearrange sometimes traumatic experiences, placing them into an “optimal aesthetic distance”, to make them easier to bear. Unsuccessful dream-work causes nightmares, while unsuccessful art-work might cause re-traumatization. Rachel Rosenblum (2012) analyzed fatal cases of artists when the “optimal distance” collapsed. She referred to several traumatized authors (like Holocaust-survivors), who, after the years of writing hetero-biographies as elaboration of their traumas, turned to autobiography, and later committed suicide. It seems that the lack of distance finally left the self unprotected, and caused re-traumatization and the annihilation of the self.

According to Holland’s model a member of the audience can bring off a similar but also indirect self-analysis by receiving and consuming works of art. Writing psychobiographies contains both sides: the phase of reception (inspiration) and the phase of creation (elaboration), which always contains personal aspects. As Erik Erikson wrote in his “Luther” (1993/1958):

the clinical biographer [might] feel that he is dealing with a patient. If the clinician should indulge himself into this feeling, however, he will soon find out that the imaginary client has been dealing with him.... (p. 16)

He also emphasized that during this work the interpreter has to make reflections about the personal sources of his/her interest towards the protagonist (Erikson, 1968). Psychobiographical research therefore not only facilitates the integration of psychological knowledge on the highest level, not only helps psychology students to develop “therapeutic” skills and existential understanding that are both important in conducting individual therapies later. Writing psychobiographies also supports the emerging self awareness of the author, as knowing the other and knowing the self are walking hand in hand and facilitate each other mutually during this process.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I wanted to denote three interrelating aspects of psychobiographical research. More than two decades ago a modern classic of psychobiography, Elms

(1994) has already started to collect the arguments why psychology should start to take psychobiography seriously. I went further, and declared that the ontological and epistemological consequences of psychobiography research might help us to clarify what psychology is really about, and it would be beneficial if this clarification started during university education. Beside this the integration of psychobiography into the curriculum of psychology students would have several other beneficial effects. One of these is the support of self-knowledge, which is related to the fact that the researcher (and the similarly, the therapist) is getting emotionally involved while focusing on the significant other. The final part of my chapter is about placing this phenomenon into historical and theoretical context to unfold its importance not only for psychobiography but also for psychology in general. The major aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how important it would be to include human science psychology into the training of psychologists, and how psychobiography could serve as a fine tool in this mission.

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Chapter 7

Systems Psychodynamics in Psychobiography: The Individual Within the (Unconscious) Systems' Dynamics



Frans Cilliers and Claude-Hélène Mayer

Abstract Systems psychodynamic (SP) perspectives have become vibrant in psychological and interdisciplinary research settings. Individuals are described within systems and system dynamics to deepen the understanding of the conscious and unconscious dynamics impacting on cognitive, symbolic, affective and behavioural processes within such systems. In across-the-lifespan research studies of individuals, psychobiographical research has become transdisciplinary since the 20th century. This lifespan research, which focuses specifically on exploring the life of historically and contemporary relevant and extraordinary individuals, considers the lives of writers, artists and entrepreneurs, and their creative works, by using psychological theories. An SP perspective, with its roots in psychoanalysis, fosters an understanding of the dynamics between individuals and system elements across the lifespan and might contribute to a deeper understanding of the (un-)conscious dynamics within individuals and systems, such as the environment, the family and organisations. Through the focus on the individual and the system, new insights into unconscious and often latent dynamics emerge. This chapter provides an insight into the use of SP theory in psychobiographical role behaviour.

Keywords Systems psychodynamics · Psychobiography · Unconscious · Psychoanalytic perspective · Role behaviour

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*What we do not make conscious
Emerges later as fate.
C. G. Jung*

7.1 Introduction

Systems psychodynamic (SP) perspectives have become vibrant in psychological and interdisciplinary research settings with the focus on the study of conscious and unconscious systemic, dynamic, cognitive, affective and symbolic behaviour manifesting at micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (organisational) levels (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

As far as research studies on the lifespan of individuals is concerned, psychobiographical research has become transdisciplinary since the 20th century (Carducci, 2009; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2005). This lifespan research, which focuses specifically on exploring the lives of historically and contemporarily relevant and extraordinary individuals (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010), applies psychological theories to study the lives of writers, artists and entrepreneurs, and their creative works, (Mayer, 2017; Runyan, 2005). Classical psychological theories, such as psychoanalytically based ones, are often used to explore either the entire life of an extraordinary person in depth or certain specific life events (Ponterotto, 2015). Runyan (2005) emphasises that the life of the whole person is taken into account. This is probably based on the idea that most researchers utilise theories in psychobiography, which take cognisance of the individual using individual-focused theories, such as psychoanalysis and personality psychology, and not necessarily the (un)conscious dynamics of systems surrounding and impacting on the individual.

An SP perspective promotes an understanding of the dynamics between individuals and systemic elements, and might contribute to a deeper understanding of the unconscious dynamics within individuals and systems, such as the environment, the family or organisations (Cilliers, 2004; Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010). Through the focus on the unconscious dynamics between the individual and the surrounding systems, new insights emerge of the unconscious and often latent dynamics, which might lead to certain thinking patterns and behavioural dynamics.

7.2 Purpose, Aim and Contribution

In this chapter of the book, the authors argue that SP theory can contribute new insights into the life and creative works of selected individuals and thereby add new perspectives to classical theories and psychobiographical frameworks. SP can therefore be understood as an expansion of previously used psychobiographical theories. The argument (as in Johnson, 2019) is that psychobiography as a theory and method

needs to consider new perspectives and theories in order to expand its focus and explore new views on complex impacts relating to possible patterns in the individual life (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019), an individual's life patterns and how he/she takes up roles. Mullen (2019) provides great insight into the range of methodological approaches used in psychobiography in the context of truth in psychobiographical works.

The aim of this chapter is to provide insight into SP in order to explore its value in psychobiographical research. The contribution to the psychobiographical discourse lies in the discussion of how systems psychodynamics might contribute to the field of psychobiography.

7.3 The Use of Theory in Psychobiographical Works

Psychobiographies are based on the analysis of the lives of extraordinary individuals by using psychological theories (Eliastam, 2011; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). The aim of this is to gain a holistic view of the individual's life (Schultz, 2005) or certain key life events. Psychoanalysis has often been used as a theory to analyse the life of an extraordinary person (e.g. Kőváry, 2011; Ogilvie, 2004) and to gain a deeper understanding of his/her inner world.

Many (psycho)biographers use Freudian psychoanalysis or a variant thereof (Elms, 2002), following Freud (1910), who invented modern psychobiography with his work on Leonardo da Vinci. According to Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, and Cheung (2015), most of the theories used in psychobiography are psychoanalytic and psychodynamic, such as Freud's theory of childhood behaviour, Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby & World Health Organization, 1952; Kelley, 2019) or the object relation theory of Winnicott (1969, 1975, 2006, Verwey & Knight, 2019). Psychosocial development theories thus focus on the importance of conscious and unconscious forces in guiding behaviours, personality conflicts and the effects of childhood behaviour in adult life (Bastable, 2008). Well-known theories used in psychobiographies in the context of psychosocial development are, for example, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1950, 1977) with its eight developmental stages (see Fouché, Naidoo, & Botha, 2019). Several psychobiographies have used Erikson's theory on systems psychosocial development, such as Ruiters' (2013) work on Michael Jackson, Fouché, Nel, and van Niekerk's psychobiography on Helen Suzman or Marx's (2015) study on Margaret Hilda Thatcher.

During the past years, psychoanalytic enquires about psychobiographies have been adapted (Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005), and interest in this field has increased in the sense that various methodologies and theories are considered in the exploration of the person in psychobiographical research (Carlson, 1988).

Ponterotto (2014) argues that psychobiography can be based on a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, which has resulted in psychobiography becoming a well-established field of study (Ponterotto, 2014).

Besides the focus on the extraordinary person being researched, from a systemic perspective the phenomenon of countertransference with regard to the psychobiographer has been addressed in psychobiographic research (Strouse, 1987). Psychodynamic explanations are often used to describe and explain behaviour from an intrapersonal perspective, as, for example, in Skinner (1979).

In addition to psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory, the “narrative turn in psychology” (Bruner, 1990, 2004; Sarbin, 1986) has contributed to the analysis of life stories through narrative inquiry (link Androutsopoulou, Dima, Papageorgiou, & Papanikolaou, 2019; Schultz, 2001, 2003). Various forms of narrative analysis have been used in psychobiographies (e.g. Alexander, 1990; McAdams, 1988, 1997), and Knight (2019) emphasise that new methods and theories for life-narrative analysis are required, which, at a deeper level, take into account unconscious researcher bias.

Schultz and Lawrence (2017) argue that experimental theory and method also contribute well to psychobiographical study designs and can add value to the research field. Other researchers (Mayer, 2017; Petersen, 2006; Ponterotto, 2015) emphasise the value of positive psychology theories for psychobiographical analysis, including specifically the positive in the focus of analysis. Recently, this perspective has been extended, and it has been argued that positive psychology in terms of PP 2.0 should be taken into account by psychobiographers in order to develop a balanced view on the life events in an extraordinary person’s life (Mayer & May, 2019).

Anderson and Dunlop (2019) argue that by choosing a theory to analyse the life of an extraordinary person, the psychobiographer needs to consider the cultural factor. It is thus essential that the theory fits the person and the cultural context (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019). Also Burnell, Nel, Fouché, and Van Niekerk (2019) emphasise that in selecting a suitable psychobiographical subject of research, contextual factors need to be considered in the context of psychosocial research.

In the following sections, the authors present the theoretical approaches used in systems psychodynamics, and explore which factors are currently used in psychobiography, and describe those factors that could be taken into account in future psychobiographical research.

7.4 Systems Psychodynamics

Systems psychodynamics developed at the Tavistock Institute in London (Brunner, Nutkevitch, & Sher, 2006). SP can be defined as the study of unconscious patterns of work relations and their influence on leadership and authority, and how task and role formation, conflict and boundaries influence relationships and relatedness in the leadership system (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Colman & Geller, 1985; Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; De Board, 2014). Systems refer to the structural aspects of an organisation or institution (Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001) such as the primary task and how it is operationalised in organisational design, division of labour, procedures, processes, levels of authority and reporting relationships. Psychodynamics refers to the psychoanalytic perspective on the unconscious individual, group (social) and

organisational experiences and mental processes as a source and a consequence of repressed organisational behaviours. SP offers a depth psychology organisational theory, an organisational development consultancy and coaching stance focusing on leadership and authority (Armstrong, 2005; Neumann, Kellner, & Dawson-Shepherd, 1997) and a psychosocial research design and method (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

Theoretically, SP is based on the following approaches:

- **Social/systemic psychoanalysis**
This view (Freud, 1921) studies consciousness and unconsciousness and its manifestations in the id (unconscious urges, drives and instincts), the ego (the processing of logic, memory and judgement), and the superego or conscience (concerned with obeying morality and social norms).
- **Object relations**
This view (Clarke, Hahn, & Hoggett, 2008; Klein, 1997) studies the way in which significant early childhood connections to objects (a person, group, organisation, idea or symbol) continue to influence the individual's behaviour throughout adulthood in its representation (e.g. the internalised mother/parent). The infant splits the external world into a good part associated with the mother that feeds and comforts it (the "good breast" representing love or libido) and a bad part that denies it food and comfort (the "bad breast" representing aggression or morbido) (Klein, 1997). The family can be seen as an organisation with a hierarchy and emotional complexity (Czander, 1993). The object relations formed in the first five years of the individual's life (e.g. with parental figures) are unconsciously transferred to authority figures at school and later in organisations. Winnicott (2006) refers to transitional objects and potential space as concepts to understand the representation of valuable attachments in the unconscious.
- **Open systems theory**
A system is defined as a complex, organised, unitary whole composed of two or more interdependent parts, components or subsystems, and delineated by identifiable and permeable boundaries from its external environment (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Stapley, 2006). Examples are families and organisations, consisting of a set of interconnected parts interacting with other objects and systems. Interconnections imply that a system imports energy and information from outside itself, transforms that energy and information in some way, and then exports the transformed results back to the outer system (Colman & Bexton, 1975).
- **Social systems**
This view (Winnicott, 2006) studies social defence systems and their role in containing anxiety on behalf of the total system.
- **Group relations theory**
This view (Bion, 1961) is defined as the study of the dynamics of groups and organisations and its conscious (mostly rational) and unconscious (mostly irrational) behaviours. Contrary to psychoanalysis, the focus is not only on the individual (Dimitrov, 2008). The group-as-a-whole perspective implies that members are in continuous interdependent relationships, where the group develops a life of its own as a consequence of the fantasies and projections of its members (Cytrynbaum &

Noumair, 2004; Stapley, 2006). Individual behaviour is deemed to be carried out on behalf of the larger system. Individual meaning-making processes result in a state of relatedness with others, culminating in mutual influence and collective thinking (Stapley, 2006).

- Systemic transactional analysis

This view (Erskine, 2010; Tangolo, 2015) analyses systemic ego state functioning and scripts towards the understanding of how they contribute to the system's identity and functioning. An ego state is a coherent system and consistent pattern of feelings and experiences directly related to a pattern of behaviour (Berne, 1961). The three ego states are the parent (nurture, control), adult (rationality) and child (spontaneity, attention seeking, rebellion). A script is a complex set of transactions based on the regressive enactment of introjections and transference from a previous time that formed recurring patterns now used as coping strategies (Cornell & Hargaden, 2005).

As a consulting and coaching stance, SP is characterised as follows. It offers a developmentally focused, psychoeducational process for the understanding of the deep and covert behaviour in the system (De Board, 2014; Klein, 2005; Sher, 2013). Its primary task is formulated as pushing the boundaries of awareness to better understand the unconscious meaning of systemic leadership behaviour in society and its organisations (Armstrong, 2005; Lawrence, 1999). It believes that the organisation is socially constructed (Campbell, 2007), that the macro, meso and micro systems mirror one another and that the system as a whole strives towards equilibrium between consciousness/unconsciousness, rational/irrational behaviour, inclusion/exclusion and attachment/detachment (Campbell & Huffington, 2008).

Anxiety is seen as the core behavioural concept in SP consultancy. It is defined as fear of the future, the experience underlying any systemic experience of intense emotions, mental anguish, anticipation and dread about something unexpected, unpleasant and unwanted, such as the loss of love objects and desired parts of the system's identity (Armstrong & Rustin, 2015; Curtis, 2015). Anxiety can be categorised as free floating (not linked to a specific object), survival (being physically or emotionally threatened), performance (having to execute a task under experienced attack such as criticism), persecutory (feeling victimised), paranoid (feeling threatened) (Long, 2008) and depressive (Curtis, 2015). Anxiety serves as the driving force of workplace systemic relatedness and manifests as follows at all systemic levels (Armstrong & Rustin, 2015; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004). These forms of anxiety can be experienced by a subsystem, such as coping with performing a complex task and its emotional demands, being and staying in role and its systemic representation demands and defining one's organisational identity while struggling with many unconscious power matters (Bion, 1961). The system copes with anxiety through the use of defence mechanisms (Blackman, 2004) aimed at protection and surviving. Defences can be classified as realistic (real danger that needs responding to), neurotic (repression, regression, sublimation, transference, countertransference), psychotic (splitting, projection, projective identification) and perverse (denial of reality, acting in an entitled manner, displacing objects) (Long, 2008).

Group and organisational systemic anxiety is acted out in various ways encapsulated in five basic behavioural assumptions, namely dependency, fight/flight, pairing (Bion, 1961; 1983), me-ness (Turquet, 1974) and one-ness/we-ness (Lawrence, Bain, & Gould, 1996). These behaviours manifest unconsciously, systemically and unani- mously as a group mentality. Dependence refers to the system's experienced anxiety around its need for security and structure, which is projected onto a perceived strong or parental object. When these needs are not met, the system experiences frustra- tion, helplessness, powerlessness and deauthorisation (Czander, 1993; Stapley, 2006) manifesting as counter-dependence. Fight/flight refers to the system's experienced performance anxiety in the here-and-now and the defence to save itself by either fighting the imagined enemy or to remove the self physically or emotionally from the danger (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). Fight responses manifest in aggression against the self, peers (with envy, jealousy, competition, elimination, boycotting, sib- ling rivalry, fighting for a position in the system, an assumed privileged relationship with authority figures) or authority itself (Klein, 2005). Flight responses manifest physically in, say, avoidance of others, illness or resignation. Psychological flight responses include defence mechanisms such as avoidance of threatening situations or emotions in the here-and-now, rationalisation and intellectualisation (Gould et al., 2004). Pairing manifests in order to cope with the anxiety around alienation and loneliness. The system tries to pair with a perceived powerful object (individual, subgroup, idea) (Colman & Bexton, 1975). The unconscious fantasy is that creation occurs in pairs, which will save the system from threat (Colman & Geller, 1985). One-ness (or we-ness) refers to the system's effort to join into a powerful union or omnipotent force, surrendering the self to passive participation, thus living in the fan- tasy of wholeness and safety (Turquet, 1974). Me-ness refers to survival and solace in the own inner world, putting the self above the larger system, avoiding the outer world and its reality (Lawrence et al., 1996).

SP consultation and coaching study the assumption of a leadership role, which involves a number of core behavioural constructs (Czander, 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries, 1991; Klein, 2005; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Vansina & Vansina- Cobbaert, 2008). In SP "role" is seen as the place, area or interface between person and organisation, or between personal and social systems (Newton et al., 2006). Taking up a role refers to consciously being appointed in a task position, as well as unconsciously managing the complexity where person and institution meet in the exercise of representing the self and the other (Campbell & Groenbaek, 2006). Role consists of the normative, experiential and phenomenal parts (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), where the experienced difference between these represents systemic anxiety (Armstrong & Rustin, 2015). The normative contains the conscious, rational and measurable work components. The existential contains the system's introjections defined as the unconscious incorporation of external ideas, feelings, attitudes and values into the system's mind and behaviour—the external is taken into the inner self (Klein, 1997). The phenomenal contains the unconscious projections and projective identifications about competence received from the other, as well as the projections made onto the other. Projection refers to unconscious transferences of the system's own impressions and feelings (often unwanted, disowned, denied, unacceptable,

undesired, unrecognised or ambivalent experiences) to external objects or persons. The capacity to attribute certain mental contents from one system to another can alter the behaviour of that system through the identification with the contents, which is referred to as projective identification (French & Simpson, 2015). The system's valence (unconscious disposition) determines the projections it identifies with.

Role identity comprises the following domains: Task is the basic component of role where the primary task contains anxiety, and off-task/anti-task behaviour indicates high levels of free-floating anxiety (Neumann et al., 1997). Boundaries (e.g. ego, time, task, territory, organisational structure) refer to either a tight or loose permeable space around and between parts of the role system, keeping it safe and contained or causing vulnerability or suspicion (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). Authority refers to the right granted to work on the primary task as a result of rank or office occupancy, to issue commands and to punish violations (Hirschhorn, 1997). Authority is bestowed (in terms of the organigram in the mind) from above (the organisation, leadership), the side (colleagues), below (subordinates) and from within (self-authorisation) (Czander, 1993). Containment refers to holding one's own and others' transformational anxiety as a potential space where thinking can move from elementary to complex (Clarke et al., 2008). Valence refers to the systems unconscious inclination to act in a specific manner, which includes being vulnerable towards specific deep-rooted introjections and projections (Gould et al., 2001). Hence role identity manifests in how the system consciously (normatively) and unconsciously (existentially, phenomenally) assumes its role, manages the primary task and the different relevant boundary conditions, authorises itself and others, being authorised and contains anxiety towards rational thinking (Sievers, 2009). Erikson (1959) describes identity as a subjective experience of a persistent sense of sameness within oneself. According to Arundale (2017), identity is formed fundamentally by the individual's object relations, the other in his/her life and the quality of these relationships, particularly those whom the individual has loved or hated. Identity is dynamic and to be discovered throughout life through a feeling-full, intuitive finding of enduring aspects of the self and selected items as they appear in consciousness.

In terms of research, SP focuses on working "beneath the surface" (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). A psychosocial stance is used in the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of group dynamics, observation and the co-construction of the research environment by the researcher and the researched (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005; Holloway & Jefferson, 2010). It accepts the notion that the unconscious plays a significant role in the construction of reality and the way others are perceived, the generation of research data and the construction of the research environment ("the world is not the way it is, but rather the way we are"—Anaïs Nin). Reification as interpretive stance is used—seeing human phenomena as if they were things (in non-human terms) (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

7.5 Bringing Systems Psychodynamics into Psychobiography

Systemic psychoanalysis (Freud, 1921) and object relations (Clarke et al., 2008; Klein, 1997; Winnicott, 1960, 1975, 2006) have commonly be used in psychobiographical research. However, the open systems theory (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Stapley, 2006) has hardly been used in psychobiographical stances to consider the individual within his/her systems. Furthermore, social systems theory, which studies social defence systems and their role in containing anxiety on behalf of the total system, has not yet been considered in psychobiographical research. The reason for this could be the fact that psychobiographies focus on individuals and their anxieties, instead of interpreting the anxiety of the individual as a mirror and/or reflection of the systemic (un-) conscious group dynamics of the total system.

Furthermore, group relations theory has also been somewhat neglected in psychobiographical research since, in psychobiography, the focus, again, is on the individual rather than on groups and organisations. However, it is argued here that the group relations theories could contribute new insights into psychobiographies in the study of group relations and the individual as a group member. For example, which extraordinary individuals carry what aspects within groups and organisations? How does a selected extraordinary individual react to the systemic group dynamics? How does he/she contribute? How can SP be used in psychobiography to facilitate individuals'/clients' awareness of their unconscious role histories and biographies towards the understanding of the roles they assumed in their systems in the past and how that impacts on and repeats in their present systems?

Erskine's (2010) theoretical approach has been used in psychobiographies to analyse systemic ego states functioning and scripts towards the understanding of how they contribute to the system's identity and functioning. The three ego states (parent, adult, child) are used as coping mechanisms and have been explored in psychobiographical research.

Group and organisational systemic anxiety theories have hardly been used in psychobiographical research in which the leadership role is taken up involving a number of core behavioural constructs, referring to role taking, introjection, projection and projective identification. A question in psychobiographical research could be how the individual deals with (organisational) systemic anxiety and which core behavioural constructs are at play in the person researched.

7.6 Role Biography

Systems psychodynamics proposes that, in contrast to personal psychobiography, which traces the development of a personality over time, role biography can be used to emphasise how past roles unconsciously affect and drive present roles and behaviour (Long, 2008). Role biography (Newton et al., 2006) is described as the

study of the individual as a person-in-role informed by the various family and work roles that they have taken up throughout their lives. Long (2008) also refers to role history in terms of how a specific organisational role is shaped over time by the various incumbents, and especially by the original role holder, followed by how the role impacts on the present individual role holder. The combination of role biography and role history gives the role holder a sense of how past experiences might be unconsciously influencing present role behaviour and identity (Akthar & Twemlow, 2018). In this sense, identity refers to a subjective experience of the persistent sense of sameness within the self (Erikson, 1959), which is based on the individual's inner working model (whereas character and personality refer to the description of the individual in others' description of the individual's behaviour).

Long (2008, pp. 228–233) proposes role biography as a collaborative conversational method to understand the impact of work roles taken up by clients throughout their lives, on their present roles. The purpose is to facilitate the client's sense of uniqueness in undertaking a role and the valence that unconsciously predisposes specific role behaviour. Clients are asked to draw on paper, the work roles they have taken up throughout their lives at different ages and explore specific chosen roles (including child "work" roles in the family of origin). The consultant works with the client in exploring the biography. The client is encouraged to think of the role-in-the-mind (Hirschhorn, 1997). The consultant does not make interpretations of the material, but may offer associations that are evoked, which the client may or may not accept. This implies learning through self-authorisation, while also reflecting on own defensive behaviour.

Through role biography, the systems psychodynamic consultant facilitates an understanding of how work roles taken up by the individual throughout life are influencing the present role. The task for individuals is to learn about the uniqueness of their own role behaviour, the fact that roles are not taken up in isolation or a vacuum and how they have developed a pattern or role history in role taking. Role biography can be understood from the individual's perspective, from the role's perspective and from a mutual influencing perspective.

7.6.1 Individual Role History and Biography

The individual's associative unconscious (Long, 2008) forms before birth where it is attuned to the mother's emotional experiences. After birth and in the first five years of development (Freud, 1921), attachments with objects are formed in terms of those "above" (authority figures such as parents) and those "alongside" (siblings, peers) (Rholes & Simpson, 2004). The individual may be able to develop and transform these relationships, but he/she cannot discard them—the person is unconsciously and inherently attached to parental and sibling objects and their symbolic representations (Freud, 1921; Klein, 1997). SP argues that we are all born into organisations—we just call them families. This implies that adult relationships in organisations, are always to some extent influenced by these early relationships. New friends and

work colleagues become substitute figures for these first attachments—taking over a type of emotional heritage based on memory traces left behind by the original objects (Nicholi, 2003). The above applies to people as objects as well as to roles taken up in the relatedness to the other. This transference from the past implies a displacement of feelings and attitudes from past objects onto new objects, especially if the new object shows similarity to the past ones. Transference from previous relationships and relatedness manifests, for example, in new authority relationships such as leader-follower or manager-employee. Displaced feelings from authority figures in childhood onto those in the present distorts and causes conflict with the present authority. The above explication is also based on research by Dias (2016), Mitchell (2008), Solan (2015), Volkan and Ast (1997) and Winnicott (1960, 1975, 1988, 1990, 2006).

7.6.2 Role History and Role Biography

A role has a history that takes on a life of its own in how it has been influenced by previous role holders. This includes the expectations that the previous role holders had and brought into the role. For example, the role of the president of a country or an organisation, changes over time because it is impacted by how various role holders have acted in the role (e.g. through introjections) and how the other has reacted to their use of authority in the role. Thus, some of these behaviours become formally and informally institutionalized and unconsciously acted out by the new role holder. Even the role of a bully in a system can be institutionalized—the individual may leave the system, but the institutionalized bullying behaviour can be taken over by someone else (Cilliers, 2012).

7.6.3 The Mutual Influence Between Role and Individual

No role or individual exists in a vacuum—the role was unconsciously and emotionally impacted, constructed and deconstructed by its previous role holders, which influences the way in which the new role holder takes up the role. In the same vein, the present role holder impacts on the identity of the role. The present role is a coming together of its history with the role biography of the role holder, the place where the two objects meet (Long, 2008).

Role biography is also relevant in organisational role analysis, also known as organisational role consultation (Newton et al., 2006) and described as a form of psychodynamically oriented individual consultancy. The focus is on the analysis of individual transferences in the context of work, as well as the interrelatedness of such dynamic processes with the unconscious dynamics in the organisation as a whole. The task is to provide opportunities for the role holder to gain insight into and an understanding of the way in which the professional role of the client is shaped by

the organisation and the role holder himself/herself, consciously and unconsciously. This so-called “binocular vision” studies the complex interplay and interrelatedness of the personal dynamic of the individual and the psychological dynamics in the organisation. This method uses concepts such as the organisation-in-the-mind and the organisation-as-whole. Role analysis separates the individual from the organisation and studies the unknown and the unthought in the organisation. Role consultation studies the reintegration in its focus on the exploration of subjective experiences such as the individual’s experience of his/her professional role in the organisation. The assumption is that in social systems the individual’s experience reflects more than just the individual, and that the whole and its parts are inextricably intertwined, so that the exploration of single phenomena will open the way to an interpretation of the whole.

7.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Psychobiographical research needs to cover a broad variety of psychological and life development circumstances to focus on specific perspectives and aspects of the person being researched. It therefore requires a diversity of theories and methodologies applied to explore the various aspects of an individual’s life.

In the past, most of the theories used in psychobiographical research have focused on the person as such, to some extent taking the context into account. However, hardly any research has explored the life of an extraordinary individual from the systems psychodynamic perspective. This complex theoretical perspective could support an in-depth understanding of the person and his/her interlinkages from the systemic group perspective.

With regard to the theoretical expansion of previously used theoretical approaches in psychobiographical research, it is recommended that systemic psychoanalysis, object relations, open systems theory, social systems, group relations theory, systemic transactional analysis and SP consulting stances are included.

The use of one or more of these approaches can lead to new insights and perspectives on the life of extraordinary individuals. At the same time, the use of these approaches in the field of psychobiography can also support the evaluation, reconstruction or even strengthening of the theoretical approaches (Mayer, 2017). This is especially so because these approaches will be used to develop a lifespan perspective based on a system” psychodynamic perspective. It is therefore recommended that systems psychodynamic theories should be used in psychobiographical research to contribute to new insights as well as theoretical and methodological discourses, which will take cognisance of the context of the individual within his/her relationships, as well as the sociocultural and societal contexts.

SP offers a developmentally focused, psychoeducational process for the understanding of the deep and covert behaviour in the system (De Board, 2014; Klein, 2005; Sher, 2013). The SP perspective might therefore provide further information for counselling, coaching and educational settings in which the impact of the SP is viewed in terms of the individual. In this instance, SP theory could provide a the-

oretical base for practitioners who intend working with SP in their practice, since this would provide insights for clients and patients into how SP has impacted on extraordinary individuals, which might serve as an example to address SP within these settings.

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Chapter 8

The Case for the Psychobiography as a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Case Study: A New Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Method of Analysis for Life-Narrative Investigations



Zelda Gillian Knight

Abstract Both description and interpretive understanding are the long established hallmarks of phenomenology and phenomenological research. If the psychobiography as a case study includes description and interpretation it can be aligned with phenomenology. As such, it can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. With an emphasis on life-narrative, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study requires a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis. While there are existing methods of both narrative and life-narrative analysis, they are not strictly phenomenological-hermeneutical. A new method of analysis for psychobiographical and other life-narrative research is presented. It is referred to as ‘Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis’ (PLA). Furthermore, the notion of the researcher’s unconscious bias is introduced and included in this new method of analysis. It is termed the ‘researcher’s transferential implant’.

Keywords Psychobiography · Phenomenological · Hermeneutic · Unconscious bias · Life-narrative

8.1 Introduction

The need to ‘psychobiographize’ or to make psychological sense of a biography has a long history dating back to the Greek times when the lives of significant persons were documented (McAdams, 1988; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Since then the study of lives has undergone major methodological changes and evolved and reappeared in a variety of forms (Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 2005). The study of lives, of which the psy-

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chobiography is one form, is in contemporary times allied with narrative psychology and its associated research methods. The contemporary psychobiography is defined as the study of a single life across the entire lifespan with the purpose to develop psychological theory pertaining to personality development (Schultz, 2001, 2005a). McAdams (1988, 1993, 1997) and Schultz (2005b) both assert that the examined life-narrative should be on a 'finished' life as opposed to persons still living. Fouché and van Niekerk (2010) defined it as a form of life history research. The psychobiography uses psychological theory as a lens to illuminate the life story (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) but at the same time, the life story in turn explores the lens itself. This is the value of the psychobiography. In this regard, the psychobiography may thus be seen as an assimilation of, and blending between, biography and psychology (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) to generate theoretical insight into, and understanding of, the individual.

In recent years, different methods to collect, manage and analyse the data in the psychobiography has been endorsed. Such methods have been designed by seminal theorists in the field of psychobiographical research, such as Alexander (1990), Schultz (2005b) and McAdams (1988, 1997). Moreover, in terms of research methods, the psychobiography has been positioned as a case study and as life-narrative research (Anderson, 1981; Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994, 2007; Ponterotto, 2013; Runyan, 1982a, 1982b; 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 1997, 2003, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). The psychobiography, however, as an investigation of a life-narrative, has not been positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. Furthermore, while there are established methods for narrative analysis (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Gergen & Gergen, 1993; Hyvärinen, 2007) and life-narrative analysis in psychobiographical research (Alexander, 1990; McAdams, 1988, 1997; Schultz, 2005b) they are not phenomenological-hermeneutic methods. The well-known phenomenological research method, known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as developed by Smith (2004, 2008, 2011) commonly used in phenomenological research, is not designed to investigate a life-narrative and, thus, not suitable. A new phenomenological-hermeneutic method suitable for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic life-narrative investigation is thus required. This is not to suggest that other qualitative research methods currently used in the contemporary psychobiography are not suitable or invalid. When it is approached, however, specifically as phenomenological-hermeneutic, the psychobiography requires a matching method.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, to position the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. This is achieved by linking the psychobiography to the ideology of phenomenology and its related phenomenological research approaches. Secondly, to present a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis suitable for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. This new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of life-narrative analysis is called 'Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis' (PLA).

Furthermore, the notion of the researcher's unconscious bias, something not linked to phenomenology and phenomenological research, is introduced and included in this new method. It is suggested that unconscious bias has an impact on the interpretation of the life-narrative within the psychobiography, and it needs to be managed methodologically. The unconscious bias is referred to as the 'researcher's transferential implant'.

8.2 Structure of the Chapter

The chapter content is a theoretical chapter with two aims. The structure of the chapter is to logically fulfil these two aims. The chapter thus presents the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. In order to achieve this, the structure of the chapter is as follows: (a) a brief presentation of the psychobiography as research is presented, and (b) links are made between the psychobiography and phenomenology as well as phenomenological research. The second part of the structure of the chapter is associated with the second aim which includes a presentation of a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis that is aligned with the positioning of the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study.

8.3 The Psychobiography as a Method of Inquiry

"Where is the person in personality research?" cried out Rae Carlson in 1971. At the time, in the previous decades (1950s–1960s) research methods in psychology had been predominantly quantitative, nesting within the discourse of positivism. This focus on quantitative methods had not always been the case. The psychobiography by Freud on Leonardo da Vinci (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 2005; Simonton, 2003) was recognised as using idiographic methods that put the individual narrative as the pivotal centre of investigations into life and living. Perhaps the development of psychoanalysis was the unacknowledged methodological renewal of the focus on the individual and biography as a research unit in terms of theory building (as Dilthey noted earlier in the previous century, see Mullen, 2019). Other psychobiographies were to follow, such as Erik Erikson's work on Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther. While these early psychobiographical research projects were criticized for their lack of methodological rigor, the trend to focus on life narrative research had (re)taken root in psychology. Allport and Murray, working in the field of personality psychology in the 1930s and 1940s, advocated for the use of biography, and thus, life narrative research, as a way to begin to understand the development of personality. To this end, they contributed substantially to the development of both personality research and modern psychobiographical research (Kőváry, 2011). A theoretical slump or decline in interest in psychobiographical research, however, occurred in the 1950s

and 1960s because of the attention paid by psychologists to quantitative research methods. In the 1970s, Carlson was not alone in the call to return to biography, narrative research, and idiographic methods that located the individual life-narrative as a dynamic source of knowledge and information; information not only about human development, but about life itself. Psychology in the late 1960s and 1970s began to shift towards research methods that ostensibly aimed to put back into psychology the unique individual person.

The so-called ‘narrative turn’ in psychology in the 1980s (Bruner, 1986; László, 2008) was an important development in research methodologies because it heralded the notion of using biography as a story, or the storying of individual lives, in relation to psychology and theory building.

Within the narrative turn in psychology, narrative itself in research has a long history, long before narrative analysis occurred. At an early stage, narratives were used as factual resources. This evolved into the study of narratives as texts with a particular form (a hermeneutic exegesis, as in the sense of studying texts within scripture). More recently, shifts occurred towards more than a single narrative text into the study of life-narratives and storytelling of individuals so as to discover their personality structure and personal identity. “Narratives bring into the open rich, detailed and often personal perspectives” (Hyvärinen, 2007, p. 447). It is easy, however, to misunderstand narrative *simply* as a method, and narratives *as resources* with which to explore the phenomena of which the narratives make a descriptive account (Hyvärinen, 2007).

A more ambitious version of narrative analysis emerges from the social constructionist notion that narratives already always are part of the constitution of the social, cultural, and political world (Bruner, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 1993; Hyvärinen, 2007). Psychobiography as a particular form of narrative research—the *life-narrative* investigation of an individual life—contributed to the value of the narrative as both *resource* and *method* with a focus on description and interpretation - core to qualitative research methods. In the history of personality psychology and psychoanalysis, life experiences were, therefore, a profound source of understanding existence. Psychobiography as a narrative method became a crucial medium for contributing to this important understanding. The growing appreciation of, and value in, idiographic and interpretative research methods, further set the scene for the development of the contemporary psychobiography.

At around the same time as the emergence of the narrative turn, the groundbreaking works of pioneers within the field of psychobiography, such as Runyan (2019), McAdams (2019), Schultz, Carlson, Winter, Elms, Anderson (2019), Alexander, Simonton, and others, sought to design a clear and consensual agreement as to the theoretical foundation of, and good methodological practice when doing, a ‘good psychobiography’. Stolorow (see his introduction to this book—Foreword) and Atwood (2019) (1984) blended phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory (self psychology) to advocate for a shifted towards the inclusion of the use of the concept of intersubjectivity. Their book, *Faces in a cloud: Subjectivity in Personality Theory* (1979) suggested the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity on that which is researched; specifically the subjective sources of personality theories of the 20th century. This

book is one of the important references for contemporary psychobiographical and the dynamics of personal subjectivity (Kőváry, 2011).

Schultz (2005b) identified markers for both good and bad psychobiographies that become central for many aspiring psychobiographers treading into this field of research. Methods of narrative analysis, however, have existed since the narrative turn in the social sciences. Early versions of narrative analysis can be identified by the models of Vladimir Propp (1968) and Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997). Narrative analysis has evolved since then and has been successfully used by other seminal scholars of narrativity, such as Bamberg (2006), Bruner (1991), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Czarniawska (2004), Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), Gergen and Gergen (1993), Riessman (1993, 2001) to name but a few.

These methods of narrative analysis, however, as indicated, are not phenomenological-hermeneutical in approach. These methods are mostly aligned with other theoretical perspectives of narratives and life-narratives such as the social constructionist approach. As it is life-narrative research within the framework of personality psychology, the psychobiography has its own narrativity methods. These methods, however, are also not phenomenological-hermeneutical in approach because psychobiography itself is not approached as such.

In terms of research, the case has been made that the psychobiography, as an investigation into a life-narrative, is a case study (Anderson, 1981; Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994, 2007; Ponterotto, 2013; Runyan, 1982a, 1982b; 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 2003, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Moreover, the psychobiography can be both a single case study and a 'multiple case psychobiography' (Isaacson, 2005) pointing to the notion that more than one individual life can be investigated in one single psychobiography.

There are, however, various types of case studies in various settings, and with various foci or units of investigation, adopting various theoretical frameworks to make sense of the case. Given the emphasis on life-narrative, the psychobiography is a type of case study—a narrative case study, or a case study of a life-narrative. Moreover, the case has been made for the psychobiography as a psychological case study because it uses psychological theories to make sense of the individual life (Elms, 1994, 2007; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2011; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). In this sense, the psychobiography is a psychological life-narrative case study with the purpose of psychological theory development. Not all psychological case studies are, however, psychobiographical, and not all narrative (as opposed to life-narrative) research is psychological or psychobiographical.

8.4 Phenomenology, Phenomenological Research, and Psychobiography

Both description and interpretive understanding are the long established hallmarks of phenomenology and phenomenological research. If the psychobiography as a case

study includes description and interpretation it can be aligned with phenomenology, and as such, it can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. In order to make the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study, connections are made between it and phenomenology as well as research values associated with phenomenological research.

It should be noted that it is not possible to present a detailed description of the complexities and nuances of the different branches of phenomenology that have emerged. Instead, only what is relevant to making the case for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is presented.

Phenomenology has a rich history rooted in early twentieth century continental European philosophy. Phenomenology is not easy to define because of this rich and long history that includes several philosophical branches, developments, and deviations. In its broadest definition, phenomenology is a philosophical approach to human experience (Smith, 2008). It focuses on the description of the essential nature of an experience, or the ‘essence of a phenomenon’ (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011). Phenomenology is thus concerned with experience, or more accurately, with lived experience obtained through detailed or ‘thick’ description of those experiences (Smith, 2004, 2008). The description of experience or lived experience is, therefore, given a central position in phenomenology.

In phenomenological research, the honouring and centralising of the description of the phenomenon or experience in order to begin to understand the essence of the experience, is rooted in the early work of one of the central figures in developing ‘descriptive phenomenology’—Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). His distinctive theory of phenomenology he called ‘pure phenomenology’, which he later termed ‘transcendental phenomenology’ (Husserl, 1970). Husserl (1970) aimed for phenomenology to provide a rigorous and unbiased study of life experiences as they appear, (what he referred to as ‘*back to the things themselves*’) in order to come to an understanding of such experiences. As experience is related to consciousness, and that consciousness, according to him, is always conscious of something, Husserl’s phenomenology is defined as the study of human consciousness (Giorgi, 2010).

8.4.1 The Concept of the Life-World

In this regard, Husserl’s particular brand of phenomenology included various concepts related to human consciousness, experience, and human living. Concepts such as ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘life-world’ or ‘*Lebenswelt*’¹ (Giorgi, 2010) became central to phenomenology, and foreshadowed much of the later psychological

¹The European life philosophy or the *Lebensphilosophie* of the late 19th century concerned the value of studying the human ‘individuum’ in an idiographic way. It supported the importance of the psycho-biographical approach to understanding the individual life, and thus it had links to the value of detailed descriptions of experiences of that life, a hallmark of phenomenology.

notions regarding the value of understanding individual experience within a social-psychological context of both self and world.

In phenomenology, not only is the description of the lived experience validated as a worthy unit of analysis and contemplation, the meanings that individuals attach to their lived experiences are also prioritised. Meanings attached to experience are subjective. Thus asking different individuals about similar experiences will often result in varied responses and meanings because individuals are different. In this sense, investigation into human experience can be an investigation into difference, and thus into individuality and personality. It can be said that phenomenology is an investigation into personality difference through its rich description of lived experience.

In a sense, phenomenology concerns the study of experience as it manifests itself, and is contextualised, in the life-world or *lebenswelt* of an individual. This core concern with human experience, and its description, was translated into distinct phenomenological research methods of inquiry. Such phenomenological research has the overarching aim to describe lived experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008) and the meaning or understanding of the lived experience for the individual experiencing it (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Smith & Eaton, 2007). Description is, therefore, the central analytic method in phenomenology and phenomenological research (McLeod, 2001). A phenomenological case study would, therefore, seek to describe, in as much detail as possible, the meaning of lived experiences for individuals (Galvin & Todres, 2012). In other words, the purpose of phenomenological research, and the methods adopted, is to obtain a clear, precise, and systematic description of human experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

In phenomenology, with its focus on description and meaning or interpretation of lived experience, there were two main theoretical deviations and developments of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. These extensions of Husserl's phenomenology are of 'existence' and 'phenomenological hermeneutics' (Bengtsson, 2013). These directions originated in Heidegger's (1927/1962) early philosophy, and have since been expanded by other leading phenomenologists, such as Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty in the phenomenology of 'existence', and by Gadamer and Ricoeur, in 'phenomenological hermeneutics'.

8.4.2 *Phenomenological Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics in phenomenology and phenomenological research is rooted in the seminal works of early hermeneutic theorists, namely Dilthey, Heidegger, Schleiermacher, and Gadamer. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and, later, William Dilthey (1833–1911) are cited as the early pioneers who contributed to the modern beginnings of hermeneutics or the interpretive alternative in Western philosophy (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Dilthey's work on hermeneutics arguably foreshadowed and prepared for the important shift from epistemological understanding towards an ontological understanding in the human or cultural sciences (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Dilthey (1883/1989) emphasized the value of studying the unique or whole

'individuum' as a way to understand the human condition. He can, therefore, be seen as a pioneer of the idiographic approach in research. In this regard, Dilthey (1989) also came to view biography as an essential tool in understanding such life.

Hermeneutics is defined as the theory and practice of the interpretation of the meaning of texts (Smith, 2011) (See Kóváry, 2019; Mullen, 2019). The origin of hermeneutics in its modern day use dates back to the 17th century, where it gained value in the context of biblical studies (Crotty, 1998; McManus Holroyd, 2007). Since the 17th century, hermeneutics has been adapted in other areas of scholarship and to text other than scriptures (McManus Holroyd, 2007). The primary concern of hermeneutics is the philosophy of understanding. Understanding is defined as the original distinguishing mark of the being of human life itself (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 259). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, all understanding is ultimately self-understanding; it is the individual's mode of being (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

Hermeneutics proposes that there is no such thing as measuring behaviour or measuring life experiences in order to gain understanding. Instead, investigation, or the process of discovery, is prompted through such things as encounters with individuals and their life-worlds (McManus Holroyd, 2007) either directly (interviews) or indirectly (archival material). The interpretive hermeneutic research tradition proposes that in all journeys of discovery, such as those involving human experience and human research, one can never hope to discover everything fully. In other words, when embarking on this type of practical philosophical inquiry, it is important to note that all resulting understanding will never be complete: some aspects of an experience will remain undiscovered (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

In phenomenological hermeneutics, both Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1977) identify language as integral to the hermeneutics of understanding: it is in language that our world is made meaningfully, and thus, in how the world is disclosed to us (McManus Holroyd, 2007). The world that is spoken of here is not the environmental scientific world, but the life-world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). This has a direct relation to phenomenological research and the phenomenological aim to describe not only the experience but also to document and understand the meanings attached to experience through the use of language. The avenue that makes this understanding of the world possible is language (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Language is where the world exists or resides, and hermeneutic experience, as we understand it, occurs in and through language; it is language that reveals and discloses the world to us (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

In this regard, Heidegger made the case for a *phenomenological hermeneutics*. He asserted that access to meaning is always through hermeneutics or interpretation. For him, some things are not always apparent or seen, but have a latent nature and this must be discovered too. Thus Heidegger (1927/1962) and Gadamer (1960/1989) were concerned with examining things that may be latent or disguised, as well as examining the manifest things as they may appear to one in the world. Heidegger was concerned with the conceptual basis of existence, or the concept of 'worldliness'.

This worldliness concerns the notion of self-other as reciprocal in influence, as co-constitutional, thus fore-grounding the concept of 'inter-subjectively' which permeates so much of psychology and related social science disciplines. He asserted

that hermeneutics was not a simple issue because of this co-constitutional nature of self and the world. Hermeneutics, according to Heidegger, or the event of understanding, is rooted in an encounter with personal experiences of being here in this world, and thus, the essential structures of meaning is located in the basic categories of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

8.4.3 *The Notion of Fore-Structures and the Co-construction of Meaning*

Linked to this is what interpretive hermeneutic understanding offers phenomenological researchers who wish to discover the meaning of things is the ability to begin to see the way in which such researchers' blind attachment to certain classifications and categorizations about the world limit how they understand and come to know the world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Heidegger, as explained by Gadamer (1960/1989) speaks at great length about the disclosure of the *fore-structure* of meaning or understanding in the hermeneutic experience. Heidegger (1927/1962) describes this fore-structure is an innate capacity that exists in all individuals to intuit the meaning of being (McManus Holroyd, 2007). What the fore-structure offers is a shadowy grasp of the nature of existence (McManus Holroyd, 2007). More specifically, what is implied is that every encounter we have is grounded by something that exists in advance—an already decided way of conceiving that which we are interested in (McManus Holroyd, 2007).

Within the fore-structure of understanding, whenever we know and understand something, the interpretation is founded essentially upon what Heidegger (1927/1962) frames as our fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception (McManus Holroyd, 2007). What all of this guides us to understand is that there can never be a presuppositionless stance in any act of interpretation (McManus Holroyd, 2007) and thus, awareness of this is commonly taken for granted as an aspect of our existence—that we possess a fore-structure of understanding—is what helps us to surrender our attachments to how we currently know and understand the world (McManus Holroyd, 2007). Fore-structures are thus the modern day understanding of personal bias.

Phenomenological hermeneutics is of particular relevance to phenomenological research methods. The subjective nature of a life-world lends itself to the implication that individuals can experience the same phenomenon differently. Because there are variances in how individuals' experience the same phenomena, Heidegger (1927/1962) proposes to understand human experience as an interpretative and co-constructed process (Willig, 2008). This means that in a phenomenological research process, the researcher's life-world can blend and merge with that of the researched/the participant, resulting in a co-creation or co-construction of meaning (Willig, 2008). This co-construction of meaning is a dynamic process, and as such, the researcher's personal bias should be explored and made explicit as it has an influ-

ence on the kinds of inquiries that take place because such inquiries are part of the subjectivity of the researcher (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Willig, 2008).

In phenomenological hermeneutics, given the notion of inter-subjectivity, it is not possible for researchers to completely set aside or blatantly bracket their perspective and interpretations (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). In fact the presence of the researcher's own history and experiences are resources in understanding the experience under investigation. Smith (2004, p. 45) refers to this as the "biographical presence" of the researcher which is needed to make sense of what is said or described by the other. From a hermeneutic view point, the interpretation of lived experience undergoes a "double hermeneutic" process (Smith & Eaton, 2007, p. 36). Sullivan, Gibson, and Riley (2012) define double hermeneutic as a complex process of interpretation which emphasises that in the same way that people seek to make sense of (interpret) their life experience, so the phenomenological researcher needs to interpret individual's interpretation of those experiences (Smith & Eaton, 2007) thus all experience that is described between researcher and researched is already interpreted by the researched, and again by the researcher.

Grasped in this sense, the hermeneutic process may be viewed from two vantage points. Firstly, the researcher makes an effort to make sense of the participant's meaning making. Secondly, while the researcher assumes an empathic stance towards being on the 'side' of the participant, he or she is also expected to assume a critical and questioning stance when analysing the text (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2011). This researcher bias should, however, not dominate in the research process. Therefore, it is important that any researcher implementing phenomenological research minimise the effect of personal bias (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Willig, 2008). Heidegger called for researchers to actively engage in a process of personal reflection rather than to adopt a non-realistic stance of non-engagement, so as to increase awareness of preconceptions, and the effect that one's preconceived ideas can have on research processes and research findings (Langdridge, 2007).

This approach of personal reflexivity ties in with qualitative research methods that acknowledge that suspended judgment is not a realistic goal: researchers are continuously interpreting others experiences through the tinted lens of their own experiences.

In summary, phenomenology regards the description and understanding of lived experience as they are encountered, engaged with, and lived through of prime value in understanding human existence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Phenomenological-hermeneutics has the aim to describe and interpret, or make meaning of, the experience as it is experienced in the context of 'worldliness'.

8.4.4 *The Case for the Psychobiography as a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Case Study*

Given phenomenology's approach to human experience, as described above, and its related research methods that are concerned with lived experience obtained through description (Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011) the psychobiography also seeks to explicate, through description, lived experience and, as such, can be positioned as a phenomenological case study. Moreover, as a phenomenological case study, the psychobiography also focuses on interpretation. In this context, the psychobiography is distinctly hermeneutic. As such, the psychobiography can be more accurately positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study.

In this context, the psychobiography is essentially a series of phenomenological descriptions and interpretations of lived experiences of the selected individual's life-narrative. From within this perspective, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study pays watchful attention to both a) description of the life-narrative, and b) the meaning attributed to such experience. In other words, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is, therefore, meticulously aligned to the philosophical underpinnings of both descriptive phenomenology and interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology in that it involves detailed description of the life-narrative as well as the hermeneutics of the life lived. It must be noted, however, that the phenomenological researcher is not always a psychobiographer but all psychobiographical research can be approached as phenomenological-hermeneutic in nature.

Moreover, phenomenology advocates that the exploration of the lived experience must necessarily be within a context. Research methods within the phenomenological conceptual framework emphasize context (as does other qualitative research). The implication is that psychosocial and historical-cultural factors are taken into account when investigating lived experience. The psychobiography as phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is aligned to research contextualization principles of phenomenology, and can be viewed as not only appreciative of contextual factors, but insightfully informed by context.

Additionally, the philosophy of phenomenological research methods and the psychobiography itself recognise the inter-connectedness between the researcher and the researched. Both insist on declarations regarding their attachments to certain assumptions about the world because these limit how understanding is achieved. The notion of the disclosure of fore-structures and researcher reflexivity, applied to the psychobiography, has direct ideological underpinnings to phenomenology.

Furthermore, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study undergoes a "double hermeneutic" process (Smith & Eaton, 2007, p. 36) in that it interprets the selected individual's experiences (primary sources) as well as other people's interpretations (secondary sources) of those same experiences. In this setting, the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study is thus subject to the inevitable methodological position whereby the researcher's life-world

blend, mix, and flow together with the life-world of the researched, resulting in a co-construction of the hermeneutics of meaning.

Language is central in phenomenology as it is for the psychobiography. As Gadamer (1977) noted language in phenomenology is integral to the hermeneutics of understanding: it is in language that our world is made meaningfully. The psychobiography is linked to the phenomenology of language in that it too is concerned with the language in which that life-narrative is conveyed and understood. This has a direct relation to hermeneutics in the psychobiography. In the psychobiography, because the meanings that are attached to experience are intimately conveyed through the use of language, close attention to the use of language is encouraged by the inclusion of the actual words of the individual under investigation. This inclusion of the actual words used by the selected individual in the psychobiography is a uniquely phenomenological stance towards research, and the role of language in the process of discovery.

8.4.5 A New Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Life-Narrative Method of Analysis

A psychobiography is a phenomenological description and hermeneutic understanding of a life-narrative. It can be positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study that investigates life-narrative. In this light, it focuses on a series of chronologically connecting or connective lived experiences that make up such a life. Narrative research methods of analysis of the individual life have been successfully used in the psychobiography, such as those structured and documented by Alexander (1990), Schultz (2005a, 2005b) and McAdams (1988). Other qualitative research methods such as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, (2014) have also been used in the psychobiography. None of these methods are, however, distinctly phenomenological-hermeneutic life-narrative analysis, including the well-known IPA method (Smith & Eaton, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2008, 2011; Smith, et al., 2009) because the psychobiography as life-narrative research has not been positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study. When the psychobiography is approached as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study a new method of analysis is required. This new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis that examines the life-narrative within the psychobiography is termed '*Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis*' ('PLA'). Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA) can also be used for other types of life-narrative research (such as auto-ethnography) that endeavours to phenomenologically explicate human life events and lived experience. The word 'psychobiographer' in the new method, described below, can be substituted for the word 'researcher'. The new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis is adapted from IPA as presented by Smith et al. (2009). The new method that is proposed is shown in Table 1. The new method has nine stages. These nine stages

are organised into two categories corresponding to two main columns in the Table—Activity and Description.

It must be noted that PLA, as a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis for investigation of life-narrative in the psychobiography, is not meant to be prescriptive. It is important to understand, therefore, that the suggestions and guidelines in the nine-stage method are not a ridged recipe to be mechanically followed. Some steps may not always be sequential, especially the middle steps when interpretation is the focus. Research is not always lineal in practice.

When used as a research method in the analysis of the life-narrative, PLA is an iterative procedure, and it is necessary that the psychobiographer remain close to the data and immerse him or herself in it so as to gain a holistic and comprehensive view of understanding. Reading and re-reading material allows for this immersion in the data, and of obtaining of a holistic, aerial, or bird's eye view of the data. With such immersion in the data through a reading and re-reading, PLA includes the process that entails (a) allowing the data to reveal itself, and (b) addressing particular questions of the text/description of the life-narrative. Both are a distinctively phenomenological initiative.

In stage three, unconscious researcher bias is noted as a step in method. The unconscious is not normally viewed as a part of psychological research. The notion of the unconscious ushers in a psychoanalytic perspective which can be used as a framework in research practice, especially life-narrative research which involves interpretation. If, as indicated earlier, all interpretation is self-understanding, the implication is that interpretation may have an unconscious bias. From within this perspective, it is one thing to disclose researcher bias in the form of 'fore-structures of understanding' (the disclosure of that which is conscious) and another thing to disclose the unconscious. While phenomenology does not recognise the notion of the unconscious, it remains a powerful construct for many interpretive researchers. As such, it does influence conscious actions and decisions, including research actions and decisions. In other words, the researcher is inevitably influenced, to some extent, by unconscious bias.

I would like to offer a new term for the unavoidable unconscious bias in research—the '*researcher's transferenceal implant*'. In this regard, some aspects of the biography of the psychobiographer is unconsciously transferred onto the life-narrative, impacting on the interpretation. The researcher unconscious, however, is not only transferred onto the life-narrative, as in the process of projection, but it is also 'implanted' into the narrative, as in planting a seed into soil. The implant or 'insertion of self' into the soil of the life-narrative/text is the same process as the psychoanalytic understanding of projective identification, as first introduced by Melanie Klein (1946). The implication is that interpretation of the life-narrative in the psychobiography (and any other interpretive research) is rooted in the unconscious. Because of this, it needs to be managed. In this case, the process of implanting aspects of the unconscious self into the life-narrative is a process of inserting bits and pieces of the self into the text so that 'understanding' is always imbued or permeated with the psychology of the self. In this light, the implant becomes embedded in, and a part of, the process of interpretation. The researcher's transferenceal implant thus becomes an integral part

Table 1 Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA) as adapted from Smith et al. (2009)

Stage	Activity	Description
1	Read and re-read the life-narrative	As a psychobiographer immerse yourself in the original data by reading and re-reading all the archival documents collected regarding the life story of the selected individual Treat the final archival material collected on the individual life as a narrative text, as a life-narrative Allow the data to reveal itself Be aware of the life-world/context (historical, cultural context) as you read the life-narrative Record personal reflections and responses to the life-narrative of the selected individual
2	Disclosure of 'fore-structures of understanding' as a way to work with researcher bias	Make explicit your 'fore-structures of understanding' as in the phenomenological tradition of research
3	Disclosure of the psychobiographer's life-narrative as a way to work with unconscious researcher bias	As a way to disclose and manage unconscious bias ('researcher's transference/implant') document and reflect on your own life-narrative. Highlight various facets of your life-world that may add to context, and thus, to the process of meaning-making when approaching and interpreting the life-narrative of the selected individual
4	Initial noting of phenomenological themes within the life-narrative	Initial level of analysis includes describing the content, commenting on the language used, such as key words, phrases or explanations, and conceptual coding Asking the data questions. The material is eventually organised in terms of how it answers the questions As a psychobiographer, aim to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes about the life story of the selected individual Record comments directly into the text of the life story of the selected individual (a good idea is to use tracking for comments)

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Stage	Activity	Description
5	Develop emergent themes and identify 'meaning units' of experience within the life-narrative	<p>As a psychobiographer, at this stage, the aim is to organise, write-up, and interpret the data. This stage forms a part of the hermeneutic process of interpretation. It is the process of understanding and discovery in terms of the phenomenological hermeneutic tradition</p> <p>Analyse one at a time discrete segments or portions of the life story of the selected individual</p> <p>Analyse the explanatory notes and map the interrelationships, connections, and the patterns in the life story</p> <p>Aim to produce a concise statement about what is important in each particular part of the life story of the selected individual</p> <p>At this stage, further re-clustering and renaming of themes or 'meaning units' of experience is possible</p> <p>Use the exact words of the selected individual so as to remain faithful to the description of the life under investigation</p> <p>Notes on this stage can be done in another column or new tracking comments in another colour</p>
6	Search for connections across emergent themes within the life-narrative	<p>The process of mapping how the themes within the life story relate to one another. For example, develop a superordinate theme by putting similar themes together. Some emergent themes might be discarded at this stage, but should be kept in mind when approaching the other life story of the other selected individual(s), as in the multiple case psychobiography</p> <p>As a psychobiographer, write all themes out in larger bold font substantiate why this is a theme by referring to the exact words used in the text</p> <p>Develop a graphic representation of the structure of emergent themes, e.g. a table or figure. Each theme should be annotated with a page number, line number, and a few key words to illustrate</p> <p>Continue to focus the hermeneutics of the life-narrative or the meaning that appear at this stage</p>
7	If using multiple life-narratives (multiple cases) repeat the previous process for the life-narratives	<p>Repeat the process detailed above for the other life-narratives</p>
8	Look for patterns across other life-narratives	<p>This stage involves laying out the table of themes for each life story and looking for patterns and connections</p> <p>Ideal to represent patterns and connections in a table of themes for the group, with each theme illustrated by each of the selected individual's life story</p>
9	Theory building	<p>This stage involves the dialogical process between psychological theory and the description of the relevant events and experiences in the selected life. This process is referred to 'analytical generalization' (Yin, 2014)</p>

of the act of interpretation. It is useful for, and should be used explicitly in, the act and event of hermeneutic understanding.

The nature of the unconscious means it is unknown and not easily open to disclosure. A way is needed to manage unconscious processes that impact on interpretive research including in the psychobiography. The question becomes what can be done to manage the researcher's unconscious bias? The uncovering of the unconscious, however, is a complex process in both psychoanalysis and research. It is suggested, however, as a way to manage unconscious bias that the psychobiographer engage in a process of writing up their own life-narrative. The life-narrative of the researcher must necessarily 'sit parallel' to the life-narrative of the selected individual when engaging in the process of interpretation. When the psychobiographer is engaged in the interpretative process, both life-narratives need to be constantly compared to each other in such a way that phenomenological themes within each life-narrative can be identified as possibly impacting on each other. Moreover, it is recommended that the psychobiographer discuss with a research supervisor or colleague any possible unconscious issues within his or her life-narrative that could impact on this interpretive process, and any of the other research stages and process. It may be prudent for the psychobiographer to include his or her life-narrative in the write-up of the psychobiography so that reader can also 'pick up' and identify where the psychobiographer may have had some 'blind spots' in terms of his or her interpretation of the life-narrative. This inclusion of the researcher's life-narrative in terms of unconscious bias management is not the same as researcher reflexivity because reflexivity is a conscious process.

Furthermore, this inclusion of the researcher's life-narrative in terms of 'disclosure' of unconscious bias it is not to say that all unconscious elements can be captured, disclosed and noted. It does, however, go some way to acknowledge unconscious bias and it is an attempt to manage some aspects of it.

Finally, the last stage concerns theory building. While theory building is implied in all research it is made explicit as a specific stage. Theory building in the psychobiography as a method has been documented (Carlson, 1988) and relates to the widely recognised notion of 'analytical generalization' (Yin, 2014) which basically means that the research findings are not generalized to the wider population, as in the case of quantitative research with large numbers of participants, but instead, generalized to psychological constructs within psychological theory (Carlson, 1988; Schultz, 2005a).

8.5 Final Brief Comments

If I know your story, I know something about you.

The understanding of life as narrative means that the story of life is the story of identity formation. McAdams (1993, p. 5) stated

In the modern world in which we all live, identity is a life story. A life story is a personal myth that an individual begins working on in late adolescence and young adulthood in order to provide his or her life with unity or purpose.

The life story is the basis of the psychobiography. The life story becomes the conveyer of individuality and personal identity. It is encrusted by levels and layers of collective engagement of community, culture, history, heritage and language. It is infused with meaning, ritual, suffering and triumph. If the life story is known, it is a glimpse into human experience and existence. It becomes a storied version of existential being-ness. To tell the story of a life, as does the psychobiographer, is to make it, for a moment at least, a living life; a celebration of a life lived. The way the life story is received is, however, a complex process of a meeting of minds between the story of the life lived and the story of the life still being lived. Layers of inter-mingling stories and psychologies between the two occur, rendering the psychobiographer as a co-author in the documentation of the life of the other.

In this regard, the writing about the other's life story is imbued with the psychobiographer's own subjectivity, or psychic transference templates of personalised existence and mental topographies of meaning. As indicated above,

'If I know your story, I know something about you' can be extended to, as a result, 'I also know something about myself'.

Understanding the life story of the other is, in part, self-understanding; the psychobiography, in part, is a document of self-understanding.

While there have been other research methods used to make sense of the selected life of an individual within the psychobiography, it is when the psychobiography is positioned as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study which investigates lived experiences of the entire life-narrative, that a new research method that aligns itself with this position should be introduced. In this context, a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis has been presented. It is called 'Phenomenological-hermeneutic Life-narrative Analysis (PLA)'. PLA is a suitable method of analysis for the psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study in that it aims to phenomenologically elucidate the entire life-narrative, and thus, explicate both the phenomenology of lived experience and the hermeneutics of experience lived.

This chapter is a great contribution for students to improve their understanding of the embeddedness of psychobiography and phenomenology. It will help to improve research on a well-written basis. I do not have any further comments and would accept this chapter as is.

Great contribution that is about the clarification of the epistemological background of psychobiographical research. Maybe It should be opposed to the positivistic approach of mainstream "natural science psychology" to see why this epistemological approach is necessary in case of life history researches.

Talking about the heremenutic-philosophical roots of idiographic-psychobiographical research it is highly important to refer to the works of Wilhelm Dilthey, who might be more important in this context than the others. His "methodological heremenutics" is sometimes regarded as the meta-theory for idiographic/qualitative researches, and he was explicitly talking about integrating

psychology and biographical approach. That is why he was criticized by Gadamer and others for being too psychological, while Heidegger and Gadamer were rather anti-psychological (their approach is called “philosophical hermeneutics”).

It is also important to refer to the works of Robert Stolorow and George Atwood! Their 1979 book “*Faces in a Cloud*” was the first modern application of psychobiography, and their conclusions made them formulating “psychoanalytic phenomenology”. In their next book, “*Structures of Subjectivity*” they tried to establish “the science of human experience” and its relation to existential phenomenology, hermeneutic tradition (like Dilthey) and structuralism. I think that modern day psychobiography cannot avoid this as they were the pioneers of it.

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Chapter 9

The Positive Psychology Movements PP1.0 and PP2.0 in Psychobiography



Claude-Hélène Mayer and Michelle May

Abstract Positive psychology theories usually focus on positive, holistic, health-related concepts within psychology. Recent studies in psychobiography emphasise the need of developing psychobiographical theory further, considering the positive psychology movements (PP1.0) and the new wave of positive psychology (PP2.0). In this chapter, it is argued that more psychobiographical studies based on the PP1.0 and PP2.0 perspectives could impact positively on individuals and societies to provide guidance orientation by giving positive and constructive examples of role models and on how to conduct one's life balanced with purpose and meaningfulness. Thereby, an integrative approach of positive and negative aspects needs to be given to display a holistic viewpoint of the person. This chapter aims at providing insight and new discourses on the theoretical development of psychobiographies based on PP1.0 and PP2.0.

Keywords Positive psychology · PP1.0 · PP2.0 · Psychobiography · Theoretical perspective · Role model · Orientation for individuals and societies

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*It is almost always the case that whatever has wounded you,
will also be instrumental in your healing.*

Robert A. Johnson

9.1 Introduction

Positive psychology has become a newly established pillar in psychology. Positive psychology concepts are understood as defining, comprehending and fostering psychological factors that allow societies, communities and individuals to flourish, as emphasised by Seligman (1998, 2002), Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2003, 2014). Usually, theories that focus on positive, holistic, health-related concepts within psychology, are viewed as belonging to the positive psychology movement (Mayer, 2017) and often relate to positive emotions (Frederickson, 2001, 2002).

During the past years, Wong (2009, 2011) has moved the positive psychology (PP1.0) movement forward by identifying the four pillars of the good life, namely meaning, virtue, resilience and well-being that are strongly shaped by culture. This movement has been defined as the second wave of positive psychology, named PP2.0, and is characterised by a balanced, interactive, meaning-centred and cross-cultural perspective. This perspective needs to integrate weaknesses and strength to explore the science and practice of positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2007), see the limitations of the positive and the impact of the negative within the positive (Haybron, 2007) and very much relates to Frankl's (1985) search for meaning and the meaning-making movement.

Psychobiography gained international recognition throughout the past decades (Alexander, 1990; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Schultz, 2005), using psychological theories to analyse and interpret the life of extraordinary individuals to improve and deepen the understanding of the life's development from a certain theoretical angle. The constructive use of positive psychology perspective is generally needed in contemporary research (Luthans, 2002, 2013) to complement the long tradition of pathogen orientations in psychobiographical research that need to be expanded, if not overcome (Kőváry, 2011). Mayer (2017) argued that theories belonging to the positive psychology perspective are useful in psychobiographical research and in establishing new insights in and models to health and well-being in individuals across the lifespan. This theoretical perspective in psychobiographical research is needed from various points of view that will be addressed in the following section.

On the one hand, the positive psychology perspectives (PP1.0 and PP2.0) support the change in perspective from psychoanalytic and critical and pathological views on extraordinary individuals to positive views on the individual's life. On the other hand, it emphasises social and societal perspectives by creating positive role models that provide guidance in times of global changes, insecurity, disorientation and crises. In times of increasing challenges, positive psychology perspectives—and particularly the second wave PP2.0—can increase the awareness and foci on the positive—on the aspects that contribute positively to a life to create a healthy, peaceful and sustainable

future for the individual, the societies and the global community—in a balanced and meaningful way.

In this chapter the authors argue that more psychobiographical studies based on the positive psychology and PP2.0 perspectives could impact positively on individuals and societies to provide guidance, security and orientation by giving positive and constructive examples of role models and on how to conduct one's life balanced with purpose and meaningfulness. One of the main questions is what PP1.0 and PP2.0 can contribute to psychobiographical research. The aim of this chapter is therefore to provide insight and new discourses on the theoretical development of psychobiographies based on a positive psychology perspective. The authors of this chapter aim further to do the following:

- Define the state of the art in the use of positive psychology framework and positive psychology theories within psychobiography.
- Determine how PP1.0 and PP2.0 can be useful in psychobiographical research.

The following section provides an overview on the positive psychology movement within psychology and further discusses psychobiographical studies and its impact on them.

9.2 Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Positive Psychology

According to Strümpfer (2003), the roots of the debate on pathogenesis and the strengths paradigm can be traced back to the time of the ancient Greeks. A focus on well-being can be traced back further in time to the even more ancient Chinese healers who considered their role as enhancing resilience and resistance, with health considered the natural order of things (Strümpfer, 2003). The understanding of well-being has also been informed by the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism (Strümpfer, 2003). In the late 18th century research focussing on emotional, physical and mental pleasure, as well as the absence of pain, were the intellectual forerunners of subjective well-being. That marks the beginning of empirical studies about subjective well-being began in the early 20th century (Strümpfer, 2003).

As part of the origin of modern psychology, James (1902) in his writing on “healthy mindedness”, explored optimal human functioning and the role that transcendent experiences played in this. In 1925, Flugel studied people's moods by recording emotional events and summing emotional reactions across time. After World War II, survey researchers polled large numbers of people about their experience of happiness and life satisfaction, by using simple global surveys, questionnaires and short scales (May, 2013). In 1969, Bandura showed that pleasant and unpleasant affect are not merely opposites but are somewhat independent and have different correlates. Thus, experiencing a negative state does not necessarily mean that one experiences the absence of a positive state, raising awareness that a positive state could be developed and enhanced (May, 2013).

More psychodynamic-informed theorists also contributed to concepts used in positive psychology (May, 2013). Alfred Adler provided the idea of striving for

superiority, which according to Strümpfer (2005), could be seen as a forerunner of ideas such as self-actualisation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, striving for superiority is linked to concepts such as social interest and working for the common good (Strümpfer, 2005). Strümpfer (2005) also proposed that concepts from Carl Jung's personality theory relates to fortigenic processes such as achieving individuation and self-realisation. Allport, one of the first psychologists to focus on the study of the personality, introduced a description of the mature personality marked by the principle of mastery and competence, constructs that are central to theories about positive human functioning (Strümpfer, 2005). Gestalt psychology also contributed to the study of positive human functioning through Werner's orthogenetic principle of development, postulating that growth and change occur from a diffuse state towards more differentiated, progressive and hierarchic integration (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004; King, Eells, & Burton, 2004; May, 2013).

Several constructs from social-cognitive learning theorists denoting individuals' achievement of and striving for self-control over their influencing environment and their own behaviours and their efforts to make events more manageable and predictable, are used in positive psychology (May, 2013). Some of these constructs, denoting the emphasis on resources people use to have more self-control, include Rotter's (1990) concept of *locus of control*, Bandura's (1977) *concept of self-efficacy*, and Rosenbaum and Ben-Ari's (1985) concept of learned resourcefulness. Cognitive theorists emphasise concepts such as *cognitive appraisal*, *control* and *redefinition*, which people use and develop to achieve control and make events more manageable and predictable (Baldwin, 2005; May, 2013).

In 1967, Antonovsky, a sociologist in Israel experienced what he described as "probably the most stressful life event I have ever faced" namely the Six Day War. Afterwards, he studied relevant literature and concentration camp survivors concluding that crises or trauma did not necessarily have an immediate or delayed negative impact on health. Based on his research about health, stress and coping from middle 1950s, he has developed salutogenesis to contribute to our understanding of health and health promotion (Idan, Eriksson, & Al-Yagon, 2017; Strümpfer, 2013). He coined the construct, general resistance resources (GRRs), meaning resources that assists individuals in making sense of countless stressors (every day and traumatic stressors) (Idan et al., 2017). Victor Frankl (1985), a holocaust survivor, proposed that the primary force in life is an individual's striving to find meaning and purpose in life.

According to Rothmann (2002), the theorists of humanist psychology can be regarded as the founders of positive psychology. According to Strümpfer (2005, p. 28) the forerunners of these works included *Goldstein, a neuro-psychiatrist, who in 1934 introduced the concepts of a drive to self-actualisation or -realisation*, initially, to explain the *reorganisation* of a person's capacities after brain injury. Goldstein (1934/1995, p. 239 quoted in Strümpfer, 2005) stated that

an organism is normal and healthy, in which the tendency toward self-actualisation is acting from within, and overcomes the disturbance arising from the clash with the world, not out of anxiety but out of the joy of conquest.

Bühler (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007), analysing hundreds of biographies, wrote a book entitled, *The human life course as a psychological problem*, on a five-stage structure of normal human development. In later works (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007) she wrote about concepts such as *self-actualisation*, *creative expansion*, the tendency to bring about creative change through action or physical and mental productivity, intentionality, striving to give meaningfulness and purpose to one's life and self-limiting adaptation, self-restraint in relation to others to fulfil the desire to belong (Strümpfer, 2005). Maslow also developed the theory about self-actualisation and peak experiences doing research with healthy and creative individuals. Carl Rogers's contributions included the concepts of the *fully functioning person* and *actualising tendencies* (Rothmann, 2002; Strümpfer, 2005). The term "positive psychology" was first used by Abraham Maslow in his book *Motivation and personality* (1954, 1970), in the last chapter, titled "Toward a Positive Psychology" (May, 2013).

9.3 The Development of the Sub-discipline of Positive Psychology

Central to the development of positive psychology was a reaction to the emphasis on the pathogenic, meaning negative aspects of human behaviour at the expense of the positive aspects of human behaviour in psychology (Mayer, 2011). The pathogenic orientation focused on a deficit, disease model of human behaviour, whereas the strength paradigm focused on positive aspects of human functioning. Thus, the strength paradigm asks, "how can we develop and/or enhance positive human functioning in all spheres of life?" (May, 2013). The pathogenic and strength paradigm (as expressed through salutogenesis, fortigenesis and positive psychology) stands in a particular tension to each other with the project of the strength paradigm to refocus practitioners and researchers' attention to the positive aspects of human functioning and ensuring flourishing in stressful and optimal contexts (Strümpfer, 2005). Several theorists within positive psychology emphasise that this new focus should explore both psychological aspects that facilitate and prevent optimal human functioning (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007; King, Eels & Button, 2004; Strümpfer, 1995, 2005).

Well-being has been studied and promoted by three main sources of knowledge with salutogenesis and fortigenesis historically being forerunners to positive psychology. Today, salutogenesis and fortigenesis is contained within positive psychology:

- *Salutogenesis*. This refers to exploring the origins of health (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007; Strümpfer, 2003).
- *Fortigenesis*. This entails exploring the origins of health and strengths (Strümpfer, 2013).
- *Positive psychology*. This is a sub-discipline of psychology, scientifically studying the nature, manifestations and ways of enhancing positive subjective experience linked to strengths and virtues (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007; May, 2013; Seligman

& Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Strümpfer, 2005). According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 1) and Seligman (2002, p. 3):

the field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment and satisfaction (in the past); optimism, hope and faith (for the future); and flow, joy, sensual pleasures and happiness (in the present).

The focus of positive psychology (PP1.0) is on the study of optimal human functioning with the aim of changing the focus of theory and practices in some fields of psychology from preoccupation primarily with disease and healing to well-being and the enhancement or fostering strengths and virtues (Coetzee & Cilliers, 2001; May, 2013). In South Africa, the field of psychofortology was suggested by Wissing and Van Eeden (1997) to refer to the same study field as positive psychology (Rothmann, 2002; Strümpfer, 2005). However, based on existing literature, the American designation “positive psychology” is preferred (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007).

There are different approaches to positive psychology, but common to all these approaches is the assumption that human beings have the potential for positive experiences and positive character or virtues (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004). Importantly, positive psychology adopts and revitalises, through Gestalt Psychology, an Aristotelian frame of reference (Jørgensen & Nagstad, 2004; Strümpfer, 2003), which holds to the following assumptions:

- Human beings have positive character, strengths and virtues.
- Human beings are fundamentally social by nature.
- Human beings can engage the good life or “eudaimonic pleasure”, as opposed to hedonic pleasure, which refers to effort that a person exerts to cultivate his or her optimal potential/functioning.
- A human being’s goodness and morality do not come from the moral rules of society, but from his or her involvement in moral activities expressing his or her potential for virtues such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.
- Growth and change towards that which is better, more complex, more optimal are fundamental aspects of a human being’s existence.
- A distinction exists between “the human being as she or he happens to be” and “the human being as she or he could be” if his or her essential nature is realised through optimal functioning. Importantly, an individual’s cultivation of his or her true potential or optimal functioning occurs through effort and can be evaluated and measured against objective standards.

The assumptions of positive psychology (PP1.0) have been explored before by different theoretical perspectives, and these assumptions have formed the foundation of the definition and succinct descriptions of positive psychology. This has allowed theorists in the field to revitalise and research these assumptions in reaction to a pathogenic orientation to behaviour, while proactively holding the positive aspects of behaviour in view.

The purpose of the field of positive psychology is the achievement of scientific understanding of and effective intervention to ensure optimal human functioning to develop and enhance the flourishing of individuals, families, organisations,

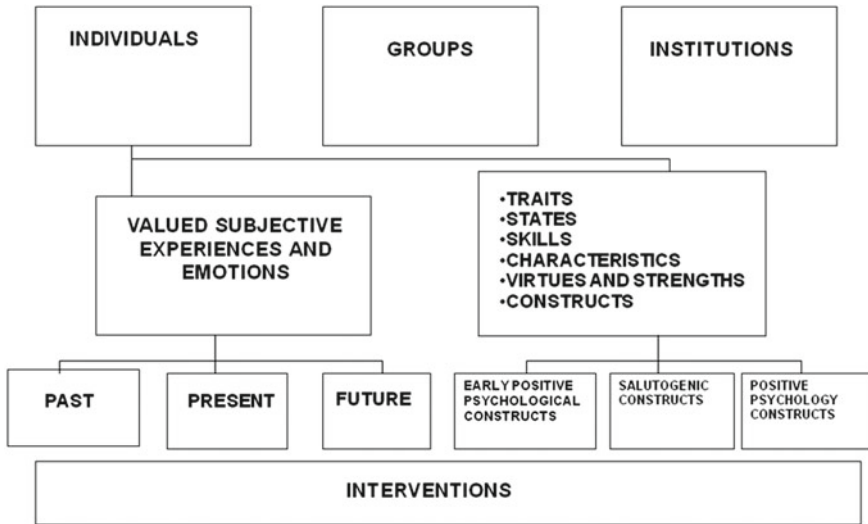


Fig. 9.1 Framework of positive psychology based on a historical overview of research (Source Coetzee & Viviers, 2007)

communities and countries. Importantly, the field does not focus on virtues and strengths that help individuals and communities only to endure and survive, but also to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13). The field endeavours to use and enhance existing ideas and research to build a cumulative, empirical body of research about wellness, health and positive psychological functioning in individuals, groups, organisations, communities and countries (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Mayer, 2011). Through positive psychology, psychologists can ensure optimal human functioning by working with and researching strengths, deficiencies, environmental resources and stressors (Wright & Lopez, 2002).

Coetzee and Viviers (2007) through their overview of research on positive psychology in South Africa, conceptualised a workable categorisation of positive psychology by using the three fields of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) as the basis of the categorisation (see Fig. 9.1).

The framework focused on:

- Wellness as experienced by individuals, groups, and institutions.
- On the individual level, wellness was expressed by
 - Valued subjective experiences and emotions (in the past, present, and future as defined by Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)
 - Positive individual traits, states, skills, characteristics, virtues, strengths, and constructs that were categorised into early positive psychological constructs (constructs extensively investigated during the eighties and early nineties before the formal announcement of the term and field of study of positive psychology)

salutogenic constructs (according to the 1990 and 1995 conceptualisation of Strümpfer)

recently introduced positive psychology constructs

- Interventions facilitating optimisation on individual, group, and institutional level (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007, p. 480).

Positive psychology has contributed tremendously to our understanding of health and health interventions. It has not remained stagnant, but has incorporated other aspects of behaviour which it developed in reaction too. In the next sections we discuss these new developments, i.e., positive psychology 2.0.

9.4 Further Developments in Positive Psychology: The Second Wave (PP2.0)

In the past decade, several theorists had concerns about and indicated that there may have been made too much about the value of PP1.0, because several of the proposals and assumptions thereof have been studied in Western and Eastern philosophical and anthropological thought (Ivtzan, Lomas, Heffron & Worth, 2015; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Wong, 2011a, 2011b, 2017). Cilliers and May (2010) referred to the valorisation as the idealisation of PP1.0 at the expense of or denigration of other theoretical perspectives. Thus the “tyranny of positivity” (Held, 2004; Lomas, 2016), through the idealisation of PP1.0, a polarising rhetoric was created in which positive aspects of human behaviour were considered beneficial and negative aspects seen as undesirable (Fernandez-Rios & Cornes, 2009; Lomas & Itzvan, 2016; Wong, 2011a, 2011b).

This research reverberated with the work of theorists who contemporary, propose the second wave of positive psychology (Held, 2004) or Positive Psychology 2.0 (Wong, 2011a, 2011b) through publications and other sources of research. Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferson and Worth published in 2015 a book entitled *Second Wave Positive Psychology: Embracing the Dark Side of Life* (2015). The research project, “Second wave positive psychology”, on ResearchGate lists various research artefacts such as conference presentations, articles, book chapters and two books about the dialectical relationship of “darker” and positive constructs in optimal human functioning. Numerous articles have also appeared in the last ten years exploring how apparent negative aspects of human behaviour, negative conditions and contextual factors are crucial constituents in ensuring optimal human functioning. It seems that these theorists, through PP2.0, are highlighting how our assumptions that split emotions and experiences into positive and negative aspects require much more interrogation, because the apparent dichotomous understanding of emotions and experiences could be replaced by an understanding that actively celebrate the complexity and multi-faceted nature of emotions and experiences. Focusing on the dialectical relationship between apparent positive and negative aspects of human behaviour allows for the exploration of how these apparent opposite aspects dynamically create, destroy and

maintain each other as these contribute to optimal human functioning (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016).

While PP1.0 interventions mainly aimed to enhance positive emotions, meaning and engagement in life (Seligman et al., 2005), PP2.0 expands the bases of the PP1.0 interventions by bringing virtue, meaning, resilience and well-being into play as the four pillars of PP2.0, referring to previous research having shown their importance for PP1.0 (Wong, Ivtzan & Lomas, 2017). The major difference, however, between PP1.0 and PP2.0 seems to be the aim to emphasise the positive while managing and transforming the negative to increase well-being for individuals, organisations and societies. Wong (2011a, 2011b) and Wong, Ivtzan and Lomas (2017) focus on that PP2.0 needs to include the scientific study of the synthesis of both, the positive and the negative is therefore most important in PP2.0, as is the holistic view on different levels of analysis while building constituency with other branches of mainstream psychology, suggesting a meaning-centred approach in the context of improving life for individuals and for humankind as such. Further, not only the individual is taken into consideration, but rather how to address the challenge to improve the socio-cultural conditions of individuals and societies (Wong, 2011a, 2011b). PP2.0 thereby focuses on creating full functioning individuals, while aiming for healthy organisations and institutions to strive for holistic well-being of individuals (Wong, Ivtzan & Lomas, 2017).

Wong (2017) emphasises further that in PP2.0 it is assumed that maintaining well-being is based on how a person manages to deal with the polarities of an emotion that inherently carries positive and negative aspects and that can contribute to reflect on personal conviction and self-evaluation, as described above. Secondly, Wong (2017) points out that emotions have both intrapsychic and interpersonal dark sides that need to be embraced—as what Jung highlights with regard to the shadow—to then build upon the self-recognition and self-knowledge to increase resilience and flourishing that is anchored through the acknowledging of the positive and negative side of the self, virtue, meaning, resilience and well-being to improve the life of humankind and individuals with regard to the entire life. Additionally, negative aspects need to be considered, recognised, acknowledged and transformed.

Covalence purports that phenomena hold both positive and negative, light and dark aspects (Lazarus, 2003; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). We hypothesise that any phenomenon holds numerous shades and these shades can be represented by light reflecting from a prism. The metaphor of a reflecting prism acknowledges the complexity of a phenomena; meaning that it has many shades, it has contextual complexity. Hopefully this idea moves us beyond a dichotomous understanding of phenomena, into a multifaceted understanding thereof. The multifaceted aspects of a phenomenon are inseparable, complementary and co-creating sides of the same prism (see Lomas, 2016; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). Thus, the *principle of complementarity* suggests that a phenomenon of human behaviour, such as well-being, involves the inevitable dialectics between multifaceted aspects of human living. Furthermore, these multifaceted aspects can be co-present and co-dependent (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). A critical awareness of and focus beyond the simple binary of idealisation of positive psychology and the denigration of other theoretical perspectives towards a more nuanced under-

standing of the dialectical complexities of human behaviour denotes the evolution and development of PP2.0. Wong (2011a, 2011b) refers to this more nuanced appreciation of human behaviour as the dual system model that incorporates a balanced, interactive, meaning-centred and cross-cultural perspective as evident in psychobiography that allows for the exploration of the complexity of human living.

9.5 Critical Voices on PP1.0 and PP2.0

Cilliers and May (2010) explored how the endeavour to develop a sound scientific foundation for PP1.0 resulted in an overemphasis of the positive aspects of human functioning amongst practitioners and researchers alike. In their research with practitioners and researchers working with PP1.0, system psychodynamics and other theoretical perspectives, Cilliers and May (2010) hypothesised that:

- PP1.0 seemed to be used as a defence against the complexity of human behaviour amongst practitioners and researchers.
- There seems to be a reluctance to relinquish positive psychology as an object of hope—privileging positive psychology constructs at the expense of working with pain, loss, suffering and dissatisfaction.
- Refocusing on the dialectical relationship between positive, negative and other aspects of complex human behaviour will allow positive psychology theorists to draw more actively on other psychology perspectives as it develops a more holistic understanding of the complexity of human behaviour.

The critical, dialectical thinking about positive and negative phenomena of human behaviour that underpins PP2.0, is based on four dialectical principles, namely appraisal, covalence, complementarity and evolution (Lomas, 2016; Lomas & Ivztan, 2016; Wong, 2011a, 2011b). Lomas (2016) suggests that it is difficult to categorise a phenomenon as positive or negative because the *appraisal* of such a phenomenon is contextually dependent. Based on Wong (2011a, 2011b), it is proposed that phenomena of human behaviour have both intrapsychic and interpersonal apparent dark sides. May (2017) suggested that positive psychology has to learn from system psychodynamics about being in the presence of and surviving apparently destructive phenomena of human behaviour. Here we have to consider that behavioural phenomena are apparently destructive or dark because we have to appraise whether the behaviour is detractive or dark in a specific context.

9.6 Positive Psychology in the Context of Psychobiography

With regard to the increasing literature in psychobiography and psychobiographical studies (Schultz, 2005; Kőváry, 2011; Mayer, 2017), a research need has been identified that requests new theoretical approaches to contribute to the analysis and

interpretation of the life of extraordinary individuals (Ponterotto, 2015). During the past years, researchers from different backgrounds have requested new theoretical approaches in psychobiographical work (Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Maree, 2017; Saccaggi & du Plessis, 2014). Over the past decade the importance of positive psychology concepts has been emphasised in psychological research in general (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2003, 2014; Frederickson, 2001, 2002; Seligmann, 2002, 2011), but also recently in psychobiographical research (Burnell, 2013; Saccaggi & du Plessis, 2014; Ponterotto, 2015; Mayer, 2017). The focus on new theories can lead to a new, complex and balanced psychological understanding of extraordinary individuals who act as outstanding universal and positive role models (Mayer, 2017). These role models might have a positive impact on individuals and societies, bringing about reflection, new ideas and change. Schultz (2005) has emphasised that there is a need for more positive research on artists and writers to promote positive aspects in the psychobiographical perspectives on the life of individuals. He further explains that, for example, in the case of Van Gogh, a critical, pathological and negative view has often been emphasised without taking the positive psychological perspective into account to point out the wellness, the spirituality, faith and resilience of the extraordinary person (Schultz, 2005). The focus on the positive psychology perspective in psychology and particularly in psychobiography is urgently needed from a psychological, spiritual and societal perspective (Mayer, 2017): new and positive role models are needed as guides to provide orientation in times of global changes, insecurity, disorientation and unhealthy developments. They can bring meaningfulness through their own life developments into the life of other individuals. This is particularly important in times of strong societal challenges, global crisis and increasing conflict potentials: universal leaders and extraordinary, outstanding individuals are requested to become creative and inspiring role models to contribute to a peaceful, healthy and sustainable future (Leeder, Raymond, & Greenberg, 2007). Positive role modelling can support changes in individuals and society and be supportive in applied fields, such as meditation and therapy (Mayer, 2016), as well as counselling (Ponterotto, 2014). Due to the global challenges that individuals and societies are facing, the search for positive psychology constructs and a focus on the positive aspects in research increases; for example, by focusing on holistic well-being and faith constructs and their changes across the life span (Burnell, 2013; Mayer, 2011), wellness and spirituality (Powers, 2005). Regarding positive psychology theories used in psychobiographies, particularly theories of holistic wellness, faith development and spirituality, as well as character strength and intuition can be identified as fitting into the theoretical frame and perspective in positive psychology psychobiographies, as described next.

One of the central concepts in the positive psychology movement used in psychobiography are the neo-Adlerian holistic wellness model (Nortjé, Fouché, & Gogo, 2013; Myers & Sweeney, 2008; Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). The model is associated with the principles of holism by Adler, defined in Myers and Sweeney (2004, pp. 334–336), based on pillars of the Adlerian theory, such as:

- the indivisibility of the self
- the focus on the whole rather than on the parts
- the focus on the interaction of the parts towards the whole
- the social context contributing to the whole.

In the holistic wellness model, the five life tasks of neo-Adlerian Individual Psychology are used as an organising principle of the various components of wellness (Myers, 2009). It is defined as a “way of life orientation toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community” (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252).

Spirituality is conceived as one of the core of the five life tasks, further integrating self-direction, work and leisure, friendship and love (Myers et al., 2000). These life tasks are dynamically connected to life forces (family, religion, education, community, government, media, business/industry), as well as to global events, such as disease, war, pollution, economic exploitation and poverty (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). The holistic wellness model has been used on psychobiographical studies (Burnell, 2013; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Nel, 2013; Mayer, 2017) to “provide a eugraphic and holistic approach in contrast to the traditional pathographic approach with which to view an individual life” (Burnell, 2013, p. 2).

The same is true for psychobiographical studies that use Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (Fowler, 1981) to focus on the positive development of faith across the lifespan. The stage development theory describes the development of faith across the life span and focuses on faith from a psychological perspective (Fowler, 1981; 1986).

Further, from a positive psychology framework, the theory of Peterson and Seligman (2004) has been used in psychobiographical research. This theory includes a “manual of sanities”, emphasising 24 strength and six core virtues to counteract the psychopathological worldview and classification system in DSM-IV (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013; Saccaggi & du Plessis, 2014). This theory has been applied in psychobiographical research, as, for example, in Saccaggi & du Plessis (2004) who used this theory to gain greater understanding of the life of Walt Whitman, a prominent American poet. The author pointed out in her research that the theory of Peterson and Seligman (2004) and its application within the positive psychology framework was useful to analyse the character strength of the poet, while Ponterotto and Reynolds (2013) highlight that character strength scores correlated in theoretically predicted ways with attitudes toward work, friendship, romance, recreation, leisure, and life satisfaction. By writing a psychobiography on Bobby Fischer, the authors conclude that character strength are based in creativity, industry, bravery, curiosity and zest.

Several of the psychobiographies that relate the analysis of their psychobiographical subjects of research conclude that psychobiography within the light of positive psychology frameworks and theories are a useful pair to understand positive human functioning.

9.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter aimed to provide insight and new discourses on the theoretical development of psychobiographies based on PP1.0 and PP2.0.

As during the past decades, most of the psychobiographies still tend to use psychoanalytical theories, but other theoretical constructs grow in the interest of contemporary psychobiographies (See du Plessis & Stones, 2019). In the context of a growing diversity of theories and research methodologies used in psychobiographies, this chapter focused particularly on positive psychology.

Generally, the discourse on positive psychology is gaining interest in the context of psychobiographies. However, it was pointed out that most of the psychobiographies using positive psychology theories refer to the PP1.0 model of positive psychology, while leaving the PP2.0 movement rather unconsidered. In future, psychobiographical research should anchor itself not only generally in positive psychology theories, constructs and frameworks, but should use the belonging theories in a differentiated way and contribute particularly to develop the positive psychology movements (PP1.0 and PP2.0) towards an even more elaborated theoretical framework that is, firstly, useful in across the lifespan research. It should, secondly, shed light not only on positive, but also on negative aspects regarding the extraordinary person researched to develop a more balanced and holistic view on (the life of) the person researched, which takes a holistic approach and a contextual understanding of human behaviour and human functioning through PP1.0 and PP2.0. Then, the multifacetedness of the extraordinary person could further address the richness of emotions experienced in the context of the lifespan. This would provide new insights into the exploration of how these apparent opposite aspects dynamically create, destroy and maintain each other as these contribute to optimal human functioning across the lifespan dynamically. Accordingly, the focus on positive psychology concepts, such as virtue, meaning, resilience and well-being—as the virtues of PP2.0—could expand the view of psychobiographers on the life. Particularly studies including virtues, meaning and resilience seem to be underrepresented in psychobiographical works. Taking these aspects into account, meaning-centred approaches would gain importance in the study of the life of extraordinary individuals that could, again, contribute positively on the development of theories of meaning and existentialist philosophy and psychology. Generally, an inclusive approach to theoretical and methodological diversity in psychobiographies would argue for the importance of psychobiographies in psychology and strengthen its standing. In this context, psychobiographies could further be used increasingly to improve life for individuals and for humankind as such, as suggested by PP2.0, and thereby developing even new applied approaches of using psychobiographies in coaching, counselling, therapy and personal growth development or even in group development trainings and sociological theories and transformation.

Finally, it is strongly recommended that psychobiographies consider the PP1.0 and the PP2.0 perspectives and differentiate and develop them through psychobiographical studies. Positive psychology movements can become a new and strong

pillar in psychobiographical theory frameworks if developed in a differentiated way that brings new insights regarding extraordinary individuals' lives and at the same time contributes constructively to developing the new movements in PP1.0 and PP2.0 further.

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Chapter 10

Suitability Indicators in the Study of Exemplary Lives: Guidelines for the Selection of the Psychobiographical Subject



Barbara Burnell, Carla Nel, Paul J. P. Fouché and Roelf van Niekerk

Abstract Continuous development of psychobiographical methodology has culminated in the establishment of best practice guidelines aimed at the production of sound studies that meet the requirements for credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. This chapter aims to address the objectivity challenges arising from possible researcher bias during subject selection. The authors propose employing a suitability indicators approach to eugraphic subject selection by considering contextual factors and utilizing the psychosocial concept of generativity in its broadest sense. This would enable the objective selection of subjects from a greater pool of eminent lives than only those well known and potentially idealized. The chapter concludes with the application of these guidelines to the study of two South Africans who, despite several striking differences, had a shared socio-historical context and generative focus, namely their opposition to the apartheid system. Examples from psychobiographical works on Beyers Naudé (1915–2004) and Helen Suzman (1917–2009) illustrate the proposed approach.

Keywords Psychobiographical sampling · Suitability indicators · Eugraphic focus · Generativity · Heroism

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10.1 Introduction

The international upsurge of interest in psychohistorical work has led to an increased focus on the psychobiographical endeavor, in particular the eugraphic psychological illumination of exemplary lives. The value of pursuing a complex psychological understanding of these lives is widely accepted by researchers and theorists in the field (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 2015; Howe, 1997; Simonton, 1999, 2003; Schultz, 2005a). In striving to achieve such an understanding of exemplary and exceptional lives, psychobiographers need to “maintain a controlled empathy in an attempt to understand the subject in their historic life space and prepare an unbiased, revealing, and credible psychological portrait” (Ponterotto, 2017, p. 253). Aiming at enhancing credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability in psychobiographical study, best practice guidelines emerged from the works of pioneering psychobiographers, such as Alexander, Elms, Ponterotto (2019), Runyan (2019), Schultz and Simonton (Du Plessis, 2017; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2017).

Despite these methodological developments, the approach is not without methodological difficulties (Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a). Potential points of criticism relate to reductionism, elitism, researcher bias, validity and reliability criticisms, cross-cultural considerations, the subject’s absence, inflated expectations, and an infinite amount of biographical data. In order to ensure that methodological challenges do not adversely affect the quality of the psychobiographical work, the psychobiographer should be familiar with the specific difficulties and potential methodological pitfalls inherent to the psychobiographical approach. Compensatory strategies then need to be applied to ensure the quality of the finished work, for example, the practice of eugraphic psychobiography serves as a compensatory strategy against the risk of reductionism. Its focus on the subject’s adaptation to the demands of life reduces the likelihood of specific reductionistic errors such as originology and overpathologizing of the subject (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999).

The procedures and strategies employed in the initial phase of any modern psychobiography, often referred to as the pilot study phase, are mostly to consider the following: (a) the potential subject’s historical importance, (b) ethical issues surrounding the choice of subject, such as whether they are living or deceased (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), as well as (c) personal motivations and feelings the researcher has towards the potential subjects (Alexander, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017). Therefore, the traditional aim of the pilot study phase was to conduct a preliminary evaluation of these aspects. The pilot study phase is also used to determine whether or not enough archival material from both primary and secondary sources exists on the potential subject (Du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto, 2017). However, while the quantity of data is an important consideration, it is equally important to determine the availability of appropriate as well as high-quality data regarding the life narrative of the potential subject. Du Plessis (2017, p. 223) endorses this idea by stating:

in psychobiographical research the data about the subject (as much as the subject him- or herself) constitutes the sample used in the research process.

An important remaining methodological limitation specific to the sampling phase, pertains to possible researcher bias during subject selection. The selection of eminent historical figures often arises from a personal and longstanding fascination with them, or due to some significance to the psychobiographer's own particular interests (Fouché, Du Plessis, & Van Niekerk, 2017; Howe, 1997; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017). Many accomplished psychobiographers often refer to their choice of subject as inevitable (Ponterotto, 2017). While even such subjectivity in the selection process could be embraced, several researchers have highlighted the need to limit potential researcher bias by guarding against excessive subjectivity (Elms, 1994; Elovitz, 2003; Fouché, 1999; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017; Schultz, 2005b; Simonton, 1999). Vital to increasing the study's rigor and quality, two important guidelines in psychobiographical subject selection need consideration. Firstly, personal reflexivity is required to assist in identifying and clarifying the researcher's personal motivations for considering a certain figure as a potential subject for psychological portrait writing and it ensures that the research study is not clouded by the researcher's personal reaction to and evaluation of the subject (Du Plessis, 2017; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017; Schultz, 2005c). Strategies in this regard include the *bracketing* of subjective experiences and biases as the researcher compiles notes on their relationship and personal reactions to the subject and material (Ponterotto, 2014). Secondly, the selection of a subject not well known to the psychobiographer and towards whom the psychobiographer feels ambivalent (Elms, 1994), would help to maintain the necessary professional distance and objectivity and would facilitate approaching the subject "as an objective scientist, not as an adoring fan or strong detractor" (Ponterotto, 2017, p. 253).

Although the selection of a subject relatively unknown to the researcher enhances objectivity, rigor, quality and clarity in the study, it poses additional challenges to the psychobiographer. These include (a) gathering a subject pool from which to select a suitable subject and (b) judging if a potential subject's life story would fit the eugraphic approach by representing optimal functioning. The authors of this chapter suggest addressing these challenges through the application of suitability guidelines to ensure that sampling is more objective and replicable during the pilot phase of any psychobiographical research project.

The following sections of this chapter describe the contextual considerations pertinent to selecting a socio-historical context from which to pool potential subjects, how to screen for eminence, how the sufficiency of the available biographical data can be evaluated and how to apply the Eriksonian concept of generativity in its broadest sense as a key indicator for suitability for the study of optimal human functioning. This chapter concludes with an illustration of this systematic approach to subject selection through the application of the suitability indicators. The indicators, as applied to the lives of two South African anti-apartheid activists, namely theologian Dr Beyers Naudé and parliamentarian Helen Suzman, are summarized following a brief description of the lives of these two figures.

10.2 Contextual Considerations

Not only are life narratives influenced by the context in which they occur, but also by the individual's response to these contexts. Since psychobiographical research is generally "cross-cultural and trans-historical" (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 84), viewing the individual life within the context in which it was lived, is of paramount importance. Socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-historical contexts, as well as environmental factors, may have required individuals to develop exceptional psychological strengths in order to adapt and achieve optimal functioning. Exemplary lives are often found within socio-historical contexts characterized by the shifting of paradigms and where heroic efforts for the good of others are made in the face of controversy and opposition. Periods of great difficulty may be rich with extraordinary lives of those born into the collective suffering of a group and who, nevertheless, achieved greatness. During times or in contexts within which individuals and groups are faced with the urgency of survival as a result of natural disasters, times of war and unrest, or the abuse of power, figures have emerged whose life stories have, and may still, contribute to our understanding of resilience and adaptation. Therefore, a specific context could direct the researcher's attention towards eminent personalities suited to eugraphic study.

Psychobiographers could select a specific context by applying criteria to evaluate the significance of a socio-historical context of interest to the researcher. Partington (1980) proposed five criteria against which to evaluate historical significance. *Importance* refers to its influence on the people who lived during that event or era, or the extent to which it is remembered or remarked upon. *Profundity* considers the depth of how events or phenomena affected people's lives and their potential future impact. *Quantity* refers to the amount of people or size of the group affected by the event or phenomenon, as significant contextual factors may include events with a substantial impact on large numbers of people or those that affected only the members of a particular group. *Durability* indicates how long the event or phenomenon affected people. Finally, *relevance* considers the impact of a past event or phenomenon on present-day life and its contribution to historical meaning-making. Peck and Seixas (2008) suggested condensing historical significance criteria into two categories: *resulting in change*, referring to far-reaching consequences for many over a considerable period of time and *revealing*, indicating the illumination of "enduring and emerging issues in history and contemporary life" (p. 1027) of events that held historical importance within the collective memory of a specific group or groups. Lévesque (2005) proposed three additional significance traits related to more personal or popular memory, nostalgia and nationalism that may also be considered. *Intimate interests* refer to personal significance in family, religious, cultural or ancestral connections to certain events or phenomena. *Symbolic significance* denotes those events or phenomena that have present-day national justification for a particular group or country. *Contemporary lessons* apply how historical events may be used to instruct and guide a specific group or humanity in general in avoiding the errors of the past.

After selecting a socio-historical context of interest to the researcher, the next task in the pilot study phase would be to identify eminent figures from that context to populate a small pool of potential subjects. According to Simonton (1999), a prominent person could be sampled based on the availability of relevant information, or alternatively, by meeting some degree of eminence criteria. The latter is especially relevant when the subjects themselves are linked to the research question, which would be the case in a eugraphic psychobiography. The most common eminence sampling rules as summarized by Simonton (1999) include: *nominations by experts in the field*, occupation of *special positions*, receipt of *major honours* and *conspicuous representation* in archival sources. He added that, where possible, a person from an *underrepresented* group should be selected. The latter allows for the investigation of the cross-cultural applicability of psychological theories and how, in psychobiographical research, optimal development unfolds amongst traditionally marginalized groups. An additional method would be to consider language use in the narratives concerning extraordinary people. Allison and Goethals (2014) highlighted the value of using descriptive phrases such as *one for the ages* when searching for eminent figures with outstanding achievements. The phrase was derived from “now he belongs to the ages” (p. 167), used in connection to the passing of Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela, to bestow an element of timelessness and transcendence to their leadership.

Upon identifying eminent figures, the eugraphic psychobiographer is tasked with addressing issues regarding both the quality and the quantity of data, including distinguishing exemplary from eminent lives, as eminence does not automatically signify eugraphic suitability: “many significant people are infamous rather than famous, notorious rather than notable” (Simonton, 1999, p. 426). The framework proposed by McAdams (1996) for the study of life stories offers a useful starting point for the researcher to identify the narrative markers of a good life story. These markers may be employed as useful guidelines to indicate both sufficient quantity, as well as acceptable quality, of data. In addition, they provide a preliminary indication of potential eugraphic suitability. *Coherence* refers to the structure and or content of the story and *openness* indicates a tolerance for ambiguity and ability to embrace change. *Credibility* refers to the factual accuracy of life events. *Differentiation* relates to the growing complexity of the characters as the plot develops and becomes multifaceted which may lead to *reconciliation*, referring to increased reconciliation of conflicts with the aim of achieving harmony. *Generative integration* is the ability to function as a productive and contributing member of society by carrying responsibility in terms of family and work.

Contextual Suitability Indicators

1. Socio-historical significance. Indicated by one or more of the following: (a) importance, (b) profundity, (c) quantity, (d) durability, (e) relevance, (f) resulting in change, (g) revealing, (h) intimate interests, (i) symbolic significance or (j) contemporary lessons
2. Eminence selection. Indicated by the following: (a) nominations by experts in the field, (b) special positions, (c) major honors, (d) conspicuous representation. An additional consideration is preferentially selecting a person from an (e) underrepresented group
3. 'Good' life story markers. Narrative markers should suggest: (a) coherence, (b) openness, (c) credibility, (d) differentiation, (e) reconciliation (f) generative integration.

The last marker, generative integration, highlights the importance for the eugraphic psychobiographer to uncover resilience themes and features of optimal functioning from material. The multifaceted concept of generativity, as originally introduced by Erikson (1963), incorporates various expressions of optimal psychological functioning. The authors propose their operationalization into suitability indicators for the eugraphic study of an exemplary life so that the journey toward uncovering its enigmas can commence. The following section includes a discussion on the Eriksonian roots of generativity and its expression in exemplary human behavior.

10.3 Suitability Indicators of Individual Life Stories

After the psychobiographer identifies a pool of eminent lives based on an exploration of contextual considerations, a comprehensive set of objective criteria would help ascertain whether one or more of the persons in mind would be well suited for a eugraphic psychological portrait, particularly if the researcher has limited prior knowledge of these lives. Such criteria may be especially necessary in the case of politicians or public figures, where productivity, popularity, office or vocational accomplishment does not necessarily reflect the achievement of optimal psychological functioning. Examining the purposive behavior of the potential subject would enable the researcher to judge more accurately the appropriateness of an individual life for a eugraphic study. A narrative approach to the individual's goals, strategies, strivings, concerns, tasks and projects would illuminate the social-cognitive-motivational aspects of personality (McAdams, 1996).

One of the most pertinent, and potentially useful, social-cognitive-motivational aspects of the adult personality is the presence of generativity, a concept rooted within the psychosocial development theory of Erikson (1963). According to McAdams (1996), adults are tasked with constructing a narrative that builds on a "positive

legacy of the self, to be offered to subsequent generations” (p. 309). Generativity and its corresponding virtue, care, are indicative of optimal human development. Generativity and care emphasize processes of adapting to external demands, coping with internal conflict and developing strengths during the longest stage of human development, namely middle adulthood. Generativity, as a facilitator of psychosocial adaptation, would be a key indicator for suitability for eugraphic study as it has been linked to positive mental health outcomes, such as marital satisfaction, effective parenting, work achievements, close friendships, broad social networks, altruism and engagement in volunteer work, religious involvement, as well as political awareness, interest and contribution (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; McAdams & Guo, 2015; Westermeyer, 2004).

To facilitate greater understanding of the individual’s drive towards generativity, its origin in psychosocial personality development warrants further consideration. Erikson proposed that the process of development occurs throughout the lifespan, during which different ego qualities emerge in an epigenetically determined unfolding of eight interrelated and successive stages (Erikson, 1963, 1997). The ego is conceptualized as a synthesizing power within an individual, one that creates an identity through the process of dealing with personal, societal, historical and familial forces as the individual strives to master the environment (Erikson, 1963, 1997). Generativity, the central concern during the seventh stage in Erikson’s life cycle, entails an involvement in and contribution to one’s environment or the welfare of future generations and necessitates that individuals shift their focus from themselves towards the teaching, guidance and encouragement of children or younger protégés (Erikson, 1963). The successful navigation of conflicts between the forces of generativity and stagnation results in care, which implies the capacity to give without expectations of any return, and to overcome the ambivalence inherent in adhering to irreversible obligations (Erikson, 1963, 1997).

This chapter proposes and demonstrates the operationalization of markers and features of generativity, its developmental precursors as well as its expression during late adulthood, into a set of suitability indicators. The acquisition of the previous ego strengths is essential for generativity, during which the individual aims to promote these same virtues in the next generation (Erikson, 1997). The psychobiographer could, therefore, use the available biographical data of the potential subject’s early life to screen for suitability indicators based on factors described by Erikson (1963, 1980, 1997) as precursors for the development of generativity. The potential for the development of *hope* relies on the availability of adequate and attentive caregiving during infancy. Similarly, early caregiving that promotes curiosity and exploration within healthy boundaries lays the foundation for the acquisition of *will*. Young children, thereafter, need parental figures to model appropriate conscience and responsibility during the pre-school years in order to acquire *purpose*. *Competence* could potentially emerge during the primary school years through exposure to a form of systematized instruction appropriate to the person’s culture, praise and encouragement of efforts at mastery and cooperation and collaboration with peers. Adolescents, in their efforts to develop the ego quality of *fidelity*, require positive relationships with peers, as well as with a guiding or mentoring figure outside of their

nuclear family (Erikson, 1963, 1997). In addition, they need to prepare for adult tasks related to occupational direction and develop their own political, social, religious and economic values and beliefs. Finally, the utilization of the psychosocial moratorium for experimentation with adult roles without definitive commitment is characteristic of psychosocial development during this stage. During young adulthood, the acquisition of *love* requires warm and spontaneous relationships, seeking out new adult friendships, as well as the commitment to a partnership and a shared pattern of living, whilst individual identity is preserved (Erikson, 1963, 1997). In examining data related to the subject's middle adulthood years, the psychobiographer could screen for the *expansion of ego interests* through work, volunteerism and community involvement. Generative individuals also demonstrate an *adherence to irreversible obligations, support for the psychosocial development of others* and *concern for the welfare of future generations*. They strive to maintain and develop *social institutions as well as care for the natural environment*. The expression of generativity during the late adulthood years is termed *grand-generativity* (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1989) and is characterized by conflicts in *balancing care of others with concern for self*, as well as *balancing care for the present with concern for the future*. The older adult also needs to *accept care* and thereby facilitate the generativity of others. They typically undertake a *review of their past caring actions* and strive to experience *generative confirmation* through the successes of the next generations, which they can interpret as being a result of their own generative successes. Tracking these indicators throughout the potential subject's lifespan during the first reading of the biographical material, represents only a crude evaluation of the dynamic interplay of the biological, psychological and environmental forces described in Erikson's theory. Therefore, this does not constitute a psychological analysis of the data, but merely guides the researcher in the approximation of the potential subject's likelihood to have achieved generativity.

In the preliminary investigation of the potential subject's life story, an analysis of the narrative features in biographical material may also be explored to indicate if the life story of the subject holds potential for eugraphic exploration. The large-scale empirical research by McAdams and Guo (2015), in which lengthy life-narrative interviews of late-midlife adults were analyzed to examine the extent to which a particular kind of life story is associated with generativity, demonstrated a robust statistical linkage between types of life narratives and generativity. Highly generative adults were found to be significantly more likely than their less-generative counterparts to construe their lives as variations on a prototypical *redemption narrative*. These stories entail a protagonist who enjoys *an early advantage in life*, exhibits *sensitivity to the suffering of others*, and who develops a *clear moral framework*. They also repeatedly *transform negative scenes into positive outcomes* and pursue *pro-social goals* for the future.

Further investigation of the characteristics and traits that indicate generative and exemplary lives, yields terms such as heroism and social heroism as the pinnacle of exemplary behavior within a relatively new focus of psychological research (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011; Keczer, File, Orosz, & Zimbardo, 2016). Therefore, heroism may be a useful concept to explore when attempting to select a highly generative

subject: “Narratives that detail the lives of legendary heroes provide ageless wisdom and inspiration that allow humans to survive and even thrive” (Allison & Goethals, 2014, p. 168). The concept refers to individuals who face their own mortality, take serious personal and social risks and overcome adversity in service of personal principles, purposes or beliefs (Franco et al., 2011). Three *hero functions* related to social responsibility are *enhancement*, *moral modelling* and *protection*, all for the benefit of society at large (Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2016). Research into the multi-faceted concept of heroism revealed certain characteristics, identified as the ‘*Great Eight*’ most associated with heroes: *inspiring*, *selfless*, *smart*, *strong*, *charismatic*, *reliable*, *caring*, and *resilient* (Allison & Goethals, 2011; Keczer et al., 2016). Franco et al., (2011) however, caution that heroism is a nuanced concept and propose that the wider context be considered over a single heroic act and that heroic action as a symptom of maladjustment or pathology of some kind, therefore, also warrants further investigation.

Heroism implies the potential for deep personal sacrifice and entails some form of risk-taking that differentiates it from altruism. Individuals displaying heroism make self-sacrificing decisions that help, benefit and inspire (Franco et al., 2011; Franco & Zimbardo 2006; Zimbardo, 2011). Farley (2012) distinguished between *big H Heroism* (heroic acts that involve significant risks such as death, injury, loss, imprisonment and other potential serious negative consequences) and small h heroism (pro-social and altruistic behavior such as helping others, doing good deeds and volunteering that involves relatively low personal risk and sacrifice). Big H heroism categories include: (a) situational Heroism, referring to an individual who acts heroically in a once-off, high risk situation, such as performing a daring rescue; (b) professional Heroism, referring to first responders and rescue workers where their job entails acts of heroism; and (c) lifelong Heroism, where a person devotes their life to the pursuit of strongly held ideals and beliefs. They demonstrate a personal commitment to a higher or noble purpose, as well as a willingness to accept and endure the consequences of their commitment. These individuals often encounter severe opposition and take considerable risks.

Life-long Heroism may require the development of a “moral compass” (Franco & Zimbardo, 2006, p. 34). A *moral compass* may be related to two concepts, namely *heroic imagination*, referring to a person who cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of others or injustices perpetrated against them and is compelled to assist in some way (Franco & Zimbardo, 2006; Zimbardo, 2011) and *moral courage*, referring to pro-social action with anticipated risk and expected negative consequences and high personal cost (Osswald, Greitermeyer, Fischer & Frey, 2010). Moral courage is required to speak out or stand up against situations of injustice, harassment, violence, discrimination and abuse. Moral courage is also required to address harmful or illegal business practices as well as situations where natural resources and/or cultural assets are threatened. In these situations the personal risk and cost for the helper in assisting the victim(s) stems from a confrontation with the perpetrator(s) of the negative or destructive behavior (Osswald et al., 2010).

Individual Suitability Indicators

1. Psychosocial generativity indicators
 - Generative Precursors: (a) hope, (b) will, (c) purpose, (d) fidelity, (e) love
 - Middle Adulthood Generativity: (a) expansion of ego interests, (b) adherence to irreversible obligations, (c) support of psychosocial development of others, (d) concern for future generations, (e) interest in social institutions and the natural environment
 - Grand Generativity: (a) balanced concern for self and others, (b) balanced present and future concerns, (c) accepting care, (d) reviewing of past caring actions, (e) generative confirmation
2. Redemption narrative indicators
 - The protagonist demonstrates one or more of the following: (a) early life advantage, (b) sensitivity to the suffering of others, (c) moral framework, (d) transformation of negative scenes, (e) pro-social goals
3. Heroism indicators
 - Pro-social Hero Functions: (a) enhancement, (b) moral modelling, (c) protection
 - Great Eight Characteristics: (a) inspiring, (b) selfless, (c) smart, (d) strong, (e) charismatic, (f) reliable (g) caring, (h) resilient
 - Big H Heroism
 - Moral Compass: (a) heroic imagination, (b) moral courage

The suitability indicators, as presented in Sects. 10.2 and 10.3 of this chapter, are proposed as a crude method for ‘sifting’ both autobiographical and biographical archival material during the process of subject selection. To facilitate and simplify the process, the authors recommend that the researcher compile a brief list of condensed and illustrative examples from source material relevant to the suitability indicators. This provides a structured framework for identifying markers of optimal human functioning as encountered during the first reading of the archival material. The following section will provide an illustration of the application of this suitability indicator approach.

10.4 Application

Data gathered from two eugraphic psychobiographical studies of South African figures, Dr Beyers Naudé (Burnell, 2013) and Helen Suzman (Nel, 2013) were employed in the application of the suitability indicators for the study of exemplary lives. Naudé

(1915–2004), born into the Afrikaner *elite* and poised to achieve great status within that community, became an important figure in the anti-apartheid struggle. As a minister of religion in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), he filled many leadership positions and was poised to achieve even higher leadership positions and status within the DRC and Afrikaner community (Bam, 1995; Clur, 1997; Naudé, 1995; Villa-Vicencio, 1985, 1995). Through a process of theological self-study and personal experiences, he realized that Apartheid, supported by both the DRC and government, was unjust, inhumane and not biblically justifiable. After Sharpeville,¹ Naudé spoke out against apartheid and was branded as a traitor by the majority of the Afrikaner community (Clur, 1997; Naudé, 1995; Ryan, 1990). Suzman (1917–2009) served a total of 36 years as a member of parliament during the apartheid era, 13 of which were as the only member of the Progressive Party (Strangways-Booth, 1976; Welsh, 2006). Saluted as a fighter for human rights and civil liberties, she won worldwide recognition for her role as an anti-apartheid activist and for her contribution towards the establishment of democracy in South Africa (Eglin, 2007; Rotberg, 2011). Her life has been described as “worthy of emulation by us all for its sheer tenacity, principle and commitment” (Taljaard, 2009, p. 2). The systematic approach to subject selection by means of suitability indicators is illustrated by comparing the data gathered from two previous studies, Naudé (Burnell, 2013) and Suzman (Nel, 2013):

- Firstly, the application of *Contextual Suitability Indicators* to their shared socio-historical context is shown by listing the indicators evident from a preliminary consultation of archival material. This included criteria for socio-historical significance, eminence sampling rules, as well as narrative markers of ‘good’ life stories.
- Secondly, the application of *Individual Suitability Indicators* for the two subjects is summarized and compared in table format. As the suitability indicators discussed in this chapter are intended for application in the pilot study phase, only singular examples from limited texts used in each study have been included in Table 10.1. These examples reflect the psychosocial generativity indicators, redemption narrative indicators, as well as heroism indicators as discussed in this chapter.

¹A 1966 Massacre in which 69 peaceful protestors were killed by police.

Contextual Suitability Indicators applied to the Lives of Anti-Apartheid Activists Beyers Naudé and Helen Suzman

1. Socio-historical significance:

Based on the preliminary consultation of archival material on the socio-historical context (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007); the anti-apartheid struggle qualifies as important, profound, affecting a large number of people, relevant and durable. The anti-apartheid movement resulted in change due to its far-reaching consequences over a considerable period of time and was revealing in its illumination of both longstanding issues in history and evolving concerns in present-day society. The context also met the criteria for intimate interest due to personal significance. Preliminary data suggested that eugraphic analysis of the lives of figures such as Naudé and Suzman could impart contemporary lessons for a continuously troubled South Africa tasked with a nation's reparation and reconciliation (Naudé, 1995; Ryan 1990; Strangways-Booth, 1976; Suzman, 1993).

2. Eminence selection:

Both Naudé and Suzman were considered eminent by experts in their fields (Mandela, 1993, 1995). They occupied special positions and received numerous major honors and accolades (Naudé, 1995; Ryan, 1990; Strangways-Booth, 1976; Suzman, 1993). Both enjoyed conspicuous representation as their lives and work are widely documented in archival material.

3. 'Good' life story markers:

The initial reading of archival sources for Naudé (Naudé, 1995; Ryan, 1990; Villa-Vicencio, 1995) and Suzman (Strangways-Booth, 1976; Suzman, 1993) suggested that their life stories reflected aspects of coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation as well as generative integration.

Table 10.1 Compared application of individual suitability indicators in the lives of Beyers Naudé and Helen Suzman

Individual suitability indicators	Beyers Naudé ^{a, b, c}	Helen Suzman ^{d, e}
(1) <i>Psychosocial Generativity Indicators</i>		
<i>Generative Precursors</i>	<p>Potential for <i>hope</i>: Naudé's mother Ada was centrally involved in the children's upbringing</p> <p>Potential for <i>will</i>: Despite a strict conservative upbringing, there were close family ties, especially with his brother. Naudé, a spirited child, was free to play and explore the rural surrounds</p> <p>Potential for <i>purpose</i>: Naudé's parents instilled in him a concern for greater social issues than merely family matters</p> <p>Potential for <i>competence</i>: Naudé was encouraged to learn how to play the piano and the children performed for company. He loved reading his older sister's English, Afrikaans and Dutch books she brought back from university</p> <p>Potential for <i>fidelity</i>: Naudé formed close friendships and was popular as indicated by his election to the Student Representative Council for three years. Through his relationship with Ilse, Naudé was introduced to a non-segregated, missionary society at her Genadendal home. This made him question some government policies. After graduation he entered into the seminary in preparation of his future career as minister of religion. Whilst at the seminary, two professors became important mentoring figures</p> <p>Potential for <i>love</i>: He participated in social activities at university, including the hiking club where he met Ilse, whom he was married to for 64 years. The couple had close friendships at the various congregations and Naudé fostered several close relationships with colleagues and like-minded individuals</p>	<p>Potential for <i>hope</i>: Suzman's aunt served as a central attachment figure and consistent and reliable caregiver during Helen's early childhood</p> <p>Potential for <i>will</i>: Young Suzman could explore her immediate environment autonomously and independently within the close-knit and secure family context</p> <p>Potential for <i>purpose</i>: Suzman's father was described as an appropriate model for conscience and responsibility who encouraged initiative</p> <p>Potential for <i>competence</i>: Her father adored her curiosity and desire to learn. Suzman achieved academic success, excelled at extramural activities and cooperated well with peers</p> <p>Potential for <i>fidelity</i>: Material indicated positive adolescent peer group relationships and a positive relationship with a guiding or mentoring figure who Suzman later credited with instilling certain values in her. Many of her lifelong values seemed to have developed during this time. A moratorium period during her early university years was followed by preparation for adult tasks related to occupational direction</p> <p>Potential for <i>love</i>: Evidence suggested new friendships during young adulthood, characterized by warmth and spontaneity. Her marriage constituted a committed partnership in which she enjoyed sharing interests and a pattern of living whilst retaining her independence</p>

(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

<p>Individual suitability indicators</p> <p><i>Middle Adulthood Generativity</i></p>	<p>Beyers Naudé^{a, b, c}</p> <p><i>Expansion of ego interests:</i> Naudé was a popular hardworking minister. He engaged with young ministers in a mentoring relationship. The couple often hosted weekly meetings with students to discuss matters of faith, especially during Naudé's student ministry years</p> <p><i>Adherence to irreversible obligations:</i> Naudé remained committed to his role as husband and father, minister and an advocate for his Christian beliefs</p> <p><i>Support of the psychosocial development of others:</i> He continued mentoring young ministers serving under-privileged non-White congregations. He founded the Circle of Brothers, an interracial group of ministers with the aim of bridging the racial divide in South African churches</p> <p><i>Concern for future generations:</i> Continued support of the anti-apartheid struggle even through the banning-order years, as he despaired for the future of the country if the government did not change its apartheid stance</p> <p><i>Interest in social institutions and the natural environment:</i> He founded the non-segregated Christian Institute to increase awareness, steer white South Africa away from the apartheid system and encourage denominational cooperation. He also engaged with fellow Afrikaners and the DRC to convince them of his anti-apartheid beliefs</p>	<p>Helen Suzman^{d, e}</p> <p><i>Expansion of ego interests:</i> Suzman had been politically active and achieved significant success in her career as a Member of Parliament. She sustained her involvement in student politics, extended her sense of responsibility to all South Africans without parliamentary representation and demonstrated care and concern towards political prisoners</p> <p><i>Adherence to irreversible obligations:</i> Suzman remained committed to her various roles as MP, mother, and wife</p> <p><i>Support of the psychosocial development of others:</i> She supported the psychosocial development of others in her roles as mother, lecturer and mentor to younger colleagues</p> <p><i>Concern for future generations:</i> Her career was characterized by fierce opposition to the practices of racial segregation and economic inequality. Her opposition to apartheid laws reflected a desire to contribute towards the development of future generations through the safeguarding of human rights</p> <p><i>Interest in social institutions and the natural environment:</i> She strived towards the creation of governmental systems that would promote justice, equality and liberty for all in South Africa. A sense of connectedness with nature was a continuous experience for her</p>
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(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

<p>Individual suitability indicators</p> <p><i>Late Adulthood: Grand-generativity</i></p>	<p>Beyers Naudé^{a, b, c}</p> <p><i>Balanced concern for self and others:</i> Naudé balanced numerous community concerns and efforts, with regular physical exercise, gardening and listening to music</p> <p><i>Balanced present and future concerns:</i> Naudé participated in secret talks abroad between the ANC and Afrikaners attempting to address the difficult political climate in the country</p> <p><i>Accepted care:</i> Due to health problems, he was eventually confined to a wheelchair and depended more on Ilse and others for care</p> <p><i>Review of past caring actions:</i> He reflected on his commitment to both his faith and the anti-apartheid movement: "I do not argue that all I did was 'good' 'right' or 'of God' ... I simply say that I would have been more guilty if I did nothing. The ultimate judgement I must leave up to God" (Villa-Vicencio, 1995, p. 30)</p> <p><i>Generative confirmation:</i> Naudé received national and international accolades and recognition nationally which confirmed of the enormity of his impact in South African history</p>	<p>Helen Suzman^{d, e}</p> <p><i>Balanced concern for self and others:</i> Material suggested continued commitment, involvement and concern for the community at large, as well as a high degree of self-care</p> <p><i>Balanced present and future concerns:</i> Concern for the future was demonstrated through continued generative actions</p> <p><i>Accepted care:</i> She maintained close and caring relationships with her daughters and close friends and accepted caregiving when her health deteriorated</p> <p><i>Review of past caring actions:</i> She demonstrated the ability to integrate her past caring actions into a coherent narrative and an acceptance of the life lived</p> <p><i>Generative confirmation:</i> The public recognition of Helen's efforts through various awards and accolades served as acknowledgement of the importance of her life's work</p>
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(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

<p>Individual suitability indicators</p>	<p>Beyers Naudé^{a, b, c}</p>	<p>Helen Suzman^{d, e}</p>
<p>(2) <i>Redemption Narrative Indicators</i></p>		
	<p><i>Early life advantage:</i> He was born into the Afrikaner elite and poised to advance to very high positions within the Afrikaner community.^{c,f}</p> <p><i>Sensitivity to the suffering of others:</i> As a child, Naudé witnessed his parents assisting many Afrikaners during the Great Depression and it greatly impressed him. Later on, he witnessed the suffering apartheid caused in non-European communities in South Africa</p> <p><i>Moral framework:</i> Naudé lived according to a set of unwavering moral values underpinned by his faith. This framework supported his anti-apartheid views and beliefs</p> <p><i>Transformation of negative scenes:</i> In reaction to his anti-apartheid views, the government issued Naudé with a banning order. What he thought would be lean years under the severe restrictions of the banning order, were in fact seven of the most enriching years of his life</p> <p><i>Pro-social goals:</i> His contributions to the negotiations that lead to the birth of a democratic dispensation in South Africa, to the benefit of future generations</p>	<p><i>Early life advantage:</i> She noted early life advantages in the importance her father had placed on her education and the instruction she received at school</p> <p><i>Sensitivity to the suffering of others:</i> She acknowledged that her “knowledge of the Jewish experience of persecution heightened my awareness of the evils of race discrimination (Suzman, 1993, p. 10)</p> <p><i>Moral framework:</i> She took an uncompromising stand on matters of principle in order to fight not only for civil rights, but also against racial discrimination</p> <p><i>Transformation of negative scenes:</i> She attributed her “strong spirit of independence” (Suzman, 1993, p. 8) to having to grow up without her mother</p> <p><i>Pro-social goals:</i> She noted that her goal was the protection of democratic values for the benefit of all South Africans</p>
<p>(3) <i>Heroism</i></p>		
<p><i>Pro-social hero functions</i></p>	<p>Once his anti-apartheid views were solidified he became unwavering and resolute in his anti-apartheid stance and support of the anti-apartheid struggle</p>	<p>Suzman was described as uncompromising on matters of principle. The protection of individual human rights was a driving force in her battle against Apartheid</p>
<p><i>Great eight traits</i></p>	<p>The following are some phrases used to describe Naudé: compassionate, resilient intelligent, charismatic, sincere, charming, determined and well respected</p>	<p>She was described as charismatic, intelligent, determined, resilient, well respected, caring, steadfast, trustworthy and unwavering</p>
<p>(continued)</p>		

Table 10.1 (continued)

<p>Individual suitability indicators</p>	<p>Beyers Naudé^{a, b, c}</p>	<p>Helen Suzman^{d, e}</p>
<p><i>Big Heroism</i></p>	<p>His conviction that apartheid was unbiblical, came at a very high price: He was vilified and rejected by the majority of the Afrikaner community and family members. He lost his job, was defrocked, threatened, persecuted and jailed. He served a 7-year banning order, his wife and children were victimized, and his home was under surveillance</p>	<p>The material suggest that Suzman displayed lifelong Heroism, as her anti-apartheid stance entailed personal sacrifices and risks, such as the constant threat of letter bombs, living away from her family for extended periods, risking her career during disagreements with her party and enduring verbal abuse from National Party members and right-wing organizations</p>
<p><i>Moral compass</i></p>	<p>Naudé displayed <i>heroic imagination</i> in his conviction that apartheid was unjust and after Sharpeville felt compelled to act on it. He also displayed <i>moral courage</i> when he opposed apartheid knowing there would be severe backlash from the Church, government and his community “It is not an easy thing to leave the warmth of the Afrikaner family within which conformity brings rewards, acclamation and support. Once the moral and theological questions were posed, however, it was difficult to accept all that one was expected to condone to remain within the inner circle” (Villa-Vicencio 1995, p. 22)</p>	<p>Suzman’s <i>heroic imagination</i> manifested in her split from the United Party based on a fundamental moral principle regarding racial equality. She displayed <i>moral courage</i> in continuing her anti-apartheid efforts in spite of the personal cost to her. “I am thoroughly unpopular...but I couldn’t care less because I know I am on solid ground...” (Strangways-Booth 1976, p. 70)</p>

^aNaudé (1995)

^bRyan (1990)

^cVilla-Vicencio (1995)

^dStrangways-Booth (1976)

^eSuzman (1993)

10.5 Conclusion

Whilst the selection of a subject relatively unknown to the researcher would limit possible researcher bias, it poses additional challenges to the psychobiographer. A suitability indicator approach was proposed to address these associated subject selection challenges. This approach includes both contextual and individual indicators of eugraphic suitability to distinguish exemplary lives from a pool of eminent figures. The chapter concluded with the application of the suitability indicators approach to subjects from two studies categorized as eugraphic psychobiographies. This application confirmed the potential of this proposed suitability approach to identify exemplary subjects for, particularly, eugraphic study.

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Chapter 11

Less Is More but More Is Different: Distinction Between High Resolution and Low Resolution Psychobiography



Ágnes Bálint

Abstract In this chapter I place the issue of psychobiography into a broad epistemological context. Mobilizing some principles of cognitive psychology, phenomenology and hermeneutics, I contemplate on the problem of cognizing and depicting the *other person*. I hope to provide psychobiographers with new methodological considerations, calling the attention to some underlying cognitive processes in forming an authentic picture of their subjects. Introducing the metaphor of digital image resolution, I make a distinction between high and low resolution biographies. In case of high resolution psychobiographies biographers rely mainly on the bottom-up constructive processes, ambitioning the highest “sustainable” level of detailedness to get to a preferably precise depiction of their subject. It is justifiable whenever a progress is in focus and when it holds the promise of a different outcome than the previous works. Low resolution psychobiography, on the other hand, is narrowed in terms of content and focus. Details are not relevant unless they serve the aim of outlining a meaningful picture. Biographers exploit the potentials of the underlying top-down cognitive processes to identify patterns in the individual’s life course, personality or oeuvre, which nobody did before. To the analogue of statistical hypothesis testing we can distinguish between type I and type II errors in the practice of psychobiographical interpretation. Type I error occurs when insufficiently cautious biographers “discover” patterns that do not exist. Type II error occurs when biographers fail to notice evidently present patterns. I conclude that the image resolution metaphor is helpful to make a reasonable distinction between the two types of psychobiographies (high and low resolution types). It is always the biographers’ competence to choose the appropriate level of resolution which best serves their aims.

Keywords Top-down processes · Bottom-up processes · Phenomenological operation mode · Hermeneutical operation mode · Resolution · Psychobiography

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11.1 Introduction

Psychobiographers tend to be occupied with their subjects' internal acts and they usually do a good job in understanding and reconstruction. But rather little is known about how biographers manage it. In my chapter I would like to find out the underlying cognitive processes that support biographers to authentically cognize the *other person*. Since it is in some sense an epistemological question, I will involve other than just cognitive psychological aspects in my train of argumentation.

Cognition is a task which goes beyond the cognizant person's powers and abilities since we are supposed to conceptualize an infinite and constantly changing universe. Perception is acute only within certain domains and is subject to illusory distortions. Relevance realization, which accounts for intelligent functioning and vice versa, is one of the hardest challenges for our brain. It means the task for filtering out meaningful structures from the infinite flow of information and distinguishing the relevant from the irrelevant ones (Irving & Vervaeke, 2016; Vervaeke & Ferraro, 2013). As for cognition, no perfect outcome is guaranteed, rather a fragmentary, distorted and an insufficient one. I suggest, however, that the potentials of human cognition can be extended in some altered states of consciousness when we shift to, as I will call, the phenomenological and/or the hermeneutical operation modes of the mind. These states allow an unbiased, non-reflective way to contemplate on the subject and might significantly contribute to an authentic understanding and interpretation.

I argue that a lot depends on what types of cognitive processes psychobiographers rely on while they are preparing their work. The nature of the preferred processes, after all, determine the level of analysis, that I will call resolution. One way of approach will result in a high resolution type of psychobiography, the other in a low resolution one. My intention is to provide psychobiographers with new methodological considerations and inspire them for further reflections on how they do what they do.

11.2 Rational Cognition and Beyond

11.2.1 *The Two Directions in Cognition*

The cognizing mind has two basic modes of operations: a top-down way of scanning and a bottom-up way of construction. These are two opponent processes which complement each other so that they efficiently promote us to filter in relevant pieces of information from the environment and construct our own reality representations. The terms naming the directions of the processes are somewhat arbitrary. They come from the common image that the cognizing mind floats above reality. That is why the process by which the mind scans the landscape "bellow" is called top-down,

and the one that sends messages about this landscape “up” to the mind is called the bottom-up.

The top-down scanning means that we (mainly unconsciously) look for something that “should be there” or at least “might be there”. Our perception is sharpened to Gestalts, that is, to meaningful wholes. We consider only those pieces of reality relevant that appear to be meaningful. We keep searching for known structures: patterns, words, tunes, motifs, symptoms, etc. Humans possess an inborn expectation that meaningful wholes are present and can be detected either outside or inside. During top-down scanning we notice, recognize and make sense. People tend to spot figures in the clouds, melodies in music, and interpret the random movements of animated geometric forms as persecution (Heider & Simmel, 1944). Despite the arbitrary and often erroneous nature of this form of cognition we benefit a lot: it reduces uncertainty and presents us with a homely feeling in the constantly changing environment.

The bottom-up mechanism on the other hand is the manifestation of our readiness and ability to create new structures and new relevant wholes (Gestalts). It filters out and identifies the rules, the correlations and the causal relations from the infinite flow of information. According to Hogarth (2001) we are more successful in identifying correlations than causal relations. One of the royal ways (among many others) of gaining new knowledge is implicit learning which is an unintentional and usually unconscious way of cognition. Filtering, however, does not explain the whole phenomenon. The flow of information consists of randomly congested potential patterns which may result in the emergence of new meaningful structures in the mind. Bottom-up cognition, thus, though it is also a rich source of errors, is the motor and sufficer of our thirst for knowledge, and as such, it is a distinguished tool for conquering the unknown.

11.2.2 Phenomenological Operation Mode

The cognizing person is not necessarily rational and it is even helpful for them to transcend rationality time to time. Let me present two further, non-rational “operation modes” that may significantly contribute to gain (and then depict) a more acute and authentic picture of the other person.

The first mode is called phenomenological. This is a perspective, an approach to reality, rather than learning or thinking meant in the conventional sense. For biographers, who have already studied the available sources deeply enough, it is expedient occasionally to shift to phenomenological “operation mode”. It is a kind of a contemplative, unbiased attitude. In cognitive terms it can be described as the temporary “turn off” both the top-down and the metacognitive processes. Metaprocesses (monitoring and control) usually account for the maintenance of the optimal functioning of the ongoing cognitive processes but in certain cases (such as creative activity, flow or the above-mentioned processes) they can trammel information processing (Bálint, 2017).

This results in the suspension of rational functions. In case we manage it, we get to an imaginative, contemplative, meditative kind of state of consciousness. Technically it means the temporary suspension of the prefrontal cognitive control functions which results in the disinhibition of the other lobes and allows a non-rational kind of functioning for the mind. It can occur both spontaneously and in various induced ways. (The exact identification of the above mentioned altered states of consciousness is beside the point. Neither the reference readings are steady in this respect.) Now we have the chance to spot things that we fail to notice in our common rational “operation mode”. The word “phenomenon” derives from the Greek verb “φαίνω”, which means “shine out”, “manifest itself”, “be uncovered”. Contemplating on our subject or their doings, new concatenations and correspondences might be revealed, the relevance of previously ignored events, persons, places, dates or other facts could be realized. Things “shining out” this way tend to prove crucially relevant so it’s worth paying more attention to them by looking for an analogue, a reason, a consequence, a meaning or an impact. The newly uncovered content might even detour the research to new directions or at least gives it a fresh impulse.

Biographers, however, should never suspend caution. It is evident that all the things manifesting themselves for me, are relevant for me, so this is a deeply subjective relation. It is reasonable to admit it as well as to reflect on and elaborate it on an emotional level. This is what Erikson (1958) calls the “principle of Disciplined Subjectivity.” Still, biographers might take the wrong way anyway. The increment of the biographers’ phenomenological attitude is that a veritable, exciting and previously unnoticed phenomenon is uncovered before them: they can spot what is relevant for themselves in the topic or in the other person. This revelation might lie behind the often very strong (and rationally unexplainable) emotional bond that ties biographers to their subjects from that time on.

11.2.3 *Hermeneutical Operation Mode*

There is another “operation mode” which can also be useful for those who ambition to know the *other person*. Let us call it the hermeneutical mode. The precondition to it, similarly to the phenomenological mode, is an altered state of consciousness but in this case the top-down processes are allowed to work untrammled, as long as they stay in the background, merely the metacognitive functioning should be suspended. The contemplation focuses primarily on the other person.

The hermeneutical attitude cannot be better described than Gadamer (2004) did when speaking about the process of interpreting texts. For our purposes let us replace the word “text” with the term “*other person*” in the following paragraph to see how well these ideas suit for the process of knowing people, too.

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared

for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Gadamer, 2004, 271–272)

The increment of the biographers' hermeneutical attitude is a peculiar openness to accept and understand the *other person*. They become capable to spot and learn someone else's perspective which is necessarily different from their own. *The other person* reveals himself in his own alterity.

11.3 The Level of Analysis

11.3.1 *Choosing the Perspective*

When it comes to methodological issues, biographers, like Levi (2000), Kövér (2002, 2017), Röckelein (2002) and Depkat (2014) incline to quote Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) idea about the Illusionary nature of writing a biography. Bourdieu is dubious about the existence of coherent life stories and questions the validity of biographies which attribute such a story to an individual. He ultimately disputes the possibility to construct a coherent picture. Others, like France and Clair (2002) think that biographers do a heroic, don-quixotic job which has a dubious outcome. But (psycho)biographies certainly do exist. How can something what is impossible be made?

A great deal depends on what perspective we take and what scale we use. Saying that writing a biography is beyond possibility is like saying that it is impossible to clean the flat. We never can do a perfect job: there will always be some unremoved dust, hair or bacteria left. Cleaning, furthermore, is pointless, if we consider that the house will be pulled down one day and even our planet will perish sooner or later. This kind of argumentation does not only cool initiatives but it is also invalid. Cleaning is done for the purposes of the present and it must be just as thorough as necessary to feel the flat clean according to our own standards. As the purpose of the cleaning is not to complete the task once for all, (psycho)biographies are not to answer all the relevant issues. It's no need to perform the task at the microscopic level neither for the cleaner nor the biographer. Let me demonstrate what I mean by the choice of the level of analysis via the metaphor of image resolution.¹ Just as images are characterized by low or high resolution, biographies differ in the level of detailedness and data wealth—as well as in size, consequently. The more detailed an image is the more acute it is. On the level of experience: it is more vivid. The same applies also for mental images. Acuteness can never be perfect—it is not guaranteed

¹The metaphoric use of resolution was inspired by Jordan B. Peterson's video lectures. <https://www.youtube.com/user/JordanPetersonVideos/videos>.

by any level of detailedness. Details, however, might prevent us from serious blunders during the reconstruction and interpretation of a life.

In the following I will make a distinction between high and low resolution psychobiographies and trace their crucial features. This distinction is a result of an effort to figure out what makes psychobiographies so different from one another in terms of composition and focus. Finally, I found the notion of “resolution” very helpful to identify the variable which underlies to these differences. The descriptions of the two kinds of psychobiographies below are based on my experiences gained meanwhile reading and working on psychobiographies, as well as on my theoretical speculations on psychobiography as a genre rather than a method (Bálint, 2012, 2014).

11.3.2 High Resolution Psychobiography

On one terminal of our imaginary scale the high resolution psychobiography takes place. In an ideal case (which is not likely) it is a “never ending story” and includes all the substantial details. These details embrace not only the life events but the motifs behind them, as well as the interdependencies of life work and life course and furthermore, the transgenerational effects. In the light of all these data biographers try to (re)construct the subject focusing on his personality. Their ambition is to find and involve in all the available sources and organize the life course data into chronological order so that there should no gaps remain between them. This is, of course an impossible mission almost in the Bordieuian sense. Plenty of high resolution psychobiographical projects prove to be unfinished and unfinishable. A psychobiographer’s life can be too short to authentically reconstruct another person’s life and personality. Indeed, psychobiographers’ ambition is not creating a “never ending story”, but, relying on their expertise, they carefully select the relevant pieces from the infinite mass of data, those which serve the purpose of putting the whole picture together in the best possible way. Psychobiographers aim at the highest (but still “sustainable”) level of detailedness to depict an acute, preferably precise (that is, historically and psychologically authentic) picture. The advantage of a high resolution image is that it can be magnified so that it does not lose any from its acuteness and authenticity (at least within some physical limits). The metaphor applies only to pixel graphic digital images. It would be reasonable to consider whether the metaphor of the vector graphic image lead to more fruitful ideas.

In the case of high resolution psychobiography, the bottom-up type of construction, in the course of which structures (meaningful wholes) emerge from randomly flowing elements, plays a substantial role. Here I primarily mean the ongoing self-organizing processes in the biographer’s mind, which move toward complexity. Compared to this the completed work is secondary, though it truly reflects on the mental path the biographer wandered along. The emergent nature of the new qualities is an inherent property of any accumulated material—or it can be viewed as a spontaneous product of the complex structure organization (Bar-Yam, 2002; Mitchell, 2009). The underlying cognitive processes are due to the biographer’s phenomenological “oper-

ation mode” in the course of which new, promisingly relevant Gestalts (fresh, often surprising interpretational options) are revealed, appointing the further direction of the research. The biographer’s hermeneutical attitude through which he can spot alterities in the *other person* also contributes to the emergence of the new qualities. These emergent Gestalts present the researcher with plenty of insights.

In the meantime, of course, biographers operate with the opposite direction (top-down) cognitive processes as well. According to their knowledge, preconceptions, biases and expectations, psychobiographers keep incessantly searching for structures (like interrelations, correlations, patterns, etc.) that they suspect probable. The higher expertise they possess, the more successfully they can detect, point out, analyze and interpret each additional meaningful structure. Experts, furthermore, are also intuitive: besides the tiresome and relatively slow conscious search time to time they are inclined to pull a fat rabbit out of their cylinder.

Writing a high resolution psychobiography is justifiable whenever the progress in (personality) development is in focus. High resolution allows the exhaustive follow up and documentation of any processes. Psychobiographers can thoroughly analyze some relevant details (such as mother-child relationship, mate choice, vocation choice, crucial decisions, etc.). It also offers an opportunity to elaborate the subject’s social network. Biographers can trace the historical, social and cultural background well. Artistic works, letters or even dreams can be analyzed. Reflections on the authenticity of the sources or on the popping up contradictions can be made. Biographers can collide different interpretations and share their doubts and intuitions. They can also reflect on their research methods as well as their professional and subjective attitudes.

Writing a high resolution psychobiography is worth only when it fills a gap or holds the promise of a different similar works than the previous similar works (scientifically better confirmed, conveys some novelty, etc.). The aim of synthesis creation or reinterpretation can also inspire psychobiographers. And there is one more reason for writing a high resolution psychobiography, that is, the biographers’ subjective interest. The first and foremost function of high resolution psychobiography is to answer some topic-relevant scientific questions. Psychobiographers ambition the deeper understanding and knowing of individuals: they want to identify the unique features, meanwhile they are interested in the similarities as well. In case of creative individuals, they search for the sources of creativity, try to trace the preconditions of creation, and point out the prerequisites of great ideas. Biographers might answer other sorts of psychologically relevant questions, such as where an unelaborated trauma or a badly made decision leads, how late bloomers or early closers manage it, how do social relations change in extreme circumstances—the list can infinitely be continued.

The piled up knowledge on individual life courses and personalities can serve as a test for the validation of psychological theories. Through the analysis of individual lives new theoretical ideas might emerge which contribute to the increase of our psychological knowledge (Bálint, 2014; Elms, 1994; Kőváry, 2014, 2017). Concerning a broader community of the readers, such as the professionals, an individual psychobiography might start a new discourse, debunk myths and misconceptions, pose

new relevant questions. A series of psychobiographies can direct the attention to the fruitfulness of studying human nature through biographies.

High resolution psychobiographies present their non-professional readers with new psychological knowledge and insights. They offer the readers a sight-seeing tour over the landscape the biographers wandered through and make them spot the meaningful patterns that would not have been revealed for them without this guidance. Readers get initiation into the secrets of the psyche as well as the methods of psychological thinking. They also gain a well utilizable self-knowledge surplus. Last, let me mention that biographers themselves benefit a lot from their research work. Besides the increase in their professional and self-knowledge, something unexpected might happen to them time to time: they are touched in their humanity by the *other person*. Their dialogue with their subject can last till the end of their lives.

11.3.3 *Low Resolution Psychobiography*

On the other terminal of our imaginary scale the low resolution psychobiography takes place. Compared to the high resolution one it is narrowed in terms of content and in focus as well.

Biographers in this case aim to answer a small number of concrete questions, verify conjectures, test hypotheses and point out interrelations. They select some noteworthy life events and life turns to elaborate on. The careful selection from the ocean of data is based on utility—data which support the answer to the research question are considered the only relevant. Details are not accumulated unless they serve the aim to outline a meaningful picture in a reasonable short time. Low resolution psychobiographies less rely on the bottom-up construction processes. Their greatest merit is the exploitation of the potentials underlying the top-down cognitive processes.

Low resolution psychobiographies are written by professionals who are masters of (personality) psychology and can apply their extended knowledge in a creative way either in therapy or in research work—that is, in the field of knowing people. Psychobiographers turn their attention to and investigate their subjects equipped with personality psychology theories as well as broad general psychological knowledge and intuitiveness. They search for and tend to find peculiar patterns. Furthermore, they certify their presuppositions on the presence of some meaningful structures and put the whole picture together casually. Technically speaking, these biographers apply their professional knowledge to sort out some dilemmas, koans or paradoxes. They choose issues that are suitable to prove their conceptions.

It would be misleading, however, to think that the selection of topics or the application of some scientific theories are due only to routine procedures. The biographers of low resolution psychobiographies do not reach the peak in the course of working on the text but somewhat before it. The creative product is the idea itself. The necessary precondition to an idea like this is an aha-experience. It is the biographer who first realizes the relevance of the relation between a theoretical statement and a certain

aspect of his subject. There is no formula for this and because of its very nature, one cannot force it. The picture gained this way is usually surprising and inspiring. It presents the reader with an insight as well. The most significant increment of low resolution psychobiographies is the novelty of interpretation. Truly creative biographers keep identifying patterns (such as interrelations, analogies, symptoms, peculiar behavior) in the individual's life course, personality or oeuvre, that nobody had before. Moreover, low resolution psychobiographies offer suitable conditions for methodological experiments as well as for innovations.

In what cases is it worthwhile to write low resolution psychobiographies? The simple answer is: when one has a good idea. A somewhat more precise answer is: insofar as biographers would like to share their insights with the public. An insight is relevant when it can be interpreted within the context of a valid scientific paradigm. Adopting this, we unfortunately exclude the ideas which anticipate a new paradigm and this might be a real loss for science, but, on the other hand, it prevents us from false aha-experiences. False insights are frequent, and moreover, it is hard to admit our mistake and put the whole thing away. In this case expertise can be helpful: experts are mostly capable to judge the truth value of their new insights and let even "nice" ideas go.

The primary function of low resolution psychobiographies is to enrich science with insights which prove helpful for answering theoretical questions and verifying propositions. Low resolution psychobiographies provide an evidence how much the analysis of individual lives can contribute to the creation of scientific theories. The novelty of these works is guaranteed and in most cases their scientific significance is indisputable.

For the professional audience low resolution psychobiographies can be inspiring. The theories or the subjects highlighted by the biographers might motivate the representatives of the professional community for further researches, exchanges of view and debates. The non-professionals, who involve in the context of a biography do not only gain insights but accumulate further psychological knowledge and increase their self-knowledge. Even biographers benefit a lot from their completed missions. Beyond the pleasant experience of creation, the enhanced knowledge can also be the source of pleasure for them (Bálint, 2014; Kóváry, 2017). In addition, they can reveal something about themselves which is very subjective: they disclose what really occupies them.

11.3.4 The Relation Between the Two Types of Psychobiographies

The metaphor of image resolution, though it proved to be fruitful, does not entirely apply to psychobiography. In the case of a digital photo we prefer high resolution unless the smallest file size is expected. Low resolution implies low quality, wretchedness. The above analyses did not intend to suggest associations like that. For the sake

of further comparison let me introduce a new metaphor, this time from the domain of literature.

The relation between of the two types of psychobiographies is analogous to the relation between the novel and the short story (Bálint, 2014). High resolution psychobiographies, just as novels, are capable to encompass the whole complexity of a (either real or fictional) world. Novels can handle the protagonists' full life course from the cradle to the grave, meanwhile tracing the social, cultural and intellectual environment. The narrative toolset of high resolution psychobiographies is identical to that of the novels. There is, however, a considerable difference in the proportion of the reflective sort of texts, in favor of psychobiographies. The crucial difference, however, is, that psychobiographies are not based on fiction.

Low resolution psychobiographies are analogous to short stories, where the protagonist gets into focus due to a particular life event, trait or doing—rarely due to common things that could happen to anyone. In low resolution psychobiographies, just as in short stories, there is always something dramatic: subjects/protagonists must commit themselves within a reasonable time. Readers can witness the crucial turns in their fate and get much closer to them meanwhile more deeply understanding their humanity. Low resolution psychobiographies do something very similar with their own tools.

11.4 Errors in Cognizing and Depicting the *Other Person*

As I pointed out in the beginning, human cognition (either individual or social) can never be perfect and precise, due to our limited sensory capacities and reasoning abilities, as well as our common perceptual illusions and distortions. Our everyday rational consciousness also confines our abilities to cognize. Psychobiographers are humans with all the constraints on human cognition regardless of how extended their expertise and knowledge are. As any other people, they are also inclined to think in stereotypes, make hasty judgements, overestimate certain ideas, fail to transcend biases, and make mistakes. Their culture, socialization, world view, value system, commitments and professional beliefs, which prove to be so useful in everyday and professional life, can easily turn into impediments when it comes to make their “hermeneutical consciousness” operate with optimal openness to know the *other person*.

To the analogue of statistical hypothesis testing we can distinguish between type I error (error of the first kind) and type II error (error of the second kind) in the practice of psychobiographical interpretations. Type I error occurs when biographers are not sufficiently prepared, aware or reflective when “discovering” patterns that do not really exist. A proper example for this is Freud's (1982, 1989) essay on Leonardo da Vinci, in which most of his system of arguments proved untenable since Freud had been operating with a mistranslated term. As Vikár (1982) pointed out in his introduction to the Hungarian translation, Freud relied on a German translation of da Vinci's diary which interpreted the original Italian word “nibio” as “vulture”, instead

of “kite”. Arbitrary sort of interpretations as well as the efforts to reduce everything to a single cause and the ambition to diagnose fall in the same camp.

Type II error occurs when biographers fail to notice evidently present patterns. It is difficult to find an expressive example for this type of error, not because biographers commit it that infrequently but because practically no one can control it. It can be detected only in those cases when another similarly prepared biographer starts studying the same subject and compares his or her results to the previous ones. Let me take an example from my own research (Bálint, 2012) on Mihály Babits, the famous 20th century Hungarian poet, writer and essayist and his wife, Sophie Török. The young lady had low literacy but a strong ambition to get into a higher social class via marriage, that many other women shared at that time (Valachi 1998, Borgos, 2007). When reading through the present day biographies about the Babits couple (Borgos, 2007; Borgos & Szilágyi, 2011; Rába, 1983; Sipos, 2008) I found that biographers who tended appreciate the works of both members of the couple had a blind spot on the specific game the couple’s friends played in the background. The main rule of this game that I identified (Bálint, 2012) was that in the circles of the Babits couple Sophie Török had to be acknowledged as a talented poet and writer irrespective of her actual achievement. The friends (usually talented young poets and writes) willingly accepted to write down and say only compliments publicly on Mrs. Babits’ work—and their articles serve as justifications for her talent in the 21st century. In exchange for their loyalty, Babits, the poet monarch devoted time, attention and unique publication opportunities to his friends. On the other hand, those who refused to take part in the game (as László Németh did), were “excommunicated” of the circles. A true critique about Sophie Török was uttered only in personal notes. However, the close friends of the couple, as reported in their memoirs, openly discussed their totally different private opinions among themselves (Illyés, 1986; Németh, 1977; Szabó, 1974). To sum up, in this case, I faced a situation in which the written sources, that are commonly used up by present-day biographers proved untrustworthy. The previous biographers ignored the notes these people wrote privately so they failed to notice the game the couple’s friends played publicly.

Both types of errors mislead the interpretation and suggest an inappropriate picture of the subject. Biographers who fail to be careful enough miss the goal which psychobiography is supposed to fulfill.

11.5 The Two Slogans

In the beginning of this chapter I pointed out how the two main ways of cognition (“normal operation mode”) lead us to a better understanding of reality and the *other person* imbedded in it. I added that in certain other states of consciousness things might “shine through” for us (phenomenological operation mode) as well as we can unbiasedly contemplate on otherness (hermeneutical operation mode). Intuition and insight can also meaningfully contribute to the efficiency of our cognition. I discussed the benefits of all these ways of human cognition for the psychobiographers.

Introducing the metaphor of image resolution seems helpful to make a reasonable distinction between the two types of psychobiographies (high and low resolution types) that differ in composition and focus. I rendered the different predominant ways of cognition in the course of their construction. I argued that both types are justifiable since they fulfill distinguishable functions, pursue distinct goals and generate further knowledge in different ways. It is always the biographers' competence to choose the appropriate level of resolution that best serves their aims.

To sum up what we have learnt about two types of psychobiographies I propose the following slogans. What applies the best to low resolution psychobiographies is: "Less is more." As for high resolution psychobiographies: "More is different."²

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²I borrowed this slogan from Anderson (1972).

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Chapter 12

The Use of Unusual Psychological Theories in Psychobiography: A Case Study and Discussion



Carol du Plessis and Christopher R. Stones

Abstract This chapter argues for the use of ‘unusual’ theories in psychobiographical research through the presentation of a case study. Historically, psychobiographical research has made use of the work of psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, and developmental theorists, while more recent psychobiographical approaches have preferred more modern, empirically based theories. However, over reliance on a few theories within psychobiographical research creates the possibility for narrow explanations of complex lives. Given the proliferation of theoretical models in psychology the current use of theory barely scratches the surface of available explanatory paradigms. This chapter argues for the value of casting the explanatory net wider, and for the inclusion of more psychological theories in psychobiographical work. Using a psychobiographical case study, the chapter illustrates how a ‘forgotten’ psychological theory (Tomkins in *Personality structure in the life course*. Springer, New York, pp 152–217, 1992) can serve as a useful explanatory paradigm for a complex religious figure. The case study focuses on Gordon Hinckley (b. 1910, d. 2008), the fifteenth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (commonly referred to as the Mormon Church), who remains a prominent figure in contemporary Mormonism and played a key role in the rapid growth and increasingly positive public profile of the Religion throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Using Tomkins’ script theory in conjunction with a psychobiographical method and the analysis of data gathered from published speeches, this study explores Hinckley’s personality structure and identifies three core psychological scripts.

Keywords Gordon Hinckley · Psychobiography · Script theory · Silvan Tomkins · Latter Day Saints · Mormonism

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12.1 Introduction

The application of psychological theory as a lens through which to understand an individual life is a distinguishing feature of psychobiography, and marks it as distinct from other biographical and historical endeavours. Indeed, psychobiography is best understood as a case study based idiographic method (Kóváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015a; Runyan, 2005; Schultz, 2005a) that aims to use psychological theory to understand the lives and personalities of exemplary individuals. The decision concerning which psychological theory to use within a psychobiography is a crucial one, as selecting an appropriate theory allows for meaningful interpretation and the production of a high quality psychobiography. Given the importance of theory selection in psychobiography it is unsurprising that almost all guidelines for psychobiography incorporate discussions regarding the selection and application of psychological theory (see, for example, du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 2005; Ponterotto, 2015b). The general consensus amongst these authors is that theory selection often involves pragmatic choices and is often “determined as much by a researcher’s familiarity with a specific theorist as it is by the inherent suitability of the theory” (du Plessis, 2017, p. 225). This has resulted in certain theories gaining prominence within the psychobiographical oeuvre.

Psychobiography has its roots in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories and these continue to be prominent in psychobiographical studies, although classical Freudian interpretations have largely been replaced by the work of modern psychodynamic theorists such as Winnicott, Kernberg, and Kohut (Ponterotto, 2014, 2015b; Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, & Cheung, 2017; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). In addition, developmental theorists such as Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson are frequently used as they allow for the discussion of adult development. A study by Ponterotto et al. (2017) found that 74% of psychobiographical doctoral dissertations completed in North America between 1978 and 2014 made use of these theories.

Despite the continuing prominence of a small number of theories, there have increasingly been calls by psychobiographical researchers for the expansion of the types of psychological theories used in psychobiographical research. The reasons for these calls vary between researchers. For some, expansion of the range of theories used and the use of multiple theories reduces the risk of deterministic conclusions being drawn (Ponterotto, 2018), a hallmark of poor psychobiographical research. For others, including Dan McAdams (2005), the emphasis is on including more empirically validated theories to enhance the quality of the psychobiographical endeavor (Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Whatever the reason, there is broad consensus that the incorporation of more psychological theories into the psychobiography ‘toolbox’ will enhance the quality and interpretive power of psychobiographies.

Against this backdrop, the main body of this chapter presents a case study illustrating the use of an ‘unusual’ psychological theory, Tomkins’ (1992) script theory, to provide a psychological portrayal of Gordon Hinckley. This is a theory that has been largely forgotten by main stream psychology, but one that has gained some traction as an explanatory paradigm within psychobiography (see Ponterotto, 2015a;

Ponterotto et al., 2017), and was used successfully by Rae Carlson in an earlier study (see Carlson, 1988). Following the presentation of the case study the chapter concludes with some suggestions and recommendations for the inclusion of ‘unusual’ theories in psychobiographical research.

12.2 Gordon Hinckley and Mormonism—A Case Study

The Mormon Church is one of the fastest growing religious denominations in the world (Lawton, 2012; Stark, 1996) and forms a major part of the global contemporary religious landscape. Founded in the 1800s by the charismatic Joseph Smith, the organisation has experienced considerable expansion and official membership figures now exceed 14 million and continue to increase (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints [LDS], 2015). Much of this expansion took place in the mid to late twentieth century (Allen & Cowen, 1972; Shippo, 2007), when membership figures increased rapidly, from just over 1 million in 1945, to over 11 million at the turn of the century (LDS, 2015). During this time period the organisation has also managed a successful transition of its public image, from its initial positioning as a maverick religion characterised by the controversial practice of polygamy during the nineteenth century, into a position where it is now viewed as a fairly mainstream conservative religion embodying a deeply moral approach to living (Baker & Campbell, 2010; Beaman, 2001; Bowman, 2011; Mauss, 2011).

One of the key figures identified with this transition in late twentieth century Mormonism is Gordon Bitner Hinckley (b. 1910; d. 2008), the fifteenth president of the Mormon Church. Hinckley spent most of his adult life formally employed by the Mormon Church and was primarily responsible for finding new ways to communicate Mormon doctrine to both Mormons and non-Mormons in such a manner as to allow for the increased public positive perception and acceptance of Mormonism as a mainstream religious movement (see Carlson, 2008; Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). During the 1980s and early 1990s Hinckley assumed de facto leadership of the religion due to the ill-health of many of the church’s leaders and in 1995 he was officially appointed as the fifteenth Mormon president. Hinckley’s legacy with respect to the Mormon religion relates to his extensive travel, aimed at improving the public image of the Mormon Church, as well as his willingness to publicly talk about the church, appearing on television shows such as *60 min* (1996) and *Larry King Live* (1996). Although Hinckley is frequently referred to and referenced throughout Mormon literature (such as in the Mormon academic publication, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*) this frequent discussion does not equate to an investigative and evaluative stance regarding the personality of Hinckley himself. Any writing specifically focused on Hinckley centers on presenting him in a Saintly manner without any psychological investigation (see Decker, 2005 and Koltko-Rivera, 1999, for a discussion of why this might be the case).

The study presented in this chapter is positioned against the backdrop of the rapid expansion of Mormonism, the prominent role played by Hinckley within contempo-

rary Mormonism and the lack of academic literature relating to Hinckley. Making use of a psychobiographical method, the study investigates aspects of Hinckley's personality through the lens of Tomkins' (1991/2008, 1992/2008, 1992) script theory. Through so doing, it identifies three core personal scripts (defined as sets of rules aimed at affect management) that characterised Hinckley's personality. These scripts provided rules through which Hinckley was able to interpret events and determine his own course of action in relation to these events. These scripts are also likely to have influenced the manner in which Hinckley led the Mormon Church and thus may have had a direct impact on the growth and development of the Religion. This is the first published psychobiography of Gordon Hinckley and thus contributes to burgeoning bodies of literature concerning Mormonism and contemporary religion. In addition to providing insight into the psychological profile of Hinckley himself, the study highlights the complex interplay between a religious leader's own belief system and the religion that he leads.

In the sections below a brief biographical overview of the life of Gordon Hinckley, as well as an introduction to Tomkins' script theory (1991/2008, 1992/2008), are provided. The method section begins with an overview of psychobiographical research before turning to a detailed discussion of the specific method employed in this study. The three identified scripts are presented separately in the results section, while the discussion section investigates the relationship between the scripts and provides examples of how the scripts influenced the way in which Hinckley led the Mormon Church. Finally, the case study ends with a discussion of the conclusions drawn, the possible limitations of the research and a suggestion of directions for future research.

12.2.1 Biography of Gordon Hinckley

Born in Utah in 1910, Hinckley was the descendent of Mormon polygamists who had assisted in founding the state of Utah. Gordon was the first child of Ada and Byrant Hinckley (Byrant already had eight children from a previous marriage) and was to be joined by four siblings. The Hinckley family remained in Utah throughout Gordon's childhood, with Byrant working outside the home and Ada assuming responsibility for the children and the home. The Mormon Church played a central role in the Hinckley household, and Gordon participated in various Mormon ceremonies throughout his childhood and adolescence. Outside of the church arena Gordon was a fairly shy and sickly child who was reluctant to attend school (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996; Deseret Publishers, 2005b). Hinckley developed a strong belief in the Mormon Church during his adolescence (Hinckley, 1971–2007).

In 1928 Hinckley enrolled at the University of Utah (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). Hinckley's university years coincided with the onset of the Great Depression, and he described this as one of the most difficult periods of his life because the challenging economic situation combined with the secular learning of the university led him to question "in a slight measure the faith of my parents" (Dew, 1996, p. 47). This

difficult time was compounded by the death of his mother in 1930. Following his completion of university Hinckley volunteered to complete a proselyting mission for the Mormon Church in England (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). This mission, which lasted from 1933 to 1935, was a pivotal time in Hinckley's life. Occurring in close proximity to the death of his mother and his crisis of faith, Hinckley's mission solidified his Mormon belief system. While on his mission, he made a conscious decision to dedicate himself to the Mormon Church (Deseret Publishers, 2005a).

Following his return from England, Hinckley almost immediately entered the employment of the Mormon Church and he spent the next seven decades of his life formally involved with the Mormon Church and living mostly in Utah (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). He married Marjorie Pay in 1937; the couple would eventually have 5 children and remain married for over six decades until Marjorie's death in 2004. Hinckley's life from the time he returned from mission consists of a linear narrative in which he gradually assumed positions of increasing responsibility within the Mormon Church, culminating in his appointment as president in 1995. Throughout this time Hinckley travelled extensively across the globe and became the public face of Mormonism. Hinckley was often addressed controversial topics within Mormonism and gained a reputation for endorsing 'old fashioned values' by speaking out strongly against issues such as pornography, child and domestic abuse, drugs, extra-marital sex, abortion, and homosexuality (Dew, 1996). Hinckley passed away in 2008 at the age of 97.

Despite the prominence of Hinckley within twentieth century Mormonism he has not been the subject of academic attention from non-Mormon scholars. The two published biographies of Hinckley (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996) are both works by Mormons and endorse a very specific view of Hinckley. Other publications that mention Hinckley are either written by Mormon scholars, or mention him in passing as a part of Mormon development. This is the first study to focus specifically on Hinckley from a psychological perspective, and to make use of a psychobiographical method to understand Hinckley's personality.

12.2.2 Theoretical Background

Silvan Tomkins' script theory is based on his theory of affect, and anchored in the metaphor of the individual as a playwright (Carlson & Carlson, 1984; Tomkins, 1981). Affect theory holds that there are a limited number of innate, inherited and universal affects (Holinger, 2008; Tomkins, 1965, 1981) and these affects are the fundamental motivators of human behaviour (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Each individual experiences a large variety of scenes, which all contain objects and affects (Carlson, 1981; Demorest, Popovska, & Dabova, 2012; Tomkins, 1992). Although most scenes are transient some scenes become linked together to form scripts. This linking occurs through the twin processes of affective amplification and psychological magnification (Carlson, 1986; Tomkins, 1992).

Affective amplification occurs when the affect related to a single scene is amplified, for example, when the surprise affect is amplified by the hooting of a horn outside a baby's window (Tomkins, 1992). The amplification of the affect leads to a response; the baby may cry (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Despite the affective amplification the scene remains transient unless some form of psychological magnification occurs (Holinger, 2008; Tomkins, 1992). Psychological magnification is a cognitive process whereby affectively laden scenes become linked (Carlson, 1981) through a process of identification of their similarities and differences. Through this linking process each of the scenes acquires greater importance and starts to form a script that makes certain statements designed to help an individual understand the way in which the world functions (Tomkins, 1992/2008).

A script is "a compressed set of rules that is created to predict, interpret, respond to, and control a magnified set of scenes" (Demos, 2009). Each individual possesses a large number of scripts aimed at explaining scenes and providing directions for appropriate behaviours. These scripts are not fixed entities, but overlap with each other and change and develop as new scenes occur and are incorporated. Initially, scripts are created based on the experience of scenes but over time this process shifts and as scripts become more powerful (due to the psychological magnification of scenes) they increasingly determine the way in which scenes are interpreted (Tomkins, 1991/2008). The proliferation of individual scripts, as well as the relationship between these scripts, is referred to as personality (Tomkins, 1991/2008).

Scripts vary greatly in their specificity and completeness and do not necessarily all contain the same features (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Tomkins identified several categories of scripts and differentiated between psychologically affluent scripts (high ratio of positive to negative affects) and psychologically poor scripts (high ratio of negative affects to positive affects) (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Script categories identified by Tomkins include affluence scripts (related to positive affects and their appropriate magnification), scripts of limitation and remediation (scripts related to negative affects and the ability to absorb negative affect) and ideological scripts (scripts allowing for the evaluation of things as either good or bad). Ideological scripts are the most important class of scripts, as they link facts with values and affects. Although these scripts might be linked to external ideologies they are not identical to these ideologies, but instead represent a unique personal ideology that is a core component of personality (De St. Aubin, 1996, 1999; Tomkins, 1963, 1992).

12.2.3 Methodology

There are various best practice guidelines associated with the conducting of psychobiographical research (e.g., Alexander, 1988; Elms, 2005, 2007; Itzkowitz & Volkan, 2003; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015b; Schultz, 2005b), as well as for evaluating the quality of psychobiographical research (see Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a). This study made use of these guidelines, as well as the broad qualitative research

strategies of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to identify prominent scripts in the life of Hinckley. The specific methods used are outlined below.

The data collection involved identifying material containing scripts. It was hypothesized that prominent scripts would be identifiable in the stories, anecdotes and life lessons presented by Hinckley in various forums. The data was collected from a number of publically accessible sources. Firstly, Hinckley's speeches to the semi-annual Mormon gathering known as General Conference are freely available on the official LDS website (lds.org) and these speeches were used as primary text. This data source consisted of over 200 individual speeches, delivered between 1971 and 2007 (Hinckley, 1971–2007). Secondly, the two volume set published by the Mormon Church detailing various other speeches delivered by Hinckley during his time as the president of the LDS church was also used as a primary data source (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, 2005b). These two volumes contain hundreds of speeches delivered by Hinckley to various audiences. Thirdly, various other texts published by Hinckley were used as data sources, including his books *Faith, The Essence of True Religion* (1989), *Be Thou an Example* (1981), as well as *Standing for Something* (2000). These various texts were used as the data from which prominent scripts could be identified through the process of data coding.

During the data coding process stories and narratives were and were coded as scenes. In order to produce the most in-depth analysis possible, the broadest possible definition of scene was used, which included any 'story' included within the text, as well as any indication of emotion (affect) within the text (Demorest & Alexander, 1992). It was assumed, in accordance with Tomkins' script theory and with practices used in other studies, that scenes recorded in written works and speech are unlikely to be transient scenes but instead are scenes that have undergone at least some affective amplification and psychological magnification (Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Siegel, 1996; Tomkins, 1991/2008, 1992). Approximately 500 scenes were identified in the texts. Due to the volume of text only a sub-set of these scenes were initially coded. The scenes that were coded were those that included the most complete narratives, as it was felt that these scenes would be the most likely to lead to the initial identification of scripts. To move from the identification of scenes to the identification of scripts, the individual scenes were coded. The coding related to the affect(s) and object(s) present as well as to the perceived relationships between them (the cognitive process of psychological magnification). Other aspects of the scene were also coded where appropriate (see Demorest, 2008; Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Tomkins, 1991/2008). These coded scenes were then used as the basis for script identification using Tomkins' (1992) rules for script identification relating to (1) the presence of abstract rules; (2) the presence of sequencing rules; and (3) the presence of intense affect and affective changes. This process of script identification is broadly similar to that described in previous research studies, such as that by Demorest and Alexander (1992), Siegel (1996) and De St. Aubin, Wandrei, Skerven, and Coppolillo (2006) and is also similar in process to Alexander's (cited in Schultz, 2005b) methods of identifying psychological saliency in autobiographical material. Initial coding yielded a large number of possible scripts, convalencing around topics such as the importance of Mormonism, the centrality of family, and the importance

of the media. As the goal of the psychobiography was to highlight the intersection between Hinckley's personality and his role within the Mormon religion the decision was taken to focus on scripts that related to this role and the way in which he enacted this role. This process resulted in the identification of three salient scripts for Gordon Hinckley, which are discussed in detail in the results section below.

Issues relating to the quality of the research study were addressed through the use of multiple data sources that served as a source of triangulation, the use of a structured coding technique, as well as the detailed description of the research process provided in this chapter. In terms of ethics, psychobiographical studies are always faced with ethical dilemmas regarding the non-anonymity of psychobiographical subjects and the potential harm that may result from the naming of research subjects. In this study, these ethical concerns were addressed through exclusive reliance on public data, thereby not violating confidentiality. In addition, the fact that Hinckley is deceased means that the findings of the study cannot negatively influence him. However, the findings could potentially negatively influence his family members or followers and the researchers remained cognisant of this at all times, ensuring that the findings are presented in respectful and objective language that seeks to provide a fair portrayal of a complex individual.

12.2.4 Findings

The three scripts identified through the coding process are discussed in this section. All three script labels originate in phrases associated with the period of Hinckley's life that he spent on a mission for the Mormon Church in England during the 1930s. Prior to this time Hinckley experienced a crisis of faith and during his mission he appears to have determined rules for living that were to guide him for the remainder of his life. These 'rules for living' take the form of scripts that Hinckley used to guide his understanding of events and make sense of the doctrine presented by the Mormon Church. The three scripts are discussed individually below but it should be noted that there is considerable overlap between the scripts and they should be considered as co-existing systems for interpreting events and determining behaviour.

12.2.4.1 Script 1—Personal Ideology “Be not Afraid, Only Believe”

Ideological scripts provide a way of interpreting scenes that adheres to a personal ideology, rather than necessarily to an external reality. In Hinckley's personal ideological script, the affects of fear (afraid) and distress are negated by the cognitive process of belief, which has the ability to completely dissolve the negative affects. The primary affect of fear, in Tomkins' formulation, encompasses a range of more nuanced emotions, including anxiety. Two scenes from Hinckley's childhood provide an indication of how this script developed:

When I was a small boy ... my brother and I slept out of doors ... we would look up into the heavens and find the constellation of stars that includes the North Star ... since time immemorial, sailors crossing the great seas of the Northern Hemisphere have navigated by this star because it is immovable. It is fixed and invariable. It is constant ... from looking at that star I learned a great lesson which has remained with me throughout my life. I learned that there are fixed and constant points by which we may guide our lives. (Deseret Publishers, 2005a)

When I was a boy ... my father took me to a meeting of the priesthood of the stake in which we lived ... at the opening of that meeting, the first of its kind I have ever attended, three or four hundred men stood. They were men from varied backgrounds and many vocations, but each had in his heart the same conviction, out of which they sang these great words: Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer¹ ... Something happened with me as I heard those men of faith sing. There came into my boyish heart a knowledge, placed there by the Holy Spirit, that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of the Almighty. (Hinckley, 1971–2007)

These two scenes contain the same affective trajectory and psychological interpretation. In each incident there is a situation (sleeping outside, being in a large congregation) which could potentially evoke negative affects, such as fear (in the form of anxiety) or distress. However, negative affects are not present and instead Hinckley is able to focus on something constant, something in which he can believe. Through so doing the negative affect is not merely minimized but is completely banished. While it may seem a speculative leap to identify the affects of fear and distress within these stories it is in keeping with Tomkins' formulation of the primacy of affects, which suggests that every affectively amplified scene (such as those recorded above) will incorporate at least one of the primary affects. The linking of the primary affect of anxiety/fear to these scenes is in keeping with information concerning Hinckley's own childhood experiences, as he was frequently described as a shy and sickly child, thus a child who was likely to experience the situations mentioned above as distressful and anxiety provoking (and potentially fear inducing). The prominence of this script within Hinckley's later life is reflected in the first stanza of a poem penned when Hinckley was 75 years old:

I know that my Redeemer lives/Triumphant Saviour, Son of God/Victorious over pain and death/My King, my Leader, and my Lord. (Hinckley, 1985, cited in *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1985)

The implication in the poem is that belief in Christ's victory over 'pain and death' allows an individual to similarly triumph over 'pain and death'.

The title of this script "Be not afraid, only believe" reflects an injunction given to Hinckley by his father when he embarked on his mission to England (see Deseret Publishers, 2005b). The script reflects a two part ideology. Firstly, that the world is dominated by potentially negative affects (such as fear or distress) and secondly that these negative affects can be negated through the presence of a strong system of belief, which should not be questioned (as questioning might suggest that fear would be present). For Hinckley, this belief was placed in the Mormon religious doctrine. This ideological script plays out in many different aspects of Hinckley's

¹A popular Mormon hymn sang in praise of Joseph Smith.

existence. It is there in his statement that “the things of God are understood only by the Spirit of God” (Hinckley, 1989, p. 5) and should therefore not be questioned, it is there in his statement that “I do not fret over the mysteries” (Hinckley, 1989, p. 17) and it is there in his media interviews when he ‘glosses over’ or ‘minimises’ controversial aspects of Mormon doctrine. This adult public persona of Hinckley’s was very different to the shy child that Hinckley had been and it seems likely that the presence of this ideological script provided him with the confidence to express his opinions publically, as long as they were linked to the belief system entrenched in the script.

Through its denial of negative affect, this script places value only on the positive and suggests that a lack of belief can have eternal consequences. Thus Hinckley often insisted that adherence to the principles of Mormonism was of paramount importance and that “obedience brings happiness” (Hinckley, 1981, p. 12) while even small deviations from accepted behaviour and values could result in lasting and devastating consequences “it only takes one little careless slip, one villain, one mistake to blight our lives forever after” (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 284).

12.2.4.2 Script 2—Maximization of Positive Affect “Life Is Good”

One of the features of Hinckley’s scripts is their focus on positive affect, and the continuous attempt to maximize positive affect. Hinckley was known for being a very optimistic individual, a personal characteristic that was so pervasive that it is commented on by his biographers (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996), mentioned in his various obituaries, and frequently remarked on by Hinckley himself (see, for example, Deseret Publishers, 2005b, pp. 459–478, 357–363, 556–557). A key example of this attitude is the following statement by Hinckley: “Yesterday was a great day in my life. Every day is a great day in my life” (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 343).

The pervasiveness of this personality characteristic suggests that it was linked to an underlying script, constituting an underlying set of rules that allowed Hinckley to interpret and understand events from an optimistic perspective (see Tomkins, 1991/2008). The label given to this script is taken from this statement by Hinckley: “When I was a missionary in London fifty years ago, my companion and I would shake hands in the morning and say, ‘Life is good’. Life in the service of the Lord is good” (Hinckley, Conference Talks, 1971–2007). This idea, that life is good as long as it was linked to religious service functioned as a cognitive ‘rule’ that allowed Hinckley to interpret various events that he encountered. The two stories presented below provide an indication of how this script functioned.

I remember a family I knew fifty years ago. The wife was a devoted member of the Church. The husband was not a member. Her example was one of goodness and gladness and faith. After many years he began to soften. He saw what the Church did for her and for their children. He turned around. He humbled himself. He was baptized. (Hinckley, Conference Talks, 1971–2007)

I think of two friends from my high school and university years ... Something wonderful took place between them. They fell in love ... they married ... now many years have passed

... their children are grown, a lasting credit to them, to the Church, to the communities in which they live ... Now in mature age, they were finding peace and quiet satisfaction together. (Hinckley, 1989, pp. 45–46)

These two stories display similar affective trajectories. A neutral or negative affect moves towards the positive affect of joy as commitment to the Mormon religion is developed. In both stories, life is ultimately good. This script overlaps with the ideological script, but is identified as a separate script because it involves giving primacy to positive affect over negative affect, while at the same time allowing for the existence and absorption (rather than the denial) of negative affect (see Tomkins, 1991/2008). Given the maximization of positive affect, this script is characterised as an affluence script. Individuals with prominent affluence scripts have “a general strategy of optimizing costs, benefits and probabilities so that such affluence is not only achieved, but maintained at a stable equilibrium” (Tomkins, 1992). This statement seems to describe Hinckley’s adult life, which is characterised by stability, consistency, and optimism.

12.2.4.3 Script 3—Commitment “Forget Yourself and Go to Work”

The scripts described above provided Hinckley with rules for minimizing (or ignoring) negative affect and thus ensured that he experienced mostly positive affect in relation to his life choices. However, negative affect is an inevitable part of human experience and when it cannot be ignored or minimized it must be endured. A commitment script is a script that binds an individual to a specific course of long term action despite the continued presence of negative affects by providing a set of rules that allow for the continued absorption of negative affect due to the promise of eventual positive affect (Tomkins, 1991/2008).

Hinckley’s commitment script takes on the formulation, “forget yourself and go to work” a phrase taken from the following incident related by Hinckley that occurred during his mission:

I was assigned to a place where things had not gone well with the two previous [missionaries]. I was not well, and I became a little discouraged. I wrote home to my father and said, “I am wasting your money and your time. I think I might as well come home” ... he wrote back to me a very short letter in which he said ... “I have only one suggestion – forget yourself and go to work”. About the same day I received that letter, we were reading in the scriptures and I read these great words: “He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). And I made a resolution that changed my whole attitude and outlook on life, and everything that has happened to me since then that is good I can trace back to that decision. It had a very marked effect upon my life. (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 372)

This scene contains the building blocks for a script. The initial affect is one of distress [not well, discouragement] as well as shame [wasting your money and time] and these affects have been amplified to the point where they were experienced as overwhelming. However, there is an intervention and a rapid shift occurs in the affect; the negative affect is replaced by the positive affect of joy when Hinckley commits

to following a specific course of action. Psychological magnification ensures that the meaning and cognition attached to the scene crystalizes around the idea of shame and distress as linked to selfishness (a focus on the self) and joy as linked to the service of others (an outside focus). In essence the script outlined in this scene suggests that distress and shame can be converted to joy if attention is focused on others and not on the self. This is an interesting formulation, given Hinckley's experiences as a shy child as it suggests that distressing affects can be overcome by focusing outwards on things other than the self, or in other words by adopting a public persona.

Given Hinckley's ideological script, it is unsurprising that his commitment to others suggested took the form of promoting Mormonism. Hinckley's commitment is manifest in his dedication to Mormonism throughout his adult life; he worked long hours and positioned his responsibilities to this organisation as the central feature of his existence. Speaking late in his life, Hinckley (Deseret Publishers, 2005b, p. 390) acknowledged the centrality of this script in his life: "I am an old man. I simply do not have the energy to do what I once did. But I will not permit myself to be unhappy in doing what I can. The demands are great. I feel a constant, unrelenting concern for what is being accomplished in the Church. I want to do better; I want to improve things".

There is considerable overlap between the three scripts and they functioned together to determine the rules through which Hinckley interpreted scenes and determined future actions. The links between the commitment script and the affluence maximization of positive affect script are clear, as both allow for the minimizing of negative affect and the maximizing of positive affect, although the commitment script prescribes more active methods of dealing with negative affect, including modifying behaviour and accepting the reality of difficulty. There is also a high degree of overlap between the commitment and the ideological script. Tomkins (1991/2008, p. 684) suggested that these classes of scripts might interact in the following manner: "ideology [scripts involve] faith in a systematic order in the world, and commitment [scripts involve] the courage and endurance to bind the self to an enhancement of a segment of that order", and this does seem to typify the relationship between these two scripts in Hinckley's personality structure. From a structural point of view, it is easiest to conceive of Hinckley's ideological and commitment scripts as working together to provide both a system of belief and a course of action, while the underlying affluence script allows for the abundance of positive affect. The presence of this script system allowed Hinckley to live in a way that ensured that he continually maximized positive affect and minimized negative affect (while allowing for its continued existence), and this script system would therefore be characterised as an affluent script system (see Tomkins, 1992). It would also seem that through adopting these scripts Hinckley was able to live a very public life and thereby overcome his childhood shyness.

12.2.5 Conclusion and Discussion of the Case Study

The presence of these scripts makes it possible to understand how certain aspects of Hinckley's personality, particularly those aspects related to his professional life, functioned. For example, his optimism can be described as relating to a core affluence script that was predicated not only on optimizing positive affect but on doing so through the twin processes of belief (ideological script) and hard work (commitment script). Thus, Hinckley's optimistic personality was intrinsically linked to his personal ideology developed based on his Mormon belief system (be not afraid, only believe), which was in turn linked to a set of rules that ensured that he not only passively espoused Mormon religious ideals but also actively worked at promoting those ideals (forget yourself and go to work). In other words, for Hinckley to maximize his positive affect and remain optimistic, it was essential that he continue to believe in the Mormon Church and work towards the promotion of Mormon ideals.

This script structure also provides an explanation for the stance Hinckley took towards controversial topics. His ideological script (be not afraid, only believe) suggests that belief is the way to overcome negative affect, while his affluence script (life is good) states that happiness is tied to obedience to this belief system. Thus, his unrelenting stance against things such as pornography, homosexuality and extra-marital sex could relate to his need to firmly believe in an ideological system (the Mormon ideals) and to adhere to these beliefs in an attempt to obtain happiness. In addition, his commitment script (forget yourself and go to work) allows him to not question his own stance, and instead work on promoting these ideals to others. There is no space within this script structure for questioning or re-examining, the focus is on acceptance of ideology and of moving forward from that position.

Hinckley's script structure provided him with a way of interpreting the world and managing and understanding his personal experiences. Given Hinckley's prominent position with the Mormon Church, this script structure not only relates to his personal functioning but may also have influenced the direction and growth of the Mormon Church as a whole. While Hinckley's personal ideology and other personal scripts were initially formed in relationship to the Mormon Church they also influenced the type of Mormon leader he was. In other words, while Hinckley's ideological script may initially have represented Hinckley's own understanding of Mormonism when Hinckley became president of the Mormon religion this ideological script influenced the way in which he presented Mormonism to the world.

Before concluding this case study, it is important to note a significant limitation of this psychobiography. The argument concerning Hinckley's personality structure is based entirely on publically accessible material. Due to the nature of the available information a decision was taken to focus on the way in which his personality intersected with his religious belief system and his role in the Mormon Church (see methods section). This focus may have resulted in other, more private, aspects of his life not being fully taken into account. In particular, it was not possible to explore the nature of his relationship with his wife of 60 years and with his children. While this does not mean that the portrayal of his personality presented here is inaccurate, it is

important to acknowledge that the psychobiography presented here relates mostly to his public and professional self and that there may be aspects of his private life that were not included in the portrayal.

In conclusion, this paper investigated the personality of Gordon Hinckley using a psychobiographical method and the Tomkins' script theory. Three prominent scripts were identified and discussed, and the way in which these scripts influenced Hinckley's actions (particularly in relation to his role as the leader of the Mormon Church) were discussed. The findings suggest that Hinckley's personal ideology and personality had a considerable influence on his teachings and the way in which he led the Mormon Church. The extent to which the direction taken by contemporary Mormonism was shaped by Hinckley's personality is open to speculation, and this is a valuable direction for future research. This is not to say that this was the only factor that influenced the growth of contemporary Mormonism, but does suggest that an examination of the personality of such a prominent individual within a religion can contribute much to an understanding of the way in which religions change and develop. It is hoped that the study not only contributes to a greater understanding of Hinckley and contemporary Mormonism, but also inspires additional research regarding the personalities of religious leaders within other major contemporary religions.

12.3 Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

In this section, we provide a brief explanation of why Tomkins' script theory was selected as an interpretive lens for this psychobiography. While we acknowledge that script theory has been used previously in psychobiography (see particularly the work of Carlson, 1988) it remains an uncommon choice of theory. The decision to include script theory in the psychobiography was based largely on frustration with the nature of the available data in relation to Hinckley. While the pool of data was large it was almost exclusively produced (and carefully edited and controlled) by the Mormon Church and as such it was very difficult to find any information about him that did not conform to the authorized narrative of his life. Conducting a psychobiographical study with the available data was difficult, as there was not enough detailed biographical information concerning his formative years available to inform a psychodynamic or psychoanalytic portrait. Given Hinckley's longevity, the application of a developmental theory (Erik Erikson's theory of lifespan development was used; Erikson, 1950/1963, 1968/1994, 1976, 1982) did form part of the psychobiography in the larger work from which this case study is drawn (see Saccaggi, 2015). This developmental interpretation of Hinckley's life was valuable (see Saccaggi, 2015) but it did not fully capture the complexities of Hinckley's personality.

Given that Hinckley frequently included stories and anecdotes in his speeches and published works, we set out to find a theory that would enable us to interpret these stories in a way that allowed us to comment meaningfully on Hinckley's personality. Tomkins' script theory, with its focus on the individual as a playwright, provided

a lens through which to interpret Hinckley's 'performances' in his public life. In particular, the idea of a scene (Tomkins, 1992) was one that mapped easily onto Hinckley's data, as Hinckley frequently repeated and retold specific affect laden stories from his youth. This matching between the nature of the theory and the nature of the data was the central pivot of the psychobiography, and allowed for the production of a psychological interpretation of Hinckley's life that was able to provide insight into patterns (scripts) that appear to have underpinned his functioning.

Thus, the inclusion of script theory, a theory that we were unfamiliar with prior to beginning the psychobiography, provided a lens through which to view the subject that allowed for the creation of the nuanced and detailed psychobiographical portrait presented here. As such, this case study served to illustrate the points made in the introduction to this chapter concerning the value of using unusual theories in psychobiographical research. In concluding this chapter, the following two recommendations are advanced.

Firstly, the case study illustrates the explanatory power of using a psychological theory that falls outside of the mainstream. It is therefore recommended that when conducting psychobiographies researchers 'cast a broad net' from a theoretical perspective and consider using theories that are not psychodynamic or developmental in nature (see Ponterotto et al., 2017). Given that researcher familiarity with a theory is often the main reason for the selection of a specific theory (du Plessis, 2017) it is suggested that psychobiographers need to familiarize themselves with a wide range of personality theories and be open to using theories that do not form part of mainstream personality psychology. However, the danger of this approach is it could result in the use of theories that are not well regarded or well researched. Thus, the choice of a theory will always incorporate an evaluation of the 'truth' value of the theory itself. In addition, when using a theory that does not enjoy strong empirical support, it may be useful to ensure that the entire psychobiographical study is not solely reliant on a single theory.

The caution advanced above leads to the second recommendation, which is that wherever possible psychobiographical work should make use of more than a single theory. This is an idea that has been advanced elsewhere, but is echoed in this paper. While the analysis advanced above illuminates certain aspects of Hinckley's life narrative there are other areas that remain shrouded in mystery. These include things such as his personal relationships, his unconscious processes and any discrepancies between the public persona and the private person. Given the data available and the limits of Tomkins' script theory these aspects could not be explored in this psychobiographical study. The addition of another theoretical lens would have resulted in enhanced understandings. In addition, adding a well recognized and well regarded theory from the 'mainstream' of personality psychology helps to add credibility to the addition of a more unusual or 'fringe' theory.

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Part III
Psychobiographies on Selected Individuals

Chapter 13

Amor Fati or Posttraumatic Growth? The Case of Etty Hillesum in the Time of the Holocaust



Márta Csabai

Abstract Almost four decades after her death in Bergen-Belsen, the young Dutch woman, Etty Hillesum's diaries were published in 1981 and since then have received intense attention from the general public, and some reflections from philosophical, theological and psychological theorizing as well. The diaries reveal a deep struggle for personal independence against the unprecedented threats of the strengthening Nazi oppression. Influenced by Julius Spier, a charismatic psycho-chirologist, who was a therapist, a father/figure, lover and mentor for her, writing became Hillesum's outlet, and a vehicle for her spiritual liberation and personality development. One of the most interesting and paradoxical aspect of her diaries is that she could realize a substantial improvement of her self-coherence and personal integrity through her reflections about existential themes in an actually life-threatening, liminal situation. The chapter gives an overview of Etty Hillesum's writings in the context of her life-history and personality development; in the light of current psychological theories of posttraumatic growth, and also in the frame of the philosophical concept, the "flow of the presence" of Eric Voegelin. The analysis might contribute to the understanding of the paradoxical positive reactions which help certain sufferers of extreme stresses and serious traumas to cope with the stress and to reach personality development and post-traumatic growth. Through the case of Etty Hillesum we might also examine the methodological question whether the present-tense narratives of self-experiences might serve as sufficient resources for psychobiographies.

Keywords Esther (Etty) Hillesum · Psychobiography · Diary · Holocaust · Trauma · Personal growth · Spirituality · Metaphoric case

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13.1 Introduction

In 1981 the diaries of the Holocaust victim, Etty Hillesum, written between 1941 and 1943, appeared for the first time under the title *Het verstoorde leven* [An Interrupted Life], followed by a collection of her letters from the Westerbork Nazi camp, before her deportation to Auschwitz. A complete edition of Hillesum's approximately 100 pages of letters and 600 pages of diaries was published in Dutch in 1981 and translated into English in 1983. The confessional letters and diaries describe this exceptional young woman's—"the Dutch Anne Frank's"—spiritual growth and awakening during the Holocaust and her paradoxical relationship with the charismatic "psycho-chirologist", Julius Spier. Hillesum's writings provoked very strong and divisive existential, ethical, psychological and political dilemmas. The enormous public interest for her case facilitated the translation of the diaries into 67 languages and the 1986 opening of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre (EHOC) in Middelburg, the Netherlands. The diaries were offered to the publisher of the Dutch edition by professor Klaas A. D. Smelik, whose father, the writer Klaas Smelik received them trust from Hillesum before her deportation to Auschwitz.

The diaries and letters follow the identity development of a young woman and hold mirror up to a process which tragically presents how totalitarian ideology can destroy personal freedom. Paradoxically, they also demonstrate the way by which inner spiritual experience, the self-imposed community with fellow sufferers, and the feeling of connectedness might guarantee always, in all circumstances, the inviolable uniqueness and validity of human experience.

The central concept of Hillesum's writing is "inner life" (het innrlijk leven), which can be found on more than 200 pages of the original diaries: inner richness, inner horizon, inner reality, inner space, inner world, inner uttermost, etc. In her first diaries in 1941 she says that she feels it difficult to formulate her feelings but she wants to write for that very reason to be able to enter into the essence of existence.

Etty (Esther) Hillesum was born on 15th of January in 1914. Her father was a headmaster and professor of classical languages in Deventer. Her mother's family moved to the Netherlands from Russia, escaping from the persecutions of Jews. Though her grandfather was a rabbi of high rank, Etty considered herself an assimilated woman up to the time the persecutions started also in Holland during the war. This experience strengthened her Jewish identity and the feeling of community with the fate of Jews. Also that was one of the reasons why she did not hide or escape.

Etty called the family's home a madhouse. One of her brothers, Jacob (Jaap) was a talented medical researcher but suffered from psychiatric problems, presumably schizophrenia. The other brother, Michael (Mischa) as a child was considered as one of the most promising pianists of Europe but also became psychotic at the age of 16. In 1943 the whole family had to move to Amsterdam, as all the Jewish citizens that time in the Netherlands. The family was deported to Aushwitz on 7th of September in 1943. The parents were sent to the gas chamber on that day, and Etty's death was reported by the Red Cross on November 30. Her youger brother died in March of

1944, and the older brother, who was transported to Bergen-Belsen, survived the concentration camp, but died on the way back home after the war.

Her acquaintances described Etty as a “typical Russian woman”: always busy, sometimes happy, other times sad, once expressive then chaotic (Coetsier, 2008). Some friends thought her changes of mood, phantasmizing and eroticism rather infantile. She studied law, Russian language, and then psychology, but after 1942 she was not allowed to frequent university. She was an independent mind already at the time of starting her first diary, but full of uncertainty:

I don't know how to settle down to my writing. Everything is still much too chaotic, and I lack self-confidence, or perhaps the urgent need to speak out. I am still waiting for things to come out and find a form of their own accord. But first I myself must find the right pattern, my own pattern. (Hillesum, 1996, 32)

13.2 An Unusual Therapy with Julius Spier

Probably the most influential person in Etty's life was the psycho-chirologist Julius Philipp Spier (1887–1942) whom she mentions as ‘S’ in her diaries. Actually the initiative of the diary itself was inspired by this relationship: the first note is a letter to Spier from March 1941. Etty spoke a very good German which they used in their communication with Spier. Several notes of the diary written in German gives evidence of Spier's influence on of her writing and personal development.

Spier left behind a successful business career in order to devote his life a new “science”—psycho-chirology. Spier had been a client of Jung, studied psychotherapy with him, and was supported by Jung who considered him a promising candidate for chirology (hand-analysis). Spier started his practice in Berlin in 1930. In 1934 he divorced from his wife and in 1937 moved to the Netherlands as he could not stay in the Nazi Germany any longer. His fiancée, Hertha Levi also left Berlin and moved to London. They continued their relationship through correspondence, so Spier's relationship with Etty Hillesum could remain hidden from Hertha (Woodhouse, 2009).

Spier was considered as the most influential chirologist—hand analyst—of his time. After his studies in medicine and psychiatry he started to give seminars in the new “science”, psycho-chirology for medical doctors and psychologists in Berlin and Zurich, trying to connect chirology with psychoanalysis. In his posthumous book (Spier, 1944) which was marked out for the first volume of a trilogy, he wanted to establish a theory and method by which early childhood psychosexual and developmental problems could have been detected and treated to prevent later neurosis.

Spier was an amateur singer and met Etty at a house concert where Etty's brother was the pianist. Spier's grandiose personality overwhelmed Etty and she checked in for therapy with him. Though Spier was a man with a strange look whom Etty described as an ugly, old kobold, his voice and the radiation of his personality held Etty spellbound, and she hoped that this “great, warm man” would help her to “collect her broken fragments”. Etty was depressed, anxious, and compulsive. She needed

an Aspirin and two hours sleep after lunch every day. She also suffered from eating disorders, panic attacks, feelings of emptiness, inferiority, and inability to make decisions (Baur, 1997).

Spier was an admitted womanizer, whose students were mainly women whom he not only seduced, but thanks to his outstanding empathy he could also teach to recognize their inner virtues. After starting their therapy, Etty soon became his secretary, and thereafter his lover. Spier applied an unusual therapeutic technique, naked wrestling, as an addition to psycho-chirology. He meant it a special “sensitivity training” for enhancing female sexuality and body consciousness, and applied it in order to get a picture of his clients’ physical, emotional and mental state, and to help them to get closer to their own thoughts and feelings. Etty wrote the following about the start of the “wrestling cure”:

That was no doubt why he began to test my physical strength in a sort of wrestling match. It was apparently more than adequate, for remarkably enough, I floored the man, big though he was. All my inner tensions, the bottled-up forces, broke free, and there he lay, physically and also mentally, as he told me later, thrown. No one had ever been able to do that to him before, and he could not conceive how I had managed it. His lip was bleeding. I was allowed to dab it clean with eau de cologne, an embarrassingly intimate thing to do. But then he was so “free,” so guileless, so open, so unaffected in his movements, even as we tumbled about together on the ground. And even when I, held tightly in his arms and finally tamed, lay under him, he remained “objective,” pure, while I surrendered to the physical spell he emanated. It all seemed so innocent, this wrestling, new and unexpected, and so liberating. I t was not until later that it took hold of my fantasies. (Hillesum, 1996, 6–7)

For the second time, however, both of them got involved:

But the second time we wrestled, things were quite different. Then he too showed passion. And when at one point he lay groaning on top of me, for just a brief moment, and made the oldest convulsive movement in the world, then the lowest of thoughts rose up in me like a miasma from a swamp, something like: “A funny way of treating patients you have, you get your pleasure out of it and you get paid for it as well even if it is just a pittance.”... In the end my rebelliousness died down and there was a sense of closeness between us, and more personal contact than we may ever have again. But while we were still lying on the floor, he said, “I don’t want to have a relationship with you.” And he added, “I must tell you honestly, I find you very attractive.” (Hillesum, 1996, 21)

For the reader of our day this therapeutic technique is obviously astounding and ethically unacceptable, but in the context of its time it can be evaluated not only from a moral aspect. This is well-known that between the two world-wars the development of psychoanalysis has brought with itself several dilemmas which resulted in the formulating of the need for a psychoanalytically founded, holistic, psychosomatic care, which contained the important element of treating the body and soul together (Mizrachi, 2001). One of the most prominent representatives of this approach was Georg Groddeck who applied massage parallel with psychotherapy, and considered the strong, suggestive presence of the therapist as an important determinant of therapeutic effect (Avila, 2003).

Spier’s psycho-chirology and the technique of naked wrestling were directly connected to the starting body psychotherapy movement of the era. One of the most

important centers of these movements was Berlin in the 1920s and '30s. That was the time when new initiatives appeared for the complex treatment of *body and mind* by gymnastics, respiration therapy, massage, homeopathy and balneotherapy, combined with psychotherapy. Julius Spier was open for these new approaches, e.g. to homeopathy. He lived a very healthy life: didn't smoke, drink, had a vegetarian diet and did exercise each day. Etty followed him with physical exercises, body hygiene and respiration practices.

Another possible inspiration for Spier's method might be Wilhelm Reich's work (Reich, 1963). Reich tried to 'liberate' the psychological resistances, the 'character armour' and the repressed instinct-energies through techniques directed to the body, the muscles, respiration and movement. The treatment of sexual energies, the 'sexual economy' got an explicit role in his method. As a main practical principle he emphasized that the goal of psychoanalytic therapy was the recovery of the 'orgastic potential', through the canalization of obstructed sexual energies. It had been also Reich's intervention that for the sake of proper muscle contractions or relaxation patients took part in therapy naked, or in underclothes, and the therapist could also touch their bodies. This was meant both as an innovation of the therapeutic technique but also a critical reflection on the contemporary psychoanalytic approach. Further, the emphasis on the liberation from repression can be interpreted as a critique of social oppression, and fascism.

It is well-known that this was the starting period of the debates in the history of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis about the boundaries and frames of therapist-client relationship (Baur, 1997). In the background of these debates one can find the unveiling of the "couch confusions" (conflicting relationships between e.g. Jung and Sabina Spielrein, Otto Rank and Anaïs Nin, Sándor Ferenczi and Elma Pálos). There was also a theoretical-technical and personal opposition between Freud and Ferenczi about the handling of transference and counter-transference along the "abstinence *versus* affectionate relationship" dimension (Haynal, 1988).

This is worth of attention to see these ambivalences in the psychotherapy and in the relationship of Hillesum and Spier. Although they involved emotionally and sexually and had an intimate relationship, they tried to protect the boundaries, keeping a "dual relationship":

He had pulled himself together and deliberately adopted a matter-of-fact attitude; but he too had quite a struggle. And he asked, "Did you think about me this week?" And when I made a few noncommittal remarks and lowered my head, he said, very honestly, "I must honestly tell you that I thought a lot about you the first few days of this week." (Hillesum, 1996, 22)

Our question now is how this questionable therapeutic technique and ethically problematic dual relationship contributed to the personality development and spiritual growth of Etty Hillesum.

13.3 Lived Experiences Transformed into Embodied Spirituality

The holistic treatment of Spier did not involve only the body and the charismatic personality of the therapist for the liberation of desires, but it was also extended to the psychological-spiritual territories. Spier had a strong attachment to mysticism and to the mystical Christian authors. He introduced Etty the works of Saint Augustine of Hippo and recommended her to read the Bible. Spier's wide knowledge of love and sexuality might help Etty to transform her sensual, erotic experiences into personality development:

I am not really in love with him. He captivates and sometimes fascinates me as a man, and I am learning an unbelievable amount from him. Ever since I met him, I have been experiencing a process of maturation, something I would never have thought possible at my age. (Hillesum, 1996, 26)

Spier suggested Etty to write a diary to understand herself but also to take responsibility for herself, and encouraged her to reach a deeper self-understanding. Etty was overwhelmed by having the chance to organize Spier's library of one thousand books, and partly storing it because there was no enough space for the books in Spier's flat. Etty called the library a "mysterious temple of wisdom".

Spier advised Etty to adhere to the following spiritual practice: read philosophy, poetry, and Biblical texts, meditate, contemplate and worship. He recommended her mainly the texts of Jung, Rilke, and the Bible. Rilke's poems made an enormous influence on Etty. She quoted them very often in the diary, but also felt a deep empathy for the poet and borrowed words and phrases from him when she couldn't find proper ones to express herself. She felt Rilke was always with her as a kind of a soul mate. Spier taught Etty the meditative reading of Rilke's poems and she used this technique to find order in her life. It was Rilke's influence which turned her to the "inner world"—with Rilke's term, the "Weltinnenraum"—which meant the inner Universe, the interiorization of the outer space for her. The feeling of identification was strengthened by the fact that Rilke was of similar age as Etty when he wrote these poems and also had strong affections to Russian culture. Etty met Rilke's *Prayers of a young poet* in Spier's library which became an important incentive for her inner dialogues between erotic, spiritual, and esthetic impulses. This book remained the most important reading for her 18 months later as well, even in the Westerbork camp, the anteroom of death.

Spier (and Rilke) taught Etty to remain "undestroyable" despite the general collapse around her. After the order to have on the Jewish badge she writes on May 18, 1942:

The threat grows ever greater, and terror increases from day to day. I draw prayer round me like a dark protective wall, withdraw inside it as one might into a convent cell and then step outside again, calmer and stronger and more collected again. I can imagine times to come when I shall stay on my knees for days on end waiting until the protective walls are strong enough to prevent my going to pieces altogether, my being lost and utterly devastated. (Hillesum, 1996, 133–134)

At the beginning she struggled a lot to be able to keep intact her connection to reality despite her mood swings originated from her encounters with the “chaos”, the “wicked” and “sorrow”. In order to protect the reality of Reason from the chaotic influence of the Nazi regime, she leaned—mostly at the beginning of the diaries—on Spier. She wrote down his notes, borrowed words from him (like from Rilke and other authors). These thoughts and the attachment to Spier helped Etty to cope with her depression:

Yesterday afternoon we read over the notes he had given me. And when we came to the words, “If there were only one human being worthy of the name of ‘man,’ then we should be justified in believing in men and in humanity, “I threw my arms round him on a sudden impulse.” (Hillesum, 1996, 11)

The first notes in her diary introduce a rather self-focused young woman, reflecting that she almost exclusively dealt with her overwhelming admiration for Spier. She never gave up this strong attachment but her attitude changed gradually. While at the beginning of the diary she is fantasizing about marrying Spier and owning him, later she leaves this fantasy, elaborates her longing by writing but remains committed to Spier until his death in 1942. One can follow the transformation of her feelings—in Erich Fromm’s (1956) terms the process of change from romantic love to mature love—and its facilitating effect on her personal development in this note from the diary:

And so I wanted to own him, and I hated all those women of whom he had spoken to me; I was jealous of them, and perhaps wondered, although not consciously, what part of him was left for me, and felt that I had no hold over him after all. These feelings were really petty, not on a high plane at all, but I did not realize that at the time. All I felt was wretchedly unhappy and lonely - I realize why now - and all I wanted was to get away from him and to write. I think I know what all the “writing” was about as well: it was just another way of “owning,” of drawing things in more tightly to oneself with words and images. And I’m sure that used to be the very essence of my urge to write: I wanted to creep silently away from everyone with all my carefully hoarded treasure, to write it all down, keep tight hold of it, and have it all to myself. And this grasping attitude, which is the best way I have of describing it, suddenly fell away from me. A thousand tyrannical chains were broken, and I breathed freely again and felt strong and looked about with shining eyes. And now that I don’t want to own anything any more and am free, now I suddenly own everything, now my inner riches are immeasurable. (Hillesum, 1996, 15–16)

The introspective tone remains present all along in the diaries, but Hillesum’s attention is opening gradually from herself to the outer environment. She is manifestly aware of the persecution and deportation of Jewish people and reacts in three ways: feels the responsibility to recording, diarizing the persecution, develops a spiritual form of suffering in herself, and creates an own image of God, and a worship practice. She considers writing as a potential form of resistance, similarly to Anne Frank, or Simone Weil.

Eroticism always occupied a substantial space in the fantasy-world and mental life of Hillesum. In the diaries she describes in detail her parallel relationships with her landlord, Han Wegerif and with Julius Spier, but also speaks about her attraction to Spier’s fiancée. As we could also see in the quotation above, she gradually recognizes

that she doesn't have to exclude erotic feelings from her life in the sake of spiritual self-fulfillment, but it is enough to give up possessiveness (see also Fromm, 1976).

Spier died on 15. September in 1942, one day before he would have been transported by the Gestapo to the Westerbork camp. One might find paradoxical Etty's reflection on it, but in the light of her spiritual transformation these thoughts are rather congruent and come up to the memory of her mentor:

Am I expected to put on a sad or solemn face? I am not really sad, am I? I would like to fold my hands and say, "Friends, I am happy and grateful, and I find life very beautiful and meaningful. Yes, even as I stand here by the body of my dead companion, one who died much too soon, and just when I may be deported to some unknown destination. And yet, God, I am grateful for everything. I shall live on with that part of the dead that lives forever, and I shall rekindle into life that of the living that is now dead, until there is nothing but life, one great life, oh God." (Hillesum, 1996, 203)

This note also reflects that Hillesum's mysticism ensues from an erotic background. Eroticism cannot be explained here with the Freudian Eros, libido, and desire concepts but also with the passion which can be connected to suffering and pain. The desire for the fusion with the Other in this case originates from the desire for homonymy (Angyal, 1939). This phenomenon can be also described by the Aristotelian concept of participation which is realisation of ultimate humanity in the acts of friendship and fraternity (Ross, 2004).

13.4 From Erotic Sensuality to the Ontological Mode of Life

The common dimension of suffering and erotic desire is *passion*—from the Latine *passio*, Greek *pathos*—cannot come into existence without the acceptance of vulnerability which contains the openness to the Other's influence. The unselfish erotic sensuality (an aspect of mature love in Fromm's sense) and the openness for the experience of suffering can result in vulnerability because in these situations the person risks losing control and powerlessness, and these are not far from defencelessness and dependency. Etty Hillesum recognized the connections between her sexual experiences and her growing spirituality. Her solution was not the Freudian sublimation of the sexual drive, but its liberation in the sake of love for mankind. With this attitude Hillesum followed the teachings of Julius Sipier and presumably those of Wilhelm Reich (1963), and the contemporary body-psychotherapy movement in the background. The key for the spiritual potential of human sexuality can be found in passion which provocatively connects the ability for self-giving in an erotic relationship, with self-giving to suffering, and the capacity for containing others' suffering (Gaillardetz, 2009). Hillesum's eroticism in this way does not only follows her spiritual growth but deepens and embodies it. That's why she cannot be considered as a real mystic because she does not turn away from the world but embraces it. Neither does she relinquish sexuality or bodily experiences for the sake of spiritually motivated celibacy.

Etty's diaries and letters also reflect—quasi as a premonitory sign of sexual revolution—on the contemporary problems of the disgregation of modern the modern family. At the beginning she thinks that the task of a woman is to show the way to the soul of the man. She did not accept traditional masculine roles but she considered—very likely under the influence of Julius Spier—a 'real man' those who had a 'feminine soul'. Also her admiration for Rilke can be traced in this opinion in the regard that Rilke also emphasized the fraternity and union of men and women. Etty's second diary starts with topic on 4. August in 1941, referring to Spier:

He is a mature fifty-five-year-old and has reached the stage where he can love all mankind, having loved many individuals in the past. I am an ordinary twenty-seven-year-old girl, and I too am filled with love for all mankind, but for all I know I shall always continue to be in search of my one man. And I wonder to what extent that is a handicap, a woman's handicap. Whether it is an ancient tradition from which she must liberate herself, or whether it is so much part of her very essence that she would be doing violence to herself if she bestowed her love on all mankind instead of on a single man. (I can't yet see how the two can be combined.) Perhaps that's why there are so few famous women scientists and artists: a woman always looks for the one man on whom she can bestow all her wisdom, warmth, love, and creative powers. She longs for a man, not for mankind. (34)

A particular paradox of Etty's life situation was that she lived in an uncertain present: *only her future was sure as she knew that she would be killed*. This dramatic contrast can be found between her writings and those of others who were in similar situation but reflect as survivors on the posttraumatic growth they experienced after this extremely destructive situation. Hillesum's viewpoint is not retrospective: she always returns to herself and the transcendence she finds there. This helps her to remain in the terribly dreadful presence. She has a strong positive attitude towards life which she thinks as nice and meaningful despite all the terrible circumstances.

Although more offered her to give refuge and hide her, she went to the Westerbork transit camp of her own will 'to take on community with the fate of her people'. She worked as a volunteer in the camp's hospital. As she had a permission to go out to Amsterdam, she could mediate between the camp and the resistance movements. In 1943 though, when the Jewish Council was dissolved, she lost the possibility to travel to Amsterdam, so she couldn't write limitless number of letters. But still then she kept her holistic, balanced view of the world:

People sometimes say, "You must try to make the best of things." I find this such a feeble thing to say. Everywhere things are both very good and very bad at the same time. The two are in balance, everywhere and always. I never have the feeling that I have got to make the best of things; everything is fine just as it is. Every situation, however miserable, is complete in itself and contains the good as well as the bad. All I really wanted to say is this: "making the best of things" is a nauseating expression, and so is "seeing the good in everything." (327–328).

Etty's diaries and letters also enlighten the process of a dramatic breakthrough and the attitude-change leading to a turn-of-fate in a person's life. Further they clarify the paradox of how one can keep a constructive and positive attitude amongst a worldwide traumatic shock and lethal threats. She gives a direct example for the authentic human existence, and how it is created from self-reflection and the need of the pursuit for

order and meaning, when everything is collapsing around the individual—and in this case that was what happened.

Several authors think that Hillesum's writings can be well interpreted in the framework of Eric Voegelin 'spiritual' 'realist' philosopher's theory (see e.g. Coetsier, 2008). According to Voegelin the dread of Nazism not only calls our attention to think and speak differently, but also to be different (Voegelin, 1987). Etty Hillesum's stance of staying in the here and now is very similar to Voegelin's concept of the 'flow of presence', without a philosophical contextualisation.

This approach has a strong resemblance also with the phenomenological-existential theory of Viktor Frankl, who, based on his experiences in the concentration camp, centers suffering as an experience which might bring the person closer to the quest of inner essence and meaning (Frankl, 2006). An important difference, though, that Frankl was a survivor, and his work about the quest for inner essence and meaning he created after his return from the Auschwitz. Hillesum's case have more similarities with Simone Weil, who starved to death in London in 1943, or with Anne Frank, who died in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. Their works are all saturated with the "flow of presence", calling attention to the importance of self-reflection, writing, and dialogue. Writing (of diaries, blogs, self-reflections) is also considered as a useful tool of elaborating traumas by the contemporary psychological literature (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). Writings which were born in the most extreme situations, like Hillesum's, very sharply prove that one of the important tool of coping is the endeavour to preserve humanity through a dialogue with a (transcendent) Other, and through the creative activity of writing. Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters also give an example for the outstanding role of empathy, the caring for others and the relational existence which can contribute to the experience of beauty even among most terrible circumstances.

The love for life compelled Hillesum to turn away from the Nazi horror to the world of her diary which took place in the transitory zone of time and timelessness (Coetsier, 2008). Probably this 'transitory existence', this particular state of flow made it possible for her to see the essence which cannot be seen if one perceives reality only in a static motionlessness, and expects only this from reality. Hillesum is not an idealist, she is not driven by some mystical irrationality, not the abstract forsaking from reality but the conscious experience of here and now reality, the direct encounter with the drama of humanity, and the finding of the unique adequate solution. Not universally unique, but the only solution for the given individual in search of meaning.

The connection to the "flow of presence" can be realized in its strongest form in the state of crisis (Coetsier, 2008). The non-static nature of existence can be seen the best then. That's why many people feel the quest for the positive meaning in a critical life-situation a transcendent, or even mystical experience. Some people after a life-threatening illness or serious trauma experience a rebirth which can be explained by the transformation of their attitudes during the quest for meaning. In the case of Hillesum it was the most direct and realistic experience of the inner space—the closest connection to reality and not the commonsense drawing away from it—helped her to get connected to others as well, not focusing only on herself.

She felt that if there is no chance for political and other community resistance, than an other act of resisting against indignity is needed which she found in the turn of hatred into love. She thought that this could be realized through the experience of one own and others' suffering. However this is not a masochistic wish for suffering. Hillesum recognized that if suffering is not avoidable then it could be transformed into a more extensive vision about life. This also implies the acceptance of death as an unavoidable component of human existence. As Irvin Yalom writes:

Death awareness may serve as an awakening experience, a profoundly useful catalyst for major life changes. (Yalom, 2008, 30)

and referring to St. Augustine:

It is only in the face of death that a man's self is born.... *Although the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us.* (Yalom, 2008, 32–33)

According to Heidegger (1962) the acceptance of death makes it possible the transference from a more superficial life to the state of conscious existence. This is the essence of authentic existence where one can face the possibilities and obstacles of existence. Following Heidegger, existentialist psychotherapists define two modes of existence (Yalom, 2008): One is the “everyday mode” when the individual deals with achievement, physical appearance, possessions, or prestige. In the “ontological mode”, however, one is prompted to construct an authentic life with meaning, connectivity and responsibility. It is noteworthy that existentialists emphasize the importance of the awareness of mortality in this process, and also that the person in the ontological mode is more primed to make significant changes.

Etty's paradoxical case—her personal and spiritual development among the most adverse circumstances—can be also explained by those theories of loss and trauma which deal with the reactions given to “shattered assumptions” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and to the “loss of the assumptive world” (Kauffman, 2002). These theories propose that the collapse of the person's world-view after a trauma, loss, disease or other strong stressor, may turn the individual to existential questions, and might be a starting point for spiritual development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). These changes however, have not been observed only among religious persons. According to these models the deepening spirituality can reorganize the value system and strengthen the relationship with people and reinforce transcendent attitudes.

13.5 Conclusions

This extraordinary story can be hardly fit in the conventional psychological models of coping. Etty Hillesum's case cannot act either the part of a generalizable example or a typical model because of the circumstances overwriting rationality, and its moral connotations pointing beyond everydayness. This case is rather metaphorical than prototypical. However this unique example may help the reader to contemplate about the dilemmas of authentic and free choice, and the possibilities of coping and growth

even in their own life. Etty, this young woman tuned herself without fear to the flow of life through her experience of the here and now in the context of the unthinkable terror of the Nazi genocide. In the collapsing world her psychological integrity was built up from her faith in human goodness and the strength of relationships. She kept her self-coherence supported by creative writing, and tried to reach a “nomadic consciousness”. Her responses demonstrate the possibility of authentic action, but do not represent an ideal or only solution (for this there might be other possibilities of resistance, escape, and any trials for the protection and saving of life). The lesson however, or at least the provoking food for thought from Etty Hillesum’s case, might be that there is always a possibility for personal growth and the search for meaning, even among the most extreme circumstances, where seemingly all reason and meaning is lost.

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Chapter 14

An Early Calling, a Late Career: Psychobiographic Investigations into Paulo Coelho's Career Development



Claude-Hélène Mayer

Abstract How do extraordinary individuals develop their career? This question has been responded to from various theoretical stances, however psychobiographical research has seldom contributed to answering this question. This chapter explores the career development of Paulo Coelho throughout his life, thereby responding to Van Niekerk et al. (*J Psychol Africa* 25(5):395–402, 2015) request for further psychobiographical studies on career development. Methodologically, the study is based on a single case and uses the methodological frame of Dilthey's modern hermeneutics. First- and third-person documents were collected and analysed through content analysis, focusing on particular events in the writer's life. Ethical considerations were applied. This chapter is limited to the single case analysis of the career of Paulo Coelho throughout his life by using one selected theory. Findings describe the career development of the world-famous contemporary writer within the context of Greenhaus et al. (*Career management*, 4th edn. Sage, Los Angeles, USA, 2010) model of career development. The analysis shows that Coelho's life only partly matches with the proposed career development model and expands it through concepts of spirituality, calling, life goals and serendipitous career development events. The chapter thereby contributes to new insights into career development theory and psychobiography with regard to the life and works of extraordinary individuals.

Keywords Career development · Extraordinary individual · Psychobiography · Single case · Paulo Coelho · Writer's life

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You are what you believe yourself to be.

Paulo Coelho

14.1 Meaning Creation through Career Development

A huge part of meaning in life is constructed through work, career and career development (Blustein, 2006). Work and career provide individuals with resources and sources of structure, relationships and connections with others (Juntunen, 2006; Richardson, 2012). Both work and career can impact positively on individuals' lives, life satisfaction and value development (Savickas, 2011). Career development theories have been criticised and redefined repeatedly over the years. They have been discussed, besides others, in the context of developing career adaptability, resilience and coping in dynamic and globalised work contexts (Lent, 2013), the management of career stages and transitions in the context of identity development and creation of meaningfulness (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Methodologically, the importance of case study research with regard to career theories and practice has been pointed out (Swanson & Fouad, 2015) and the development of the self and the identity have been explored (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Hartung & Subich, 2011;). Psychobiographies deal with single case studies across the lifespan (Kasser, 2017), which perfectly suit the need to focus on career and long-term development perspectives of individuals across the life span (van Niekerk, Vos, & Fouché, 2015). Thereby, psychobiographies focus on extraordinary and historically significant individuals (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010, p. 2) and aim at reconstructing the life of the individual in focus through psychological theories, with particular interest in developmental aspects (Burnell, 2013). They ask about the individual in terms of who they are and how they develop across their lives (Mayer, 2017).

Psychobiographies as research method and theoretical approach in psychology have gained international recognition, often using psychoanalytic theoretical approaches (Anderson, 2015; Alexander, 1990; Belzen, 2013). They contribute to a holistic and complex understanding of individual processes. With regard to career development, psychobiographies can contribute to a refinement of career development theories, not only for individuals in general, but for extraordinary individuals in particular. Such a theoretical refinement seems to be overdue in career development (Bloch, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 2014) and in psychobiography (van Niekerk, Vos, & Fouché, 2015).

Kasser (2017) recently pointed out that mainstream psychology should appreciate the contributions of psychobiography in terms of psychobiographical knowledge construction regarding scientific theories and methods. Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, and Cheung (2015) recommend that psychobiographical training at universities should emphasise the importance of various theoretical and methodological approaches to psychobiography in theory and practice. In this chapter, it is argued that psychobiographies can contribute not only to psychology, but also to other specific psychological sub-areas, such as career development. On one hand, this study contributes to the exploration of career development from a single case study perspective, presenting a historically significant individual as role model, highlighting interesting career

development aspects from which readers could learn (Mayer, 2017). On the other hand, psychobiographical research can impact on evaluating and reconstructing theories in career development on an in-depth level of analysis, referring to Schultz & Larence (2017).

14.2 Aims of This Study on Paulo Coelho

Many stories have been told about Paulo Coelho (Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Maree, 2017, 2018a, 2018b); however, his career has not yet been reconstructed based on a psychological career development theory. This study therefore focuses on his career (development), thereby contributing to holistic lifespan research in outstanding individuals (Eliastam, 2011) to reconstruct their lives from a new perspective (Mayer, 2017). The study includes information from selected creative works, such as *The Pilgrimage* (Coelho, 1987) or *The Alchemist* (1988) which flourished from the 1940s onwards (Arias, 2001; Morais, 2009). Coelho won many national and international awards during his career and is one of the most widely read and translated contemporary writers in the world.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse and reconstruct the life and work of Paulo Coelho in the context of the career development model of Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godschalk (2010) following the general recommendation of van Niekerk et al. (2015) to take the psychobiographical approach to career development further. This topic was chosen due to the fact that Paulo Coelho made an extraordinary, highly successful career as a writer and is therefore subject of interest in this psychobiographical work. The research question is: How can the life of Paulo Coelho be reconstructed with regard to his career development? To respond to this question, the Greenhaus et al. (2010) model is used, providing a piece of complex understanding of the person through different lenses.

This chapter is part of a series of psychobiographical publications on the life and creative works of Paulo Coelho (Mayer, 2017; Mayer and Maree, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). It aims to complement a holistic, multiperspectivist view of the person, which cannot—so it is argued here—be reached by just applying one theory to the life of a person. It needs various theories highlighting different foci and specifically analysed life events to develop a holistic view of an individual across the lifespan. Table 14.1 provides an overview of publications on Coelho which contribute to a multiperspectivist view of the writer.

The study at hand adds to the holistic research on Paulo Coelho's life, and in particular explores his career development and takes previous findings into account. It thereby complements the insights into the selected, extraordinary life on one hand, and contributes to new forms of psychobiographical research through cumulative theoretical and methodological research approaches on the other.

Table 14.1 Psychobiographical publications on Paulo Coelho’s life

Publication on Paulo Coelho from psychobiographical perspective	Theoretical focus and new insights
Mayer, C.-H. (2017). The life and creative works of Paulo Coelho. A Psychobiography from a Positive Psychology Perspective. Cham, Switzerland: Springer	Holistic wellness across the writer’s life Faith development across the writer’s life This book explores the holistic wellness theory and the faith development theory with regard to the development of Paulo Coelho and 70 years of his life. Findings show how holistic wellness and faith interact and how they contribute to Paulo Coelho’s development Methodology: modern hermenutics
Mayer, C.-H. & Maree, D. (2017). A psychobiographical study of intuition in a writer’s life: Paulo Coelho revisited. <i>Europe’s Journal of Psychology</i> , 13(3), 472–490	Intuition in the writer’s life The article provides insights on how Coelho uses intuition throughout his life and how it supports him to write, to become a writer and to be creative Methodology: modern hermenutics
Mayer, C.-H. & Maree, D. (2018b). The magical life and creative works of Paulo Coelho: A psychobiographical investigation. <i>The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology</i> , 18, 16 pages	Theoretical exploration of magic This article explores how magical thinking in Coelho’s life interacts with his personal development and his belief system. The interlinkages of magical belief and the stories and narrations in selected creative works are analysed and discussed Methodology: phenomenology
Mayer, C.-H. & Maree, D. (2018a). Creativity across the lifespan—a psychobiographical perspective on Paulo Coelho. <i>Journal of Genius and Eminence</i>	Creativity in the writer’s life Acts of creativity are analysed according to a specific theoretical model of creativity, and acts of creativity are reflected in terms of the development of his writing and his personal development Methodology: modern hermenutics
Mayer, C.-H. (2018). Exceptional human experiences in the life and creative works of Paulo Coelho: A psychobiographical investigation. <i>Spirituality in Clinical Practice</i>	The theoretical state-of-the-art of exceptional human experiences is presented. The article evaluates a few highly impactful exceptional human experiences which happened during Coelho’s life. The experiences are categorised in terms of their impact (positive and negative impacts) Methodology: modern hermeneutics

Source Author’s own construction

14.3 Career and Career Development

The development of a career is described as a multidimensional process during which individuals progress in terms of several stages (Sharf, 2010). This process includes social, psychological, educational, economic and physical contributing factors (Zunker, 2010). Career development meta-capacities ensure that an individual can flourish in the career context, taking internal and external factors and influences into account (Savickas & Porfeli 2012). Career meta-capacities, which are defined as a set of career resources to be used by individuals to manage and plan their career development, are crucial factors in career development (Coetzee, 2008). They are higher order skills and knowledge and include the ability to judge the availability, application and learnability of personal competencies (Beheshtifar, 2011).

Several theories focus on career development across the lifespan and life-space in terms of career, chronological time and contextual development (Hartung, 2013). The idea of a career as a calling in the context of spirituality has become popular in recent years, according to Weiss, Skelley, Hall, and Haughey (2003). These authors describe the lives of extraordinary individuals such as Ghandi and Martin Luther King, who experienced a calling to careers which changed their lives significantly during a process of exploration, trial, establishment and mastery. This process is driven particularly by the person and not by an organisation, in a non-linear, circular and developing way (Weiss et al., 2003). Taking system dynamics into account and asking for the exploration of content and process in career development (Patton & McMahon, 2014), such a calling is closely connected to constructing meaning in life through success and crisis during a lifelong process (Siegrist, 1997). Career thereby contributes to building a coherent identity (Mayer, 2011) and to managing oneself (Seibert, Kraimer, Holtorn, & Pierotti, 2013). It can be experienced as a sense of purpose, which refers to the idea and feeling that a person is meant for a certain career (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Such a calling usually impacts positively on the person and their career (Hall & Chandler, 2005) and is often connected to “serendipitous events”—non-predictable unexpected events and factors (Super et al., 1957), strategy planning and information, as well as to intuition and emotion (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996).

Career (decision-making) and establishing a career can become a stressful process (Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2000) when the individual experiences conflicting emotions and hindrances on the career path. A strong sense of coherence as an individual, however, impacts positively to strengthen the individual (Mayer, 2014).

In psychobiographical studies, analysis of career across the lifespan has been emphasised (van Niekerk & Fouché 2010, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Perry, van Niekerk & Fouché, 2016). van Niekerk et al. (2015) point out that career development includes various stages through which individuals move during their lives and which usually hold specific tasks to be addressed. The current study makes use of this career development model because its developmental stage perspective integrates the view of an individual’s total life with work, family and self-development. It is valuable as a framework for this lifespan study which does take characteristics of the environment and career development into account (Singh & Greenhaus, 2004) and

which focuses on career development, management and long-term success (Mulhall, 2014). All of these aspects seem to be important in the concept of a psychobiographical career development investigation. Further, in their psychobiography of heart surgeon Christiaan Barnard, van Niekerk et al. (2015) use the career development model of Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godschalk (2010) successfully to analyse his career during his lifetime.

According to Greenhaus et al. (2010), career development is viewed as a continuing process in which individuals progress through a series of stages, each of which is characterised by a relatively unique set of issues, themes, and tasks. The authors define career development in terms of four stages in the context of work, family and self-development dynamics, while other external influences such as socio-cultural background, gender, globalisation, economics, demographics and business might also influence the career development path. Hartung (2013) notes that career stages might be repeated, while individuals (re-)cycle around career development (stage development) processes.

In the first stage, the **occupational and organisational choice stage** during the first 25 years of life, the individual reflects on choices of occupations, completes training, gains job offers and enters the career and occupational contexts. During this stage individuals aim to find an occupation which fits their needs to flourish on the job. Super, Savicka, and Super (1996) highlight that their choice is influenced by the life-space and is bound to the life roles enacted by the individuals, while Savickas (2005) associates career development with vocational personality, career adaptability and life themes. Maree (2017) emphasises that the career path is developed early in life and early attention is needed to motivate learners. Porfeli and Skorikov (2010) point out that career exploration is not only about specific career expectations, but also about the broad learning area concerning the world of work and the self in context. Others define callings as work with a purpose or destiny (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) and a source of fulfilment (Berg, Grant & Johnson, 2010), a purpose and passion (Dobrow, 2006). These callings can occur in childhood or at any other stage in life (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Weiss et al., 2003).

The second stage—the **early career stage**—is embedded in the years 25 to 40. Most important during this stage are establishment and achievement, in which individuals develop expertise on the job, career strategies, deepen their value orientations and aim at gaining acceptance from colleagues. Kay, Hagan, and Parker (2008) emphasise how important mentorship is in the early stages of career development. After the establishing themselves, individuals strive for achievement which requires them to gain authority, manage challenges, show competence, emphasise decision-making and achieve career objectives. Thereby, the contribution a person wants to make is defined. Hall (2002) observes that career is not only bound to the increase in status and salary, but also to personal potential, accomplishment of life goals and satisfaction.

During the third stage, the **mid-career stage** (40–55 years), the career is defined by the confrontation with midlife transition, maintaining of levels of productivity, upgrading of skills and the mentoring of younger colleagues. During this time of

career development, individuals have to adapt to both environmental and individual changes and challenges in career and/or lifestyle.

Finally, the fourth, **later career stage** starts at the age of 55 years and refers to tasks such as leadership responsibilities. During this stage, individuals usually take on commitment, adapt to change brought on by their increased age, and either engage in career activities or disengage. They might also plan and prepare their retirement during this stage (Post, Schneer, Reitman, & Ogilvie, 2013).

14.4 Research Methodology

This chapter describes a longitudinal single-case study which is psychobiographic (Ponterotto, 2014) and person-centred (Elms, 2007). It is anchored in Dilthey's modern hermeneutics (Dilthey, 2002) and explores the development of the career of Paulo Coelho. Dilthey's philosophy is built upon the assumption that a life can only be understood ("Verstehen") by taking its context into account through reflection and a view of the entire life. Dilthey (2002) uses a particularly broad understanding of hermeneutics and emphasises the importance of biography within the context of psychology, while pointing out the importance of the individual's uniqueness and wholeness as extraordinary. These characteristics of Dilthey's approach make it particularly valuable for this study.

Data was collected from first- and third-person documentation (Allport, 1961). The first-person data documents included autobiographical manuscripts, his creative works, one documentary, and various internet statements. As third-person documents, one biography (Morais, 2009), one published interview (Arias, 2001) and various other documents, interviews, published comments and creative works were analysed and interpreted. Coelho was chosen purposefully as a sample for research owing to his extraordinary career and success as a writer.

For analysis, the five-step content analysis process of Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Kelly (2006, pp. 322–326) was used. The steps are familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, and interpretation and checking with regard to career development. For the analysis, parts of the data processing and analysis matrix of van Niekerk et al. (2015, p. 397, see Table 14.2) were applied and matched with the content analysis of first- and third-person documents.

14.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical and legal considerations in psychobiography have gained importance recently (Ponterotto & Reynolds Taewon Choi, 2017). Ethical considerations were taken into account in the current study, such as respectful treatment of the data and non-maleficence, particularly since the subject of research is still alive (Elms, 1994). Only data available in the public domain was analysed. Although repeated attempts were

Table 14.2 Career development stages

Stages	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
	Occupational and organisational choice	Early career: establishment and achievement	Middle career	Late career
Age (years)	0–25	25–40	40–55	55 onwards
Developmental tasks	Consider alternative occupations Make tentative occupational choice Complete required training programmes Obtain job offers Enter the organisational context	Develop expertise Utilise career strategies Acquire organisational values Gain acceptance as colleague Demonstrate competence Decide what type of contribution to make Explore opportunities Implement strategies to achieve career objectives	Confront the midlife transition Maintain productivity Upgrade skills Act as mentors for younger colleagues Consider changes in individual and environmental factors	Accept leadership responsibilities Adapt to change Remain committed Adapt to increased age

Source van Niekerk et al. (2015, p. 397)

made to contact Paulo Coelho, finally his personal agent responded that the writer does not have time to read through or comment on the study. The standards of ethical vigilance in psychobiography (Ponterotto & Reynolds Taewon Choi, 2017) were followed, in terms of discussing ethical aspects with other researchers. Self-reflection, using inter- and intra-subjective validation (Yin, 2009), was also undertaken throughout the writing process.

14.6 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the theoretical framework of psychobiographical research, to the theory described and applied and to the limitations which are bound to the research methodology (Schultz, 2005). It is expected that this research may have a researcher bias which is already expressed through the choice of theory, methodology and subject (Nortjé, Fouché, & Gogo, 2013).

14.7 Findings

The career of Paulo Coelho is analysed from his birth to his 70th birthday by using a chronological view of his development, highlighting selected life events, applying the four stages and developmental tasks identified in Table 14.2 (Greenhaus et al., 2010; van Niekerk et al., 2015).

14.7.1 Occupational and Organisational Choice

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 into an upper middle class family; his father was an engineer and his mother a housewife (Morais, 2009). The parents wanted him to become an engineer as well, but Paulo only enjoyed the world of books and fantasy (Morais, 2009). In primary school, he was known for his talent in story-telling, and in 1956 he won his first writing competition (Morais, 2009). He behaved as if he had already chosen his occupation in childhood; it was not even a “tentative choice” (Greenhaus et al., 2010), but was rather a conscious choice to become an author (Morais, 2009).

During primary school, Paulo wrote poetry and short stories and trained himself through reading novels and adventure stories (Morais, 2009). At the age of 12, he started to write a daily diary and tape-recorded his feelings, ideas and emotions to construct a contemporary self-portrait (Morais, 2009). He also began to write letters to family members and scribbled thoughts on paper for future books. At the same time, his parents were irritated and worried about his lack of interest in school and sciences; they did not appreciate his interest in books (Arias, 2001).

During adolescence, Paulo hardly managed to finish secondary school, while only being occupied with becoming a writer. He developed an *idée fixe* (a life goal, according to Hall, 2002) and just wanted to become a famous writer (Morais, 2009, p. 62) whose books were read. It could be argued that this was already an early calling into his career as a writer (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Weiss et al., 2003). However, the reason (Greenhaus et al., 2010) for wanting to become a writer is not described. In 1993, told his mother that he refused to become an engineer (Coelho, 2006, p. 11): “No, mother, I just want to be a writer. Not an engineer who writes books.” He then constructed a list of the characteristics of a writer: a maladjusted, rebellious intellectual and poet, critical of and fascinated by other writers. Coelho aimed to be seen as he considered famous writers to be. Further, he wanted to live his passion and spread his ideas through writing, thereby sharing his perspectives, and perhaps even influencing others. Probably his focus on becoming a famous writer was part of his rebelling against his parents and a strong statement against a lifestyle driven by rational thought. However, his aim to become a writer seems to have been a deeply rooted wish which was fuelled through the experience of a calling (Morais, 2009).

Already at a young age, Coelho emphasised that he was a writer (Coelho, 2006) and founded a literary club called “Rota 15” (Morais, 2009). He self-trained and

led the club without any formal training programme, mentoring or guidance (see Greenhaus et al., 2010) and wrote his first theatre play at the age of 17. He published a mimeographed booklet of poetry, continued writing poems and won first prize in the Academia Literária Santo Inácio in 1994. He wrote articles for a newspaper—thereby making his first occupational choices (Greenhaus et al., 2010). However, his poems and newspaper articles were rejected for publication and he doubted his abilities as a writer (Morais, 2009).

Striving for his dream profession and career kept him alive, while he suffered from depressive episodes and worried about how to establish himself as a recognised writer (Morais, 2009).

After he finished secondary school, Coelho started to study law, based on the wish of his parents who felt that law was an appropriate field of study for him. Coelho considered this an “alternative career path” (Greenhaus et al., 2010). He became unhappy and stopped studying after one year to return to establish his career as a writer. From 1965 onwards, Coelho developed his own literary programme which included the following: to buy a newspaper every day, read book reviews, send articles to relevant people, talk to people in the writing scene, contact newspapers and radio stations to make himself known, and find the addresses of famous writers (Morais, 2009). He explored opportunities and implemented strategies to achieve career objectives (Stage 2 of Greenhaus et al., 2010).

From the beginning of 1968, Coelho produced his own theatre plays on a regular basis, while keeping up his dream (Morais, 2009), developing more expertise in writing and organising theatre plays (Stage 2 of Greenhaus et al., 2010). He became a member of the Brazilian Society of Theatre Writers and worked at the university teaching theatre classes, during which time he also won a short story competition (Morais, 2009). Through these actions he demonstrated competence and implemented career development strategies (Greenhaus et al., 2010). However, his wish to become a world-famous writer was not yet reached; he was not accepted as a colleague by other writers and he was unaware of his personal contribution through writing (Stage 2 of Greenhaus et al., 2010). During his first 20 years, Coelho put several strategies in place to develop himself, while testing alternative occupations (Greenhaus et al., 2010), such as becoming a lawyer, a theatre play producer and lecturer. But he was not happy with any of these pathways (Morais, 2009).

14.7.2 Early Career: Establishment and Achievement

Between the ages of 25 and 40, Coelho went travelling and began at the age of 31 to write songs for famous Brazilian songwriters and singers (Morais, 2009). Although he was depressed about his inability to become a famous writer, he became famous as a songwriter for Raul Seixas. They became friends and together explored the occult, the devil and black magic (Morais, 2009). Coelho made a pact with the devil to become a famous writer (Arias, 2001; Morais, 2009), but withdrew soon after from this particular form of career development strategy (Greenhaus et al., 2010).

Coelho received his real calling—what Arias (2001) refers to as the “birth of the writer”—while visiting the concentration camp in Dachau (Hall and Chandler, 2005; Weiss et al., 2003). Shortly afterwards he became a member of Regnum Agnus Mundi (RAM), a secret Catholic order, at the age of 35 and was sent on a spiritual pilgrimage to France and Spain (Morais, 2009). A year after this pilgrimage, Paulo wrote his first bestseller *The Pilgrimage* (Coelho, 1987), a book on his spiritual journey and his application of spiritual exercises for personal growth.

Together with his life partner, Cristina, he developed career strategies (Greenhaus et al., 2010) to promote his book (Morais, 2009). Coelho became a “warrior of light” following his spiritual pathway (Morais, 2009; Stage 2 of Greenhaus et al., 2010). He developed his expertise in writing (Greenhaus et al., 2010) when writing a second book, *The Alchemist* (Coelho, 1988), one of his best-selling books to date. He developed spiritually and described this development in his books (Morais, 2009), seeing his contribution in his spiritual messages (Greenhaus et al., 2010). He became “a magus” (Arias, 2001, xix), while using this spirituality to develop his ability as a writer, and inspired his readers through his self-development (Morais, 2009).

Coelho’s personal spiritual development and his career as a writer are strongly interconnected. Many of his books provide the reader with a personal prologue, updating his personal spiritual self-development as, for example, described in *The Pilgrimage* (Coelho, 1987) and *Aleph* (Coelho, 2011). It has also been pointed out that particularly his exceptional human and spiritual experiences contributed to major life decisions which impacted positively on his development as a famous writer (see Mayer, 2018).

For his career development, Coelho did not acquire organisational values as described by Greenhaus et al. (2010), but developed his own personal values and a spiritual foundation which contributed to his success (Mayer, 2017). In the beginning of this early career, he gained scarcely any acceptance by his colleagues (Morais, 2009), as described in Greenhaus et al. (2010). Particularly his Brazilian colleagues did not accept him as a writer and criticised him strongly over at least two decades. His first international recognition came between the ages 37 and 40 (Morais, 2009). He demonstrated competence (as in Greenhaus et al., 2010) and wanted his books to be read (Morais, 2009). It was been argued before (Mayer, 2017) that the writing process contributed to his spiritual development and vice versa, while implementing further strategies to promote his writing, shaping his career.

14.7.3 Mid-Career: Developing towards International Success

Coelho expanded his promotion strategies (Morais, 2009) to being recognised as a writer (Greenhaus et al., 2010). He promoted himself on television, during talk shows, through friends and through his agent who promoted his work in Europe

(Morais, 2009). Several aspects of his early career were further developed in his mid-career.

Coelho confronted his midlife transition (Greenhaus et al., 2010) through his spiritual self-development, and tapped into concepts of eternity. He felt a continuing urge to follow his dream (Coelho, 2003a). His forties were mainly dedicated to writing more best-selling books, such as *Brida* (Coelho, 1990), *The Valkyries* (Coelho, 1992), and *The Fifth Mountain* (Coelho, 1998). He further developed spiritually through the practices of RAM and experienced spiritual transitions. The mid-career stage was not necessarily to maintain his productivity, as is usual in this stage (Greenhaus et al., 2010), but rather to build his productivity and name as a best-selling international writer and spiritual master. Through writing and informal education in terms of reading books and developing his inner qualities (Mayer, 2017), Coelho upgraded his ability to write books, publish and negotiate with the publishers. Writing and spirituality were strongly interlinked (Mayer, 2017, 2018).

Coelho started to mentor new RAM members as a spiritual master (Morais, 2009), but he did not mentor young writers as far as is publicly known (see Greenhaus et al., 2010). He was more occupied with developing his own career as a writer, than with mentoring others.

Only in his fifties and onwards, was Coelho accepted by the community of international and Brazilian writers (Morais, 2009). He experienced a major life change (see Greenhaus et al., 2010) and became a jetsetting celebrity. He remained self-driven, mainly considering his personal and individual well-being (Mayer, 2017). From the age of 50, he maintained his publishing productivity (Morais, 2009), as described by Greenhaus et al. (2010) as appropriate for the mid-career stage, and was officially and finally accepted in the Brazilian Academy of Writers in 2001, after having once failed to gain membership (Morais, 2009). This acceptance by his Brazilian colleagues only came late in his mid-career, whereas, according to Greenhaus et al. (2010), it should have happened already during his early career.

14.7.4 Late Career: Staying Committed

As in the previous career stages of his life, Coelho stayed committed (see Greenhaus et al., 2010) to being a successful writer by publishing continuously during his late career. In the later years he published *Veronica decides to die* (Coelho, 1998), *Eleven Minutes* (Coelho, 2003b), *The Zahir* (Coelho, 2005), and *The Witch of Portobello* (Coelho, 2007). He developed spiritually, adapted to change and overcame spiritual crises (Morais, 2009). He then decided to publish his books online for free, committing self-piracy, to increase his overall sales (Morais, 2009), his success and his international recognition. His publishers remained quiet, since the strategy worked out well for all concerned. Coelho was self-driven, adapted to new challenges and implemented new strategic career development ideas to make his books read (Morais, 2009).

Coelho continued writing bestsellers, such as *The Winner Stands Alone* (Coelho, 2008a), *Aleph* (Coelho, 2011), *Manuscript Found in Accra* (Coelho, 2012), *Adultery* (Coelho, 2014) and *The Spy* (Coelho, 2016) during his sixties. His productivity remained high in his late career, as had been expected for his mid-career (Greenhaus et al., 2010), while the topics of his books turned away from spirituality (Coelho, 2014, 2016).

Almost no information can be found regarding Coelho taking on responsibilities of leadership or adapting to increased age. These are the stages described as typical by Greenhaus et al. (2010) with regard to late career.

Throughout his career, Paulo focused on self-development, and took on very little social responsibility as a mentor (mid-career) or a leader (late career). He only showed political engagement with regard to a public comment on the US war in Iraq (Coelho, 2008b) and on the Brazilian government's support of young writers (Tageblatt, 2014). However, these two short notice statements can hardly be viewed as signs of leadership responsibility as highlighted by Greenberg et al. (2010).

14.8 Conclusions and the Way Forward

The aim of this study was to analyse the career development of Paulo Coelho across his lifespan. In the following section, conclusions regarding selected themes are provided.

14.8.1 Coelho's Career Development

Coelho's career development was defined by his strong urge to create meaning in his life by becoming a writer. This urge began during childhood, but was not based on the need to use writing as a source of structure nor to connect to others as suggested by Juntunen (2006) or Richardson (2012). Rather, it was seen as a resource for a meaningful, self-directed life and to fulfil his dream (Blustein, 2006; Person, May, & Mayer, 2016).

From an early age, Coelho was fond of writing, but he also experienced periods of deep doubt, crisis and depression through all career stages, particularly during Stages 1 and 2. However, he remained resilient, coped and adapted to his slowly growing career (see Lent, 2013). According to his meta-capacities (Beheshtifar, 2011), Coelho was convinced from childhood onwards that he had the ability to become a famous writer and he felt that this was his passion and meaning in life, his calling, and his life's goal (Hall, 2002). When he then received a direct calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Weiss et al., 2003) of the "birth of the writer", he experienced a high motivation to start his career based on his intuitive childhood belief. This calling was a "serendipitous event", as described by Betsworth & Hansen (1996), and Coelho managed to invent a well-based intuitive strategy to promote his creative work. His

career was not a well-planned and organised path, but rather a path based on passion and intuition (Mayer & Maree, 2017), favoured by serendipitous events (the calling, and RAM membership invitation). The career path was strongly influenced by trial, establishment and mastery (see Weiss. et al., 2003) and serendipitous events (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996) around which Coelho cycled and recycled to build his life and his career (see Hartung, 2013).

14.8.2 The Theory of Career Development of Greenhaus et al. (2010)

Coelho's occupational choice (Stage 1) was clearly defined from childhood onwards and he mainly pursued his career wish through informal education and self-training in reading and writing. He did not receive any professional training, but built his talent self-directedly against all restraints (parents, society). He considered alternative occupations (law) only to please his parents, or to sustain his life (theatre plays, newspapers, lecturing, music industry), while aiming for his dream.

Only at the end of Stage 2 did Coelho begin his career as a writer. For him, Stage 2 of Greenhaus et al. (2010) was combined with Stage 3, regarding, for example, utilising career strategies, gaining acceptance as a colleague, being clear about the contribution to make (spirituality), exploring opportunities and implementing strategies to achieve career objectives. These aspects were all addressed late in Stage 3. The specific aspects of his Stage 3 (confronting midlife transition, becoming a mentor) are not relevant: Coelho neither took on the role of a mentor during Stage 3, nor did he consider individual and environmental changes or upgraded his writing skills through formal training, as described in Greenhaus et al. (2010).

In Stage 4, Coelho hardly accepted leadership responsibilities (he seldom commented on political, environmental or societal issues), but only developed himself personally and spiritually. However, one could argue that he mentors his readers indirectly through his publications, based on his calling. Even in late adulthood, Coelho remains committed, although he does not speak about adapting to change and/or to increased age.

Coelho's career is based on passion, a calling and serendipitous events, combined with an intuitive strategy, without any formal education or training. The concepts of the calling, the passion and serendipitous events should be taken into account in the Greenhaus et al. (2010) model. Coelho developed his career against all odds, self-directedly and independent of mentors, societal educational or other social support systems. His career follows an individualised, process without norms, and is infused by passion, personal drive, and meaningfulness. It is energised through his values, characterised by his personal competence, his rejection of authority and autocratic systems (such as school, university, professional societies), and his ability to cope with adversity (in the form of parents, school teachers, university). Through self-direction and personal strength in terms of resilience, resourcefulness and spirituality,

Table 14.3 Coelho’s career development

Career development	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Coelho’s age	Childhood and adolescence	Young adulthood	Mid-adulthood	Late adulthood
Coelho’s developmental tasks	Professional dream of becoming a writer Develop ideas on professions (writer) and anti-professions (engineer) Explore how professionals of this occupation are/ behave/ think/ feel Explore ways to become a professional writer Collect information from family and peers on profession Passion for the profession and the work Strategies: build image as writer, organise professional association (Rota 15), participate in competitions	Decision to study law, thereby follow suggested and socially accepted career paths (parents, family) Overcome the social influence of others regarding the professional choice Follow the childhood dream/calling (birth of writer) Develop professional skills needed through informal education (reading and writing) Exploring and changing jobs Membership of professional writer associations Crisis and doubts in cases of failure and about strategies to become a writer	Start, increase and maintain professional productivity as writer Deepen the commitment to write Integration of professional life and life design (spirituality) Integration of professional and personal development Living the professional dream, experienced meaningfulness Self-directed, individualised, professional development	Continuous commitment to profession and dream Deepening of passion New perspectives in writing content Interpenetration of profession from different (disciplinary) perspectives Professional (self-directed) assessment and evaluation of career path

Source Author’s own construction

Coelho developed his career. With regard to the Greenhaus et al. (2010) model, several aspects of Stages 2 and 3 are delayed or irrelevant, while others, such as individual passion, meaningfulness, calling or serendipitous events, are highly relevant and need to be included in the model (Table 14.3).

14.8.3 *Career Development Research, Psychobiography and the Way Forward*

This study endorses the conclusions of van Niekerk et al. (2015) who have previously highlighted that more research on career development in extraordinary individuals is needed to contribute to career psychology and to the development of suitable models and theories which respond to extraordinary career paths from a holistic point of view through psychobiographical work. Further exploration is needed to understand how extraordinary individuals develop their (often unusual) careers, and to what extent intuition, serendipitous events, calling, passion, strategic and rational career planning and formal training impact on and are interlinked with such individuals. Methodologically, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods should be taken into account to analyse longitudinal single cases through psychobiography using different theories.

Based on these research approaches, psychobiographers should aim at developing career development models which speak to the lives and careers of extraordinary individuals. Thereby, existing models could be refined and new ones developed by taking systems' internal (intuitive/rational, conscious/unconscious, passion/strategy) and external (family, peers, values, status, cultural context, social context) psychodynamic factors into account.

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Chapter 15

Goethe's Creative Relationship with His Mother Under Psychobiographical Perspectives



Rainer Matthias Holm-Hadulla

Abstract Goethe is the ideal case for psychobiography because he had a unique ability to describe his personal development and the psychic crises he experienced. He developed strategies to solve emotional problems that are still of practical use today. His letters, diaries, and documented conversations are rich with problem-solving inspirations. Goethe's ability to remain dedicated to life and to his creativity despite severe mood swings is of special psychological interest. His frequently self-flagellating working through of memories and fantasies stabilized him throughout his life. Self-reflection, political and scientific work as well as poetic writing were indispensable to him for overcoming emotional turmoil, relational conflicts and mood swings. Psychobiographical analyses enhance our understanding of an author, his or her works and ourselves. In Goethe's case, we see how his remembering of and working through the bright and dark aspects of mother figures went along with a good relationship with his own mother. They could love and respect each other without irrational idealization, and they could tolerate each other's autonomy and separation. Both could use the other as an "internal object" that allowed feelings of resonance and secure bonding. The psychobiographical reflection of Goethe's life and work shows in a more general sense that the artistic transformation of the destructive aspects inherent in all human relationships can lead to an active art of living and—sometimes—to eminent creativity.

Keywords Biography · Goethe · Creativity · Depression · Psychology · Psychoanalysis · Psychotherapy · Psychobiography

15.1 Introduction

Goethe is the ideal case for psychobiography because he had a unique ability to describe his personal development and the psychic crises he experienced. He devel-

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oped strategies to solve emotional problems that are of practical use till today. The following remarks are taken from my book “*Goethe’s Path to Creativity*” (Holm-Hadulla, 2018).

In his works, Goethe describes a wide variety of personal and social conflicts; his letters, diaries, and recorded conversations are also full of problem-solving inspirations. Although this constant preoccupation with himself may seem off-putting to some, it does provide one main advantage to researchers: We know almost everything about his life, from his earliest childhood to his death. Moreover, the style of these self-narratives is more nuanced than we could imagine possible of today’s authors. He used actively a vocabulary ten times more words than cultivated people of today. Not just himself, but also those around him—first his mother, father, and sister, and later his friends, lovers, and colleagues—also provided detailed accounts of his personal development. This was made possible by the age in which he lived; at that time and in that society, impressions, ideas, and emotional experiences were chronicled to an extent that has not been practiced before or since.

Goethe’s ability to remain dedicated to life and to his creativity, despite severe emotional crises, is of special psychological interest. His frequently self-flagellating preoccupation with memories and fantasies stabilized him throughout his life. Self-reflection, political and scientific work as well as poetic writing were indispensable for him to overcome emotional turmoil, relational conflicts and mood swings. His creative striving to come to terms with adverse life events began with the death of his brother Hermann Jakob when Johann Wolfgang was ten years old and was reinforced by emotional crises in his adolescence:

And thus began that habit from which I could not break away my whole life through – the habit of turning into an image, into a poem, whatever delighted or troubled, or otherwise occupied me, and thus of coming to some definite conclusion with regard to it, so that I might both rectify my conceptions of external things and satisfy my inner cravings. To no one was the faculty for so doing more necessary than to me, for by nature I was constantly carried from one extreme to the other. (Smith, 1908, *Poetry and Truth*, vol. 1, p. 252)

15.2 Methods

Psychology has made great strides since Goethe’s day, and the new field of neurobiology has given us revolutionary insights into the human mind. Using modern medical imaging techniques, we can see which locations in the brain are activated when someone is in a good or bad mood, and also which biological processes are involved in human behavior, perception, and thought. Nevertheless, even leading neuroscientists believe that complex psychological experiences can only be understood with the aid of appropriate verbal methods (cf. Andreasen, 2005). There are many things that cannot be learned from brain scans; the only way to learn why a Mozart sonata elicits memories of a lover’s smile in one person and the boredom of a Sunday afternoon in another is through the power of words.

This highlights the necessity for psychobiographical understanding by delving into everyday and literary narratives. So different philosophers like Ricoeur (1981), Gadamer (1989) and Rorty (2001) confirm Freud's (1914) intuition that it is in the act of narrative understanding that we experience ourselves and the world around us. Understanding is an all-encompassing mode of being that allows people to become their true selves and to meet their own potential (see Holm-Hadulla, 2004a, 2017).

15.3 Results: Goethe's Relationship with His Mother

Goethe's birth was very difficult, echoes of this life threat of death will be found throughout his life and work. His mother, Catharina Elisabeth, was in labor for three days, and the family could not help but remember the tragedy of his grandmother's first three children, who were all stillborn. It took many different attempts to revive the child. We know today from research in the fields of neurobiology and psychology that experiences during birth and even prenatal sensations can leave behind unconscious traces in the "embodied mind". Even when there are no complications, both mother and child undergo many hours of stress during childbirth. The newborn experiences overwhelming fear and a sense of impending doom, which are stored in its unconscious mind. Nevertheless, the child copes with this mortal fear, which it is freed from by its first cry, in much the same way as the mother is relieved of her physical pain by her feeling of joy at the birth of her child.

Goethe places great significance on his birth experience in his autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*; he returned to the themes of birth and personal growth accompanied by pain and the threat of death again and again throughout his life. He conceived of his own self-actualization as a continuous process of "dying and becoming" i.e. a continuous process of construction and destruction. Being aware of this conception allows us to understand the lines of verse that he included in a letter to Auguste zu Stolberg, in which he states that he had been given everything entirely, "all joys, the infinite ones, / all pains, the infinite ones, entirely" (HA 1, p. 142: HH). For Goethe, joy and despair were often conjoined: at the time he wrote these lines, his living situation would have been the envy of many, but he had also just received news of his sister's death.

Goethe's writing allowed him to overcome crises and to create himself anew again and again. But we can also see in his work, from *Werther* to *Faust*, that this creative act of self-creation was accompanied by anxiety, despondence, and painful feelings of inferiority. In *Faust I*, he says:

I am not like the gods! Too deeply it is felt:/I am like the worm that rifles through the dust
[...] (Vs. 632–653: HH).

These verses are similar to rhymes the seventeen-year-old Goethe shared with his sister, in which he confessed the deep despair he felt during the crises of his student years. An incessant struggle for the vitality of the self could be considered one of the guiding motifs throughout Goethe's life, but he also conceived of individuation in a

general sense as a process of dying and becoming; for this reason, self-actualization and a creative life cannot occur without pain and danger.

Even after little Johann Wolfgang survived his difficult birth, his family continued to worry about him. He seems to have reacted to the dangers of his first few weeks of life with intense emotions and active attempts to cope mentally (see v. Arnim, 1861). Although Bettina von Arnim's description is not a completely reliable source, it is not inconceivable that little Johann Wolfgang was plagued by fears and anxieties that he, like any other child, attempted to assuage by means of intense psychological activity. Thanks to neurobiology, it is now possible to confirm this psychoanalytical supposition. During their first few months of life, babies are already starting to actively process internal and external stimuli, which allows them to reach a level of emotional stability.

Goethe's relationship with his mother, even after their shared experience of his difficult birth and first few months of life, was not completely free of frustrations and threats. Catharina Elisabeth became pregnant again only six months after his birth, and when he was fifteen months old, she devoted herself completely to the care of his newborn sister, Cornelia. It is likely that Goethe's father and grandmother assisted him in his attempts to cope with the relative loss of his mother; nonetheless, this loss left scars in the form of separation anxiety and creative attempts at coping. It is possible that this early separation from his mother, although not a complete separation, caused him pain while also fostering his imagination.

Johann Wolfgang was also prone to disturbances in his later development. Bettina von Arnim recorded that he was easily overexcited and tended to react with anger. If something was damaged or was not in its usual place, he was prone to respond with an angry outburst. Even as an old man, he had difficulty dealing with anything that disrupted his usual routine, such as illness in those around him. He also avoided coming into contact with sick people and even the dead. He did not attend the funerals of either of his closest friends, the poet Schiller and the Grand-Duke Karl August, and he could not bring himself to see his wife, Christiane, during her final illness. For all of his avoidance of defectiveness, illness, and death in real life, Goethe dealt with these topics repeatedly in his writing, which became his approach to coping with any issues that he found difficult in real life.

Catharina Elisabeth loved her son dearly and called him her "little pet" [Hätschel-hans], even as a grown man. Nevertheless, there was always a certain distance between mother and son. Goethe wrote the following observation on one of the manuscript pages of *Poetry and Truth*:

Children's moral character does not develop out of their relationship to their parents. The distance between them is much too great; gratitude, affection, love, and respect prevent these young and needy creatures from expressing themselves in their own ways. Every act of resistance is a crime. Privation and punishment quickly teach the child to turn away from the parent and towards itself, and because the child's wishes seem very reasonable, it will soon be clever and manipulative. (HA 9, p. 844: DS)

After the death of her husband in 1782, Catharina was to live another 26 years, during which she followed her son's development with lively interest. It does not seem to have pained her, though, that Goethe only visited her a total of four times

after moving to Weimar in 1775. She never complained, and at the age of fifty-five, she even wrote to her son:

My life is flowing peacefully along like a clear stream ... my body is at rest, but my thoughts are all activity. I am able to spend the whole day alone and still find myself taken by surprise at the onset of evening. I am as cheerful as a goddess – and in this world, happiness and satisfaction are all that is really necessary. (HA Letters 1, p. 93: DS)

Even with the physical distance between them, mother and son maintained a intimate rapport that lasted their whole lives. Even though Goethe never invited his mother to visit him in Weimar, or never seriously, they nonetheless maintained a lively correspondence. He considered Weimar to be his world, and Catharina Elisabeth accepted the parent's inevitable fate, to be left behind while her children move on. The deeper dimensions of Goethe's relationship with his mother can only be determined by analyzing his writings and his approach to mother-child relationships in general (see Holm-Hadulla, 2018).

In his tragedy Faust examines—among many other topics—the destructive aspects of the relationship between mother and child. After giving birth, Gretchen kills her child, the fruit of her love for Faust, and is executed like Catharina Maria Flindt and Susanna Margaretha Brandt. One main theme of these tragedies is that mother and child destroy each other, an idea that can be found throughout Goethe's writings. We repeatedly draw “fresh nutriment, new blood” from Mother Nature, but she takes as well as gives life. In *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, the protagonist's suicide allows him to become united with Mother Nature, she whom he had previously experienced as “a fearful monster, for ever devouring its own offspring” (Works 6, p. 54). In the first draft of his play *Goetz von Berlichingen*, the antagonist Weislingen says to Adelheid:

Such is woman's favour! At first she fosters with maternal warmth our dearest hopes; and then, like an inconstant hen, she forsakes the nest, and abandons the infant brood to death and decay. (Works 11, p. 284)

While it is clear that Goethe idealized mothers, we can also see that he was aware of the contradictions inherent in their life-giving and threatening aspects. In the novel *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*), Charlotte gives her own child into the care of her niece Otilie because there is no room for it in her life. Through her carelessness, Otilie, herself still basically a child, allows the child to drown. This is another instance of Mother Nature, symbolized by the water, reclaiming her offspring. The fullest expression of Goethe's holy awe of mothers can be found in the “Dark Gallery” scene in *Faust II*.

Faust must descend into the dark gallery of creation to fulfill his promise to the Emperor to bring to life the ideal couple, Paris and Helen. Mephistopheles resists Faust's plan to enter the realm of the Mothers and of female fertility: Mephisto: Goddesses enthroned remote in solitude,/ No space, even less time around them;/ To name them is embarrassment:/ They are the mothers! Faust. The Mothers!—Mothers!—Yes, it sounds so strange. (Vs. 6212–6217). Like his characters, the poet must also enter the dark world of unconscious, maternal phantasms as part of his

creative process. The realm of the Mothers is a taboo zone, though, and no paths lead there. Mephisto:

You will see nothing in that void all round,/ You will not hear your footstep where you tread,
Beneath your feet you'll feel no solid ground. (Vs. 6246–6248)

Mephistopheles describes an unconscious experience that cannot be recalled or consciously comprehended afterwards, but that is nevertheless real. This is reminiscent of the infant's sensomotoric experiences in utero and during the first few months of life. Neurobiological and psychological studies have shown that a fetus's experiences of temperature, movement, and sounds in utero are stored at the neural level, but can never be consciously recalled. Feelings of agitation, disquiet, and pain are also said to leave behind unconscious traces in memory. One could argue that it is this dimension of human experience—which is only one of many possible dimensions, not least of is the artistic dimension—that is being addressed in the “Dark Gallery” (see for further details HH 2018).

Here we see that overcoming feelings of holy awe in the face of female fertility is a recurring motif of Faustian creativity. Goethe used his writing to dissociate himself from his mother and at the time he created a special closeness to her by his poetry. Thus, art was a way for Goethe to remain in contact with the Mothers while simultaneously keeping his distance from them.

If we look at his relationship with his mother from the perspective of attachment theory (Bowlby, 2006), we can safely state that he was securely attached to her. Securely attached children are more able to develop a sense of creative curiosity and to confidently explore the world around them than children who are insecurely attached. Despite this, there was still a certain amount of ambivalence in Goethe's relationship with his mother. He was able, though, to take the negative aspects of the relationship—the restrictions and dangers—and not merely cope with them, but actively transform them through his creative work. The trust he had in his mother and his secure attachment to her provided him a firm foundation from which he was able to confront and work his way through the more destructive aspects of the mother–child relationship. It was not necessary for him to transform the Mothers into an idealized and remote image; instead, he approached the dangers inherent in every mother–child relationship with a degree of empathy unusual for a man, especially for a man of his time. Reading the tragedy of Gretchen from this perspective, the level of understanding that Goethe was able to develop for the pain involved in motherhood is impressive.

If we start with the psychoanalytical work of Klein (1957) and Segal (1991), we can explain this sensitivity to the Lady-of-Sorrows—*Mater dolorosa*—aspect of the mother–child relationship. A child who is sufficiently psychologically healthy is already able to perceive during his first year of life that his mother is not only the one who meets his needs, but is also the source of his frustrations. He senses that he is developing aggressive impulses and causing his mother pain. This feeling gives rise to the need to “repair” the mother image that has been damaged by his destructive impulses. This desire to make amends goes hand in hand with the development of the child's creative abilities. If the child finds sufficient acceptance of both his loving

and his aggressive impulses, it becomes easier for him to use these energies for constructive pursuits. This is what happened with Goethe, whose portrayal of his "awful and repulsive" character Faust, with whom he identified to a great degree, was actually a portrayal of his own worst tendencies. Goethe also said, with himself in mind, that we are all composed of both light and dark, heaven and hell.

According to Lacan (1949), every child is confronted with a "primordial lack" (*manque primordial*). This lack leads to a lifelong attempt to create completeness and perfection, even if only in their imagination. People are especially successful at this in the arts and in the area of erotic love, although the results may not be permanent. An additional dimension that is important for future artists is the narcissism dimension, which refers to the child receiving sufficient mirroring, acknowledgement, and appreciation from his parents. Goethe probably received this narcissistic recognition from his mother starting from an early age. Kohut (1976) thought that creativity could be promoted by the "sparkle" in a mother's eyes, a gleam that Goethe most assuredly saw. Freud also believed that Goethe's self-assurance derived from the love of his mother:

If a man has been his mother's undisputed darling he retains throughout life the triumphant feeling, the confidence in success, which not seldom brings actual success along with it. (Freud, 1917, p. 26)

Nonetheless, the love Goethe received from his mother was also associated with disappointments. A small child can experience a separation from the mother as a severe setback, even as psychologically damaging. Goethe was separated from his mother due to her preoccupation with her next pregnancy soon after his birth and with the later deaths of his siblings; we will see later that Goethe frequently experienced feelings of existential danger. The sensation of impending doom during his birth and the anxieties of his earliest years left a deep impression on Goethe his whole life long. He invariably transformed these feelings into motifs in his work and used his creativity to cope with his fears. This does not mean, though, that there is a causal relationship between birth trauma and early childhood development and the later development of artistic abilities. Early experiences in life do find expression in moods and fantasies, however; they then become themes that turn up again and again in adulthood, to be experienced and transformed anew. As Freud said,

These examinations are not intended to explain the genius of the poet, but rather to show which motifs awoke it and which subject matter has been assigned to it by fate. (Freud, 1933, p. 276: DS).

We can then view the end of the tragedy of Faust from the perspective of Goethe's relationship to his mother and women in general. "Mountain Gorges", the last scene in Faust and which was most likely written in 1830, shortly before Goethe's death, deals with the human ability to remain intact while simultaneously falling apart. Several characters appear in the scene: the Virgin Mary (*Mater Gloriosa*), Gretchen, and the Blessed Boys, who died shortly after birth. The "awful and repulsive" Faust, who had wreaked so much havoc and caused so much pain, is redeemed. Likewise, Goethe's relationship with his mother was also redeeming. Both were able to cope

with this pain, the pain experienced by every human being, but in their own ways—the mother by means of her active vitality, and the son through his writing. This is where he repeatedly dealt with both the loving and threatening aspects of his relationship to his mother; ultimately, he was able to create a positive internal image of this relationship, one that he was also able to reconcile with his human fate of having to die. This is an essential aspect of the closing chorus in *Faust*:

All that must perish/ Is but a parable;/ What is insufficient/ Here becomes efficient./ The
indescribable, / Here it is done; /Eternal womanhood / Draws us all on. (Vs. 12104–12111)

15.4 The Laborious Transformation of Psychosocial Crises

Before Goethe reached wisdom and a certain amount of psycho-social stability he had to suffer several severe crises. In these crises the internalization of a good maternal object helped him to overcome disappointments and despair. After the separation from Lili Schönemann, who he was unable to love, he could regress on a narcissistic position creatively and was able to write the wonderful poem *On the Sea*. It begins with the following lines:

Now through my navel-string/ I suck nourishment from the world./ And splendid all around
is Nature./ holding me to her bosom!

But, as we have seen, nature is not always comforting and inspiring. Goethe puts the ambivalence between constructive and destructive power of mother nature in another psychobiographically significant work: *Wilhelm Meister*.

Like Werther and Faust, the fictional character of Wilhelm Meister has some traits that are undeniably autobiographical. Goethe spoke of “his beloved dramatic likeness”. The Wilhelm Meister-project—from the Theatrical Mission through Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship to Wilhelm Meister’s Travels—was full of starts and stops, accompanying Goethe through more than fifty years of his life. The novels show the history of one man’s education in his relationship to society. The risks involved in giving shape to his own life, including the possibilities of failure, are symbolically and allegorically portrayed by various figures.

Wilhelm Meister’s Theatrical Mission was begun in 1777 and abandoned, incomplete, in 1785 after the fourteenth chapter of the sixth book. It impressively documents Goethe’s psychological development in these years. Unlike in *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, Goethe regards himself as more wise in the ways of the world and less torn by self-referential passions in this novel, his second, which contemplates his personal development at the junction of his familial and social environments. The novel begins with a description of a father who does not feel comfortable with his wife. It is his mother that he discusses pedagogical issues with, emphasizing that play—with puppets, fairytales, and “comedies”—is indispensable for children’s development, in much the same vein as modern psychologists, and psychotherapists (see Holm-Hadulla, 2004b, 2017).

The second chapter depicts how the biblical stories of Saul and David are acted out on Christmas Eve; later, Wilhelm sits alone in his room, ruminating on what has occurred. Wilhelm, pseudonymous with Goethe, is described as a child who was often unsatisfied and thus retreated into his own inner world. In the next chapter, this retreat into a fantasy world of his own making is linked to his disappointments in his mother:

He begged his mother to let him have it played over again, but only got a harsh answer, because she could find no joy in the fun provided by the grandmother for her children, which seemed like a reproach on her own unmotherliness. I am sorry to have to say it, but the fact is true, that this woman, who had borne her husband five children – two sons and three daughters, of whom Wilhelm was the eldest – had with advancing years conceived a passion for an insipid man, and her husband, who was aware of the truth, could not endure the fellow. As a natural consequence, neglect, trouble and mutual bickering crept into the household. (Page, p. 8)

This shows how the mother's affair leads to a lack of interest in her son's games and also how it seriously impedes the family's ability to peacefully coexist. It seems that Wilhelm's, and hence Goethe's, creativity developed despite his mother's resistance. This is a circumstance that is often found among creative types. They may be carefully encouraged, but they may also develop their creative powers under adverse conditions. Thus, Goethe's depiction of the mother's role in Wilhelm's emotional and artistic development is rather critical:

... in her dissatisfaction, their mother was generally in a bad temper, and even when this was not the case, was sure to rail against her husband ... Sometimes this hurt Wilhelm acutely ... Thus the boy became estranged from his mother, and was most unfortunately situated, because his father also was a hard man; so that nothing seemed left for him but to creep into himself, a fate with which children and old folks is of serious consequence. (Page, pp. 8–9)

Goethe's alter ego, Wilhelm Meister, reacts to these difficult circumstances by devoting himself to his fantasies, in this way attempting to cope with painful experiences:

Thus for some time Wilhelm's childish existence pursued its way. His thoughts often turned back to that happy Christmas Eve, and he delighted to look at pictures or to read fairy and heroic stories. Meanwhile his grandmother, who did not wish to have taken so much pains for nothing, arranged that, on the long-delayed visit of some neighbours' children, the puppet theatre should again be erected and the play once more repeated. (Page, p. 9)

His lively curiosity leads him to develop his fantasies within him while also exploring the reality around him. He wants to discover the secrets of the puppet theater and to take what he has seen to use in his own way. He spies on the maid while she is packing the puppets away, attempting to understand what is happening backstage in the theater, but also the events that are happening around him. He has an inner need to do this; the mood in the family is hostile. His father is increasingly distressed by his wife's horrible conduct:

And had it not been for his children, a look at whom gave him courage and conviction that he still had something in the world to work for, it would hardly have been possible for him to endure it. In such moods men lose almost all taste for childish joys, the invention and

arrangement of which are indeed rather the mother's affair, and not the father's; and when she is a wretch, then little consolation is left for the family in what should be its most blessed years. In the present case it was the grandmother who provided this consolation. (Page, p. 13)

Goethe will also acknowledge the important role his grandmother played in his personal development in *Poetry and Truth*. The puppet theater was associated with his grandmother, and a fantasy world arose from it that would be further developed in the theater. Nevertheless, he also emphasized the importance of solitude for personal development in the Theatrical Mission:

He often invited his brother, sisters and comrades to join him, but was much more frequently quite alone. His imagination and vivacity brooded over this little world, which necessarily soon assumed another form. (Page, p. 15)

Puberty is a difficult period for Wilhelm, yet he is able to draw on his power of imagination, which had been supported and challenged during his childhood, to creatively mold this critical phase in his life:

Wilhelm had now reached those years in which the physical forces begin most to develop, and in which people are often unable to imagine why a smart and active child should appear outwardly stupid and impracticable. He now read a great deal, and still found his best satisfaction in comedies (Page, p. 20)

He notices physical changes in himself and no longer feels comfortable in his own skin:

The age of boyhood is, I believe, less amiable than that of childhood, because it is a middle, a half state. Although childishness still clings to our boys, and they are still childish, yet with its earlier limitation they have lost the lovable complacency of that former state . . . they imitate and act things they neither can nor should be. It is just so with the inner state of their bodies, just so with their outward growth. (Page, p. 23)

Wilhelm evades these self-doubts and frictions by avoiding the upsets of little love affairs and withdrawing into the world of the theater:

It was particularly fortunate under these circumstances that Wilhelm's good natural qualities came to his help, and that none of the girls for whom he soon enough began to feel a fancy were able to join his theatrical company; his love for the theatre therefore remained pure, and he could behold without rivalry how the others each sought to set his own princess upon the throne. (Page, p. 23)

He creates a conflict-free sphere for himself where he is able to deal, indirectly, with his problems. He succeeds in this for a time, until he meets a sexually experienced woman who sparks his desire:

I name her here as Madame, though I remember having formerly spoken of her as a girl. To avoid all misunderstanding, let me then at once disclose the fact that she had contracted a 'marriage of conscience' with a man without conscience. He soon after quitted the company, and she was, except for this trifle, a girl as before. She again used her former name, and passed first as maiden, then as wife, and now as widow. Wilhelm was anxious to hold her for the last, and found certainly the strongest reasons on this side. His embarrassment and agitation on beholding her did not but render him the more agreeable and vivacious. (Page, pp. 29–30)

In Madame, alias Mariana, there are echoes of many of Goethe's love affairs, reminding us of Gretchen, Käthchen Schönkopf, Charlotte Buff and Lili Schöne-mann. Meeting Mariana transports Wilhelm to another world:

... and all night long and next day her image floated so often before him that he was very absent and clumsy at business. Next evening, as soon as he had closed the shop, an invisible hand seized him by the forelock, he felt that he was being led away, and found himself sitting, as in a dream, on the sofa beside his adored one. (Page, pp. 32–33).

He desires her and feels desired in turn, and he treats his beloved's previous sexual experiences with tolerance:

A girl who wins herself a fresh lover in succession to several previous conquests is like the flame when a new log of wood is laid upon the burnt-out embers. Actively she flatters the newly arrived darling, plays with lambent heat around him until he glows in full blaze of splendour. Her avidity seems to pass over him in play, but with every flash she pierces deeper and deeper, consuming his marrow to its very depths. Ere long, like his forsaken rivals, he will lie upon the ground and, inwardly glowing, extinguish in smoky agony. (Page, p. 33)

Evidently Wilhelm, alias Goethe, fears more than abandonment; he also fears losing his creative potency if he were to engage in sexual love. What is remarkable about this passage, though, is a different aspect, namely, the likelihood that a man without any sexual experience could write so empathetically and knowledgeably about sexual love. In other words, how plausible is Eissler's (1963) opinion that Goethe was 38 years old before he had a sexual relationship with a woman? I will expand on this point from different perspectives in a later chapter, "Goethe's 'healthy illness'". Wilhelm's assessment of Mariana's sex life and his own stance toward it are depicted in the Theatrical Mission thusly:

In her early years she had beheld the childish joys of love too quickly scared away, was conscious of so many humiliations endured in the arms of one and another, and at the present time was sacrificed to the secret pleasures of a wealthy and unbearably dull milksop, and, being naturally a good-hearted creature, never felt quite comfortable when Wilhelm seized and kissed her hand in all sincerity, gazing into her eyes with the full, clear glance of youthful love. She could not endure that glance; she feared lest he might read experience in her own; her eyes sank in confusion, and the happy Wilhelm believed that he found therein an augury and sweet confession of love, so that his senses clashed against each other like the strings of a psaltery. O happy youth! O happy time of love's awakening fires! (Page, pp. 33–34)

These lines speak of real experience, making it difficult to believe they could have come from the pen of someone inexperienced. What is most likely is that Goethe was doing more than accompanying Carl August while on the prowl in Weimar; he was probably maintaining longer-term sexual relationships, perhaps with one of Carl August's mistresses. An addition indicator of sexual experience is another one of Wilhelm's descriptions of Mariana:

In his arms Mariana first learned to know that bliss of love to which she had hitherto been a stranger; the heartiness wherewith he pressed her to his bosom, the thankfulness which often contented itself with her hand, penetrated her, and she daily recovered spirit ... But the lightness, animation and wit with which in the early stages of their passion they had sought

to bind and entertain each other, and whose exercise gave zest to each caress, tended daily more and more to decay ... But when alone, when from the clouds amid which his passion bore her aloft she fell to recognition of her situation, then indeed was she to be pitied ... But now that the poor girl had felt herself uplifted for brief moments into a better world, had looked down, as from the skies, through light and joy upon the waste and refuse of her life, had realised what a wretched creature that woman is who cannot, with desire, also inspire love and respect ... With Wilhelm it was quite otherwise. For him a new world had arisen, a world rich in blissful prospects. If the excess of his first joys somewhat abated, yet the fact which formerly had but darkly burrowed in his soul now stood out as clear as light: She is thine! She has given herself to thee! (Page, pp. 38–40)

Could a sexual novice write such a passage? It is perfectly clear that Goethe's alter ego is having a sexual relationship with Mariana:

Wilhelm's tenderness had triumphed over her prudence, and she began to feel that the undesired felicity of becoming a mother lay before her. (Page, p. 44)

When it comes to all things sexual, shouldn't Goethe be reflected in his Wilhelm Meister? A seamless identification of Goethe with his protagonist would make this assumption completely implausible. Wilhelm Meister enjoys the pleasures of sexual love, thereby entering not merely the next phase of life, but a new version of his own self:

O, Mariana! to me, the happiest of men, it is as with a bridegroom, who, full of anticipation of the new world which shall unfold in and through him, stands thoughtful, longingly, upon the sacred threshold, before the mysterious curtains whence the ravishments of love whisper him their greeting. (Page, pp. 48–49)

Wilhelm's first sexual love allows him to detach himself from his parental abode, as so frequently happens during late adolescence, while also helping him to create his own cultural world:

My heart has long since forsaken my parents' house. Even as my spirit hovers over the stage, so truly is my heart with you. (Page, p. 49)

This happy love affair soon comes to an abrupt end, though, when Wilhelm erroneously comes to the conclusion that Mariana had been unfaithful to him. He is plunged into crisis, just as Goethe was at the age of fourteen after separating from Gretchen and at the age of eighteen after breaking things off with Käthchen Schönkopf. Goethe's reflection, Wilhelm, shares his same fate of becoming physically ill:

When misfortune overwhelmed our poor Wilhelm, his inward parts burned like a furnace ... Then followed a period of clamorous, ever-recurrent and insupportable anguish. (Page, p. 58)

Like Goethe, who found stability in his family and in his friend Behrisch, Wilhelm is able to accept the support of his siblings and his friend Werner during his grief-induced illness:

A virulent attack of fever, with its usual sequel of physic, weariness, anxious friends around his bed, the company and love of his relations, often first manifested in our hours of distress and weakness, were all now so many distractions of a changed condition (Page, p. 59)

In the end, Wilhelm's emotional and physical crisis leads to a productive regression and to an improved state of health, just as Goethe experienced after his collapse in Leipzig. Wilhelm also develops an exceptional amount of creative energy from this crisis; he acquires the works of the great masters, delving into questions of poetry, and becomes a poet himself. This allows him to cope with his everyday sufferings and cares:

He partakes the sorrows and joys of every human destiny. As the man of the world crawls through his days in gnawing melancholy over grievous loss, or meets his fate with extravagant rapture, so does the receptive, quickly-stirred spirit of the poet step like the wandering sun from night to day, and tune, with easy transfer, his harp to joy or grief. Native-born upon the soil of his heart blooms the lovely flower of wisdom, and while others dream awake, and whatever marvels may happen, they are to him both past and future. (Page, pp. 73–74)

Once again, Goethe underscores the importance of remembering for creative productivity, even if the experiences remembered are painful. To Eissler (1963), this approach is evidence of Goethe's masochistic tendencies. He may well call it that, but in pathologizing it, he is overlooking the fact that working through painful, guilt-ridden, and shameful experiences is an essential aspect of creativity. The poet gives himself over to "the sorrows and joys of every human destiny", frequently finding himself at the very limit of what he can bear. Sometimes he experiences a poetical triumph and is able to lift himself above the pain of reality, only to immediately have "an early [...] injury" catch up with him. This "early injury" is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan's (1949) "primordial lack" (*manque primordial*), an initial deficiency that prevails at the beginning of all creative endeavors. Like Goethe, Wilhelm senses the danger of falling into the emptiness and annihilation of the primordial lack. Whether the tendency to gravitate toward chaos obeys a biological law, which Freud referred to as the 'death drive' (1923), or if it is basically due to ubiquitous frustrations and traumas is of secondary importance here. A creative person masters the pull of destruction by shaping new realities, yet this does not prevent him from repeatedly suffering new injuries that then require new efforts; he is unable to find true equanimity (see Holm-Hadulla, 2013).

Goethe had been working on *Wilhelm Meister* since 1777, but the first volume did not appear until January of 1795. He often despaired over his *doppelgänger*, and it was only his friendship with Friedrich Schiller that allowed him to complete *Apprenticeship*. Schiller emphasized the portrayal of subjective experiences, which, admittedly, would be expressed in a more artistically mature way compared to *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. Unlike *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission*, which began with Wilhelm's birth, *Apprenticeship* begins with Wilhelm detaching himself from the family home and his first love. Otherwise, the two novels are mainly in agreement, especially from a psychological perspective. It is only in the fifth book of *Apprenticeship* that new psychological themes are introduced, such as the significance of a father's death and one's paternal responsibility for a child. Moreover, Wilhelm and Werner's opposing conceptions of life are further explained. Werner would like to convince Wilhelm of the value of a well-ordered, bourgeois existence, but Wilhelm does not feel ready to conclude his personal development:

What good were it for me to manufacture perfect iron while my own breast is full of dross?
 What would it stead me to put properties of land in order, while I am at variance with myself?
 (Carlyle, 1907, vol. 2, p. 8)

This is followed by a criticism of bourgeois lifestyles, which make comprehensive personal development impossible. With an astounding degree of self-assurance, Wilhelm feels called to something better:

Now, this harmonious cultivation of my nature, which has been denied me by birth, is exactly what I most long for ... But I will not conceal from thee, that my inclination to become a public person, and to please and influence in a larger circle ... that so, in this enjoyment henceforth indispensable, I may esteem as good the good alone, as beautiful the beautiful alone. (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 10)

He hopes to find these opportunities for development, which are actually reserved for people of rank, in the theater, yet he is disappointed once again. At a deeper level, Goethe is reflecting on the tension between the reality of coping with life and the fantasy of satisfying desires.

While searching for that which is good and beautiful, Wilhelm encounters various types of failure. Mental disorders, in particular, attract his interest. He devotes himself to the topic of insanity and studies the treatment methods used by a country clergyman with his mentally ill charges. These therapeutic applications are simple yet effective:

They are the very means by which you hinder sane persons from becoming mad. Awaken their activity; accustom them to order; bring them to perceive that they hold their being and fate in common with many millions; that extraordinary talents, the highest happiness, the deepest misery, are but slight variations from the general lot (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 58)

This is a striking summary of psychotherapeutic principles that are still valid today: guiding patients toward self-efficacy, helping them to structure their own lifeworlds, and reflecting on experiences in their social environment. Wilhelm is impressed by the teachings of the country clergyman and a physician who emphasizes that man's main source of unhappiness is "when some idea lays hold of him, which exerts no influence upon active life, or, still more, which withdraws him from it" (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 59). Here we are able to discern Goethe's own philosophy of health again, which states that no one should give himself over to solitude too thoroughly, nor should he avoid an active life within society. The connection between religion and mental health is explained in "Confessions of a Fair Saint", the sixth book of *Apprenticeship*. Goethe describes pietism as a lifestyle that is primarily inward facing and that leads through self-denial to spiritual equilibrium. Katharina von Klettenberg's way of life was a clear example of this for him; she arguably had a strong influence on "Confessions". (cf. Boyle, 2000).

In the seventh book, the preparations are laid for the events of the novel that are to be disentangled and resolved. Wilhelm arrives at Lothario's estate, which is central to the Society of the Tower. This society, like the Freemasons, cultivates enlightenment virtues. From an individual psychology point of view, he is continuing his formative process, which also consists of self-enlightenment. He learns of Mariana's fate and her death, which causes him to develop deep, well-founded feelings of remorse. Now

he is able to assume parental responsibility for the child that was the result of his love with Mariana. The maxims of the Society of the Tower lead to active employment, much like those of the Freemasons, to whom Goethe belonged. These principles increasingly bring Wilhelm, with his "wandering" way of life into conflict. In the end, he chooses the Society of the Tower and ends his career in the theater. The confirmation of his role as a father symbolizes a break in his life: the unlimited, uncertain phase of youth has ended, and Wilhelm is now an adult. Nevertheless, the fact that earlier stages of development were not simply completed and left behind, but are repeatedly given new form in more developed stages, remains a requirement for his inner vitality:

'...everything that happens to us leaves some trace behind it; everything contributes imperceptibly to form us' ... 'The history of every person paints his character'. (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 125, 143)

After coming to these general insights, Wilhelm reflects on his behavior more consciously, which leads him to develop mature attitudes toward love, commitment, and the performance of his duties. He is able to retreat into the background with his own wishes and to concur with the principles of the Society of the Tower:

It is right that a man, when he first enters upon life, should think highly of himself, should determine to attain many eminent distinctions, should endeavour to make all things possible; but, when his education has proceeded to a certain pitch, it is advantageous for him, that he learn to lose himself among a mass of men, that he learn to live for the sake of others, and to forget himself in an activity prescribed by duty. (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 185)

In the eighth book, themes and motifs from the earlier books are taken up and condensed. Wilhelm and Werner meet up again and note that the difference between them has deepened. Werner has developed poorly; he has become pale and feeble, symbolizing the price paid for a life that did not embrace and actively shape developmental crises. In contrast to Werner, the limitations of bourgeois society do not have a blunting effect on Wilhelm because he allows himself to become involved in a complex formative process and consciously lives through painful memories, humiliating experiences, and culpable entanglements. This educational ideal of Wilhelm's corresponds with Goethe's self-treatment program, which interprets crises as transitions and not as illnesses. This process is never complete; after breaking off his love affairs and taking leave of the theater, Wilhelm is accepted into the Society of the Tower, knowing that his future life will continue to be a formative process:

'Oh, who knows,' cried he, 'what trials are before me! who knows how sharply bygone errors will yet punish me, how often good and reasonable projects for the future shall miscarry!' (Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 200)

At the end of Apprenticeship, Wilhelm and the "beautiful amazon" find their way to one another, resolving his convoluted relationships with women like in a fairytale. He marries her, but reality and fantasy will only be in consonance for a short time. The Society of the Tower pressures him to undertake a journey in order to fulfill his "higher" duties. Once again, renunciation will be one of the conditions for further advancement. Wilhelm's path to a life that is socially responsible and meaningful is

not yet over. The goal of implementing a community of active “citizens of this world”, one which would achieve prosperity, freedom, and equality without revolutionary violence, still appears to be far away.

But these achievements are not possible without deeply rooted ambivalences. In Wilhelm Meister’s *Travels* Goethe depicts life as a journey of “dying and becoming”. Eternal femininity is here embodied in Makaria. She is brilliant and intuitive and helps people find their own way to their selves by reflecting how they could be. Goethe paints a picture of an empathetic companion who fulfills many different psychotherapeutic functions, much like Auguste zu Stolberg and Charlotte von Stein, but she is also transported into the transcendental realm. Wilhelm dreams of Makaria:

I was lying in soft but deep sleep, when I felt transported into the saloon as yesterday, but alone. The green curtain went up, Makaria’s chair moved forward of its own accord, like an animated being; it shone with gold, her dress seemed sacerdotal, her glance sparkled mildly; I was on the point of throwing myself down. Clouds spread forth around her feet, and ascending they bore like wings the holy form upwards: instead of her glorious countenance I beheld through the parting clouds a shining star, that was ever carried upwards, and through the opening roof united itself with the whole firmament, which seemed to be ever expanding and to embrace everything. (Boyesen, vol. 5, pp. 65–66)

This apotheosis of femininity, which we also found at the end of *Faust*, stands in remarkable tension with everyday love relationships in *Travels* as well as in the other Wilhelm Meister novels; on the morning after he has had this transfiguring dream, Wilhelm comes across his son in the garden,

which to his astonishment he saw being tilled by a number of girls. If not all beautiful, not one was ugly, and none seemed to have reached her twentieth year. (Boyesen, 1885, vol. 5, p. 66)

The dangerous and inscrutable aspects of relationships to women and mother figures remain a shocking theme, even in a novel like *Travels*, with its wisdom gleaned from age and experience of the world. Wilhelm describes an experience he had in his youth, when he was invited to go fishing by an adolescent slightly older than him, “a boy who had at once attracted me by his serious demeanor.” This new friend was tempted by the coolness of the water to undress and swim in the river. “Quite a strange feeling” fell over Wilhelm, who was looking on:

It was so warm and sultry all around, one yearned to be out of the sun and in the shade, out of the cool shade in the still cooler water below. So it was easy for him to entice me down; I found an invitation, not often repeated, irresistible, and what with fear of my parents, and timidity about the unfamiliar element in addition, I was quite strangely excited. But soon undressed upon the gravel, I ventured gently into the water, but not deeper than was due to the gradually sloping bottom. Here he let me linger, went to some distance in the sustaining element, came back, and when he got out and stood up to dry himself in the fuller sunshine, my eyes seemed to be dazzled by a triple sun; so fair was the human form, of which I had never had any idea. He seemed to look at me with equal attention. Though quickly dressed, we still seemed to stand unclothed before each other; our spirits drew together, and amidst the most ardent kisses we swore eternal friendship. (Boyesen, vol. 5, pp. 145–146)

This depiction of young love is especially magical. Wilhelm (Goethe) describes the physical beauty of his friend, but he also discovers his own physical excitement

in this encounter. Immediately following this scene, he meets the daughter of his host and falls in love with her:

... a stroll in a well-kept pleasure-garden, in which the daughter, who was somewhat younger than I, accompanied me to show me the way, was very agreeable to me ... My companion was beautiful, fair-haired, and gentle; we walked confidentially together, soon held each other by the hand, and seemed to wish for nothing better ... When I look back, after so many years, at my situation on that occasion, it seems to me really enviable. Unexpectedly, at the same moment, the premonition of friendship and love seized me: for when I unwillingly took leave of the beautiful child, I comforted myself with the thought of disclosing these feelings to my young friend, of confiding in him, and of enjoying his sympathy together with these fresh sentiments. (Boyesen, vol. 5, pp. 146–147)

These new sensations are due to his discovery of the beauty of his own sexuality. To Wilhelm, his blossoming erotic power seems to be the appearance of his “real original nature”:

How we must have despaired at seeing so cold, so lifeless an outward life, had not something revealed itself in our heart that glorifies nature in quite another way, whilst manifesting a creative power, to beautify ourselves in her. (Boyesen, vol. 5, p. 147)

The burgeoning sexual and creative power of adolescence is already under threat, though: The pastor's wife will not allow Wilhelm's new friend in the house because she finds him indecorous; instead, she gives him the task of catching crayfish for her guests. Wilhelm waits for his friend at the edge of the woods at dusk and becomes restless and concerned when the friend does not appear. Then comes the news that Wilhelm's new friend and four other boys have drowned while attempting to carry out the task given to them by the pastor's wife of fishing crayfish out of the river. Some of the boys were weak swimmers, and when they were pulled under, Wilhelm's friend tried to save them and was himself pulled down into the deep water.

The only survivor was the youngest boy, who had remained on the shore, and who now stepped forward and dutifully held out the bag of crayfish to the pastor's wife. Wilhelm, despondent, sneaks into where the dead children lay:

In the large room, where meetings of all kinds are held, lay the unfortunates, stretched naked upon straw, dazzling white corpses, shining also in the dim lamplight. I threw myself upon the tallest - my friend. I had no words to express my condition; I wept bitterly, and deluged his broad breast with unceasing tears. I had heard something of rubbing, which in such a case was said to be of use. I rubbed in my tears, and cheated myself with the warmth that I excited. Amidst my confusion, I thought of breathing breath into him (Boyesen, vol. 5, p. 148)

Wilhelm's awkward attempts to revive his friend, reminiscent of Goethe's attempts to revive his brother Hermann and other siblings through literature, are put an end to, and rather ungraciously, by his mother. The next morning, he awakens in a dark mood. He is surprised to find his mother, aunt, and the cook “in weighty consultation”. Their discussion centers on the fact that they should not boil and serve the crayfish to avoid reminding his father of the accident that had just occurred. His aunt is not distressed about this, because she plans to fatten up the crayfish in order to serve them to her patron. On reading this scene, we get an image of a peculiar mourning ritual

that reminds of Langer (1972) “phantasma of the baked child” where the mothers appear as dangerous and cruel witches. We are reminded of Goethe’s description of treacherous “woman’s favor”, which “abandons the infant brood to death and decay”.

15.5 Conclusion

Psychobiographical analyses enhance our understanding of the author, his or her works and ourselves. In Goethe’s case we see how the remembering and working through of bright and dark aspects of mother figures went along with a good relationship with his individual mother. They could love and respect each other without irrational idealization and they could tolerate each other’s autonomy and separation. Both could use the other as an “internal object” that allowed feelings of resonance and secure bonding. The psychobiographical reflection of Goethe’s life and work shows in a more general sense that the artistic transformation of destructive aspects inherent in all human relationships can lead to an active art of living and—sometimes—to eminent creativity.

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Chapter 16

Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche—The Contradictory Nature of the Self in a Dream of Raskolnikov and in the Breakdown of Nietzsche



Tamás Tényi and Dalma Tényi

Abstract A strange similarity can be discovered between the first dream of Raskolnikov, the main character in the novel *Crime and Punishment* written by Dostoyevsky and the well-known, and often cited story of the psychotic breakdown of Friedrich Nietzsche, the most influential philosopher of the 19th century that happened in Turin, 1889. Raskolnikov's dreams in the novel, especially the first, so-called "horse dream" opens many exciting levels of interpretation of the novel. His first dream enables us to reach more colorful and interesting levels of perspective of Raskolnikov's personality, empowering the flexibility of interpretation that resembles the methodology of psychoanalytic dream interpretation. In January of 1889 Nietzsche lost his sense of reality permanently, danced naked in his room; the often mentioned incident happened in January 3, 1889, when he, walking through the Piazza Carlo Alberto, witnessed a carter ruthlessly whipping his horse. Nietzsche ran up to the animal and hugged the horse's neck crying. He collapsed on the street, was referred to the Basel Mental Hospital on January 10, 1889. His condition is referred to as "breakdown" or "eclipse" in the literature of philosophy history. We can interpret the happenings in Turin as Nietzsche's "last public statement". Considering the happenings in Turin as the oeuvre's integrant part, we could make an attempt for re-interpretation and/or psychological understanding of some parts of his oeuvre. According to our thesis, Raskolnikov's dream, as well as Nietzsche's oeuvre with the farewell in Turin show the strangely diverse and contradictive nature of the Self.

Keywords Dostoyevsky · Nietzsche · Psychoanalysis · Self · Psychology of literature · Raskolnikov · Psychobiography

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16.1 Prologue

An uncanny similarity can be discovered between the first dream of Raskolnikov, the main character in the novel *Crime and Punishment* written by Dostoyevsky and the well-known, and often cited story of the psychotic breakdown of Friedrich Nietzsche—the most influential philosopher of the 19th century—that happened in Turin in 1889.¹ Raskolnikov’s dreams in the novel, especially the first, so-called “horse dream” opens many exciting levels of interpretation of the novel (Breger, 1989; Di Santo, 2010; Steffen, 2011, Wilson, 1976). According to the common conception—referring to the Russian phrase “raskol”—Raskolnikov has a splitted personality (Wilson, 1976). On the other hand, his first dream enables us to reach more colorful and interesting levels of perspective of Raskolnikov’s personality, empowering the flexibility of interpretation that resembles the methodology of psychoanalytic dream interpretation. Raskolnikov—who later ruthlessly kills the pawn-broker woman and his half-sister, Lizaveta with an axe—is a 7 year-old boy in this dream. He walks by his father’s side—who is already long-dead in reality—passing by a church while heading towards the cemetery, where he usually goes with his parents to visit his grandmother’s and little brother’s grave. On the road they have to pass by a pub with loud-mouthed drunk people yelling and shouting. The drunks come out the pub and one of them, Mikolka would like to take home the others by his thin, weak horse. The horse is unable to pull the carriage, his owner then starts to ruthlessly whip him; at first the others are just prompting him, then they also join him; at the end Mikolka kills his horse with axe. The young Raskolnikov begs his father to interfere in vain. The boy cries and nearly loses his sanity, so much he pities the horse. He runs up to the dead horse, embraces his head, mouth and eye covered in blood. When he attacks the killer to avenge the little horse’s death, his father pulls him away from the scene. The adult Raskolnikov was startled out of his sleep by this nightmare and asks himself, whether he could be able to kill the old usurious woman.

Nietzsche, the “wandering philosopher”—who resided in the Italian Riviera and also in the Swiss Alps before—retired in 1879 because of his illnesses and lived in Turin from 1888. As his psychosis developed, he started to write his friends frequently, signing his letters as “Dionysus versus the Crucified”, “Dionysus, the Crucified” or “Ceasar” (Ludovici, 1985). In January of 1889 he lost his sense of reality permanently, danced naked in his room; the often mentioned incident happened in January 3, 1889, when he—walking through the Piazza CarlouAlberto—witnessed a carter ruthlessly whipping his horse. Nietzsche ran up to the animal and hugged the horse’s neck crying. He collapsed on the street, was referred to the Basel Mental Hospital on January 10, 1889, then to the institution in Jena on January 18. His condition was characterized by delusions, disorientation, apathy, impulsivity and cognitive decline. From 24th March, 1890 he was nursed by his mother and later by his sister, and till his death on 25th August, 1900 he lived in the darkness of severe dementia (Tényi, 2007, 2012). Although, regarding his illness, six medical hypotheses were

¹It is important to mention, that to our best knowledge, the similarity of the two was first introduced by the great Hungarian poet, János Pilinszky (1921–1981) in a short commentary in 1961.

raised in the 118 years after his death,² his condition is referred to as “breakdown” or “eclipse” in the history of philosophy literature (Tényi, 2012). This differentiates his condition from “madness” in the medical sense, therefore enables us to overstep the raw diagnostic medical point of view, interpreting the happenings in Turin as Nietzsche’s “last public statement” (Steffen, 2011). Considering the happenings in Turin as the oeuvre’s integrant part, we could make an attempt for re-interpretation and/or psychological understanding of some parts of his oeuvre³ (Di Santo, 2010; Steffen, 2011). We agree with Edith Steffen’s idea, that it is an exciting experiment to interpret the real-life incident in Turin as a “dream” that uncovers the so far hidden side of the Self with the means of its symbolic and latent content. According to our thesis, Raskolnikov’s dream, as well as Nietzsche’s oeuvre with the farewell in Turin show the strangely diverse and contradictory nature of the Self. In this essay we sought the happenings of violence, suffering, death, neutrality and condolence and made an attempt to understand them from the perspective of the ever-changing, teared up Dionysian Self, continuously being formed by the whirlpool of contradictions. The life of Dostoyevsky, his fallen and reborn heroes, the works of Nietzsche and his tragic breakdown, the haunting similarity between the Turin incident and the dream of Raskolnikov, the approach and analysis of anxiety-causing episodes explore the diverse, contradictory nature of the Self, which lacks a coherent center.

16.2 Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche

The common features and the differences between Dostoyevsky’s and Nietzsche’s oeuvre have been analyzed by many authors: the International Nietzsche Bibliography (published in 1968) has gathered more than 30 books and important studies, and of course the number of works on this topic has significantly increased since then (Czeglédi, 2008). The first author who studied the parallels and the diversities of the two oeuvres in detail, was Lev Shestov. He considered Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche as siblings, moreover twins (Shestov, 1969). He found strong similarities between the late Nietzsche’s oeuvre and the views of the characters that were portrayed in the novels of Dostoyevsky after “Notes from Underground”. It’s a well-known fact that Dostoyevsky presumably hasn’t heard from Nietzsche, however the latter surely knew Dostoyevsky’s name, moreover he started to extensively study his work from 1887. The first document of him mentioning Dostoyevsky’s name was his letter writ-

²These were the following: (1) general paralysis of the insane (caused by syphilis); (2) bipolar affective disorder, followed by vascular dementia; (3) hereditary frontotemporal dementia; (4) brain tumor; (5) cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL); (6) mitochondrial encephalopathy, lactic acidosis, and stroke-like episodes syndrome (MELAS) (Tényi, 2012).

³In one of his novels, Milan Kundera approaches this topic with the same witticism by writing, that the philosopher tried to apologize to the horse for Descartes (Kundera, 1984, 290)—for Descartes, who denied the concept that the animals have souls and—through his philosophy—dugged the seed of nihilism in the history of thinking of our mankind (Di Santo, 2010).

ten to Overbeck in 1887. The study that aimed to analyze the connection between Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche pointed out that Nietzsche had read “The House of the Dead”, “Humiliated and Insulted” and “The Devils”. As for “Crime and Punishment” and “The Idiot”, uncertainty still stands, however it is for sure, that Nietzsche had heard about the novel “Crime and Punishment”, moreover he also roughly knew the plot (Czeglédi, 2008, 2013). In these novels the characters pronounce the same views that will be unraveled in Nietzsche’s work later on. In this regard, Raskolnikov’s theory about the division of mankind is of particular interest: according to this approach there exists an elite, that controls its own self and—in contrast—the mass, that’s unable to do so and in this way, can be forced to obey. This theory closely resembles Nietzsche’s Overman concept and heralds the philosopher’s views on the moral with the division of the elite from the slaves, later described more in detail in his work “On the Genealogy of Morals” (Nietzsche, 1992). According to Shestov, Raskolnikov had already gone beyond good and evil, when the German philosopher was still believing in exalted ideas, moreover he also states that “the German philosopher would never have been so bold and frank in expounding it in “On the Genealogy of Morals” if he had not felt Dostoevsky’s support behind him.” (Shestov, 1969, 214). Shestov’s approach was highly criticized by other authors (Barcsi, 2016; Berdyaev, 1975; Czeglédi, 2008; Lavrin, 1969; Tábor, 2007; Török, 1979). According to this critical concept, the tragic heroes, failing in rebellion are symbols against the Nietzschean values:

there is, indeed, a value that can’t be reevaluated... the respect of every people’s life, freedom, value and dignity... in Dostoyevsky’s novels it becomes sure that there is a limit that can’t be exceeded: every time it is being symbolized by the falling down of the individual rebellion. (Barcsi, 2016, pp. 165)

Nietzsche may have realized the great novels’ message, namely that the heroes, the Overmen—who follow the desolated Zarathustra—fail, one after the other. On the other hand the German philosopher, who declared that “nothing is true, all is permitted” (Nietzsche, 1905, pp. 185) couldn’t and didn’t want to fit “punishment” in his philosophy.⁴ However—as Ferenc Tallár (1999) correctly stated—punishment acts as the symbol of liberation and rebirth. This motive also appears in the story of Raskolnikov, in which the confession of the sin and the punishment breaks the desolation and infinite silence, thus allowing him to enter the “world of interpersonality” (Tallár, 1999, 97).

⁴In contrast to Dostoyevsky views on the sense of guilt and punishment, according to Nietzsche: “Forgetting is...rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression, that is responsible for the fact what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it...To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time, to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworks of utility organs working with and against one other, a little quitness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, premediation...—that is the purpose of active forgetfulness...The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged...may be compared...witha dyspeptic—he cannot “have done” with anything.” (Nietzsche, 1992, 493–494, emphasis in the original).

16.3 Crime and Punishment—The Psychoanalytic Approach

Numerous studies which approached the great Dostoyevsky novels from a psychoanalytic perspective have been published, his novels—similar to those of Franz Kafka—presents a treasury of unconscious motivations and lures for a psychoanalytic interpretation. Breger (1989) pointed out two aspects that makes the Dostoyevsky novels to be “psychoanalytic”. One of them is the working through process that is present throughout his work from *Crime and Punishment* to *The Brothers Karamazov*. *Crime and Punishment* portrays the child, the desired-but-negligent mother, the uncontrollable rage and the splitting of the mother image, while in the novel “*The Idiot*”—published three years later—genital and sexual issues also appear. In his last great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the relationship with the father and Oedipal rivalry act as the central conflict (Breger, 1989; Kiremidjain, 1976). While in his early novels the reader is being confronted with extreme emotions, impulses and idealizations, Dostoyevsky’s late work revolves around characters that are real humans with relatable good and bad qualities. The second aspect Breger refers to is the “observer self” phenomenon. Even in the darkest emotional chaos, the presence of Dostoyevsky is sensible, appearing on diverse levels. The writer never identifies oneself with only one character, rather the different aspects of his personality are reflected in his characters; and meanwhile he is also able to maintain his position as an outsider observer. The great Russian esthete Mikhail Bakhtin highlighted this very same pattern, emphasizing the polyphonic and dialogical character of the novel, which results in a free associative and dreamlike story telling (Bakhtin, 1984). Moreover, the fact that the poetic dreams of the characters are observable and have a meaningful part throughout his life’s work, can’t be deemed a coincidence (Lower, 1969; Szekeres, 2008). The novels’ polyphonic and dialogical nature is the manifestation of the different, and often contradictory parts of Dostoyevsky’s Self; and it was the writer’s special ability to release these “Self-parts” to act independently—as free men—in the novel and to line up next to their creator (Bakhtin, 1984).

Although from a poetic and psychoanalytic perspective *Crime and Punishment* is probably the most exciting, interpretations of other Dostoyevsky novels seem to overshadow it—especially those of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Concerning the latter, “*Dostoyevsky and Parricide*”, an essay by Sigmund Freud published first in 1928 is of great significance (Freud, 1945). The first part of this essay aims to find the oedipal roots of Dostoyevsky’s guilt and masochisms, while the second part analyzes the writer’s gambling disorder, interpreting it as a masturbation-associated neurotic symptom. The relevance of this paper is decreased due to Freud’s two central arguments, that later proved to be fallacies (Breger, 1989). One of them is Freud’s misconception about Dostoyevsky’s illness: he regarded it as an “affective” epilepsy, a variant of hysteria with unconscious psychic mechanisms as an underlying cause. The second one is an already confuted legend about the writer’s first seizure appearing at the age of 18 years, exactly after his father’s death. According to the medical historicists’ and epileptologists’ interpretation, Dostoyevsky suffered from

temporal lobe epilepsy (Geschwind, 1984; Ferguson Rayport et al., 2011; Hughes, 2005; Rice, 1985; Seneviratne, 2010) and the possible role of any psychological causes can be ruled out.

Regarding Dostoyevsky's novels—in which sin and murder are recurring motives—it is an exciting psychopathological aspect, that the writer's epileptic auras were characterized by the perception of a heightened self-awareness and harmony. This rare epileptic phenomenon is referred to as “extatic aura” in the scientific literature, moreover, some authors identify it as “Dostoyevsky's epilepsy” (Cirignotta, Todesco, & Lugaresi, 1980). Although previously thought to be a temporal lobe seizure symptom, recent neurobiological data suggest, that the symptomatogenic zone is, in fact, the insular cortex. This observation is also consistent with Dostoyevsky's severe gambling disorder: according to recent neuroscientific data, the malfunction of the insula may be an important underlying pathology in gambling disorder: being responsible for the common cognitive distortions in gambling disorder (Tényi, Gyimesi, Kovács, & Tényi, 2016).

16.3.1 The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Crime and Punishment

The novel was written in 1885, the year of grief and misfortune for the writer (Breger, 1989). He loses his first wife Maria—who died in tuberculosis—then a couple of months later his brother Mikhail and his good friend Grigoriev. With the death of Mikhail the publication of the journal *Epokha*—on which the two brothers work together—has stopped. The writer contracted a huge amount of debt as the result of his gambling disorder. Polina Suslova, the woman with whom Dostoyevsky engaged a new relationship, left him and moved to Paris, leaving the writer behind in Germany. Dostoyevsky begged for money desperately not only from his friends (Wrangel, Herzen) and Polina, but also from his rival Turgenev, the man about whom he felt deep ambivalence. In his turmoil of personal and financial misfortune, he began to write the novel *Crime and Punishment* in Wiesbaden. This new work engagement could be traced back to rational reasons: he desperately needed some money to be able to pay back his debt; he wanted to get back his good reputation in the Russian literature society and to show that he is back and active again. It is unambiguous that the psychological need of the working through process was inevitable in this phase of his life (Breger, 1989; Burchell, 1933; Kanzer, 1948; Lower, 1969). The suffering from poverty, from feeling of being lost and desolated that also resulted in further guilt and self-accusation, the strong ambivalence to the lost ones (Maria, Mikhail) was the starting point, that enabled him to create a novel with such intensity, constantly dancing on the borderline of love and hate. In parallel Dostoyevsky felt that the writing of this novel was a chance of resurrection; that through creation he could manage to emerge from his life of sin, starvation and epileptic seizures. Not only Raskolnikov's rage, megalomaniac fantasies and the everyday life of poverty were

the manifestations of Dostoyevsky's subjective reality, but also the rationally thinking Svidrigailov could be regarded as an alterego of the writer (Breger, 1989). The parallel between the female characters in the novel and Dostoyevsky's relationships is also pretty obvious. In the role of the tuberculotic Katerina Marmeladova the presence of the lost wife, Maria can be sensed. His ambivalence towards his mother and sister can be identified through the extreme exaggerated portrayal of the novel's female characters: the landlady and her daughter, the evil pawn-broker and her innocent daughter Lizaveta, Katerina Marmeladova and the nearly as a saint portrayed Sonia, who is forced to prostitution to save his siblings from starvation death and whose Christian love and carrying helps in the "resurrection" of Raskolnikov—her rescuer role is similar to that of Anna Grigorievna, the second wife of Dostoyevsky, with whom the writer met while writing the ending of the novel. According to Breger (1989) this "resurrection" gave the chance to the writer to be able to get involved with a new romantic relationship. Through the creation of this novel the writer was able to overcome his rage, guilt and desperation and this reconstruction of self opens the gateway to self-discovery and the creation of his next novels.

The protagonist Raskolnikov, a young student lives in poverty in his rented apartment, starves and is unable to stand his ground in the university he attends. He is dependent of his mother's, sister's and his landlady's constant support, while makes his plan to murder the evil pawn-broker who takes all his left belongings in exchange for humiliatingly little money. Raskolnikov considers only one type of elite men—referring also himself to this group—to be suitable to rise above the common people and their law and morality, thus to become able to show destruction free of guilt. However, isolation, rage, fear and guilt overwhelms him, which is amplified by the pawn-broker and the landlady but also his mother, who blames him for his sister's having to step in a forced marriage, so that she can support him financially. Just before the murder, an alcoholic state official appears, who drinks away his tuberculotic dyeing wife's and son's last penny—the money that Sonia earns from prostitution to keep saved from starved to death. Marmeladov portrays Raskolnikov's masochism and takes the blame for his weakness and guiltiness which creates the possibility for Raskolnikov to identify himself with the vulnerability, poverty but also with the sin. After reading her mother's accusing letter, that evokes guilt and anger in him, Raskolnikov wonders around the city and when he lies down the grass exhausted, falls asleep and has a dream about his 7-year-old self, witnessing the ruthless torture of the horse. Later we will get back to the analysis of this dream. After her mother's letter and having the dream about the horse that liberates his aggression, he goes back to his apartment, grabs an axe and entering the pawn-brokers home, kills the old woman. Right after the murder of the woman, one of her relatives, the innocent Lizaveta arrives home and—in contrast with the pawn-broker, who desperately tried to save her own life—doesn't even try to defend herself, when Raskolnikov kills her. After the murder, panic and disgust overwhelms the protagonist and escapes from the apartment, leaving all value behind. With this motive Dostoyevsky refers to the murder's unconscious psychological motivation, not being a well thought out, rational act (Florance, 1955). The sin has been committed, the previous guilt has found its object and from this moment on, atonement fills up the protagonist's psyche. This

atonement begins with a feverish confusion and after a few days two contradictory feelings dominates Raskolnikov's mind: the longing for confession and, on the other hand, the wish to hide and escape from the penalty.

16.4 Raskolnikov's First Dream and the Falling Down of Nietzsche—The Psychology of the Suffering Horse

16.4.1 *Violence—Suffering—Condolence: The Phenomenon*

How does the “all is permitted” (Nietzsche, 1905, pp. 185) philosophy of the powerful immoralists, who go on their own ways, relate to Raskolnikov, Nietzsche's Overman and the need for pity, absolution and condolence? What does the novel of atonement and the incident in Turin teach us?

Our starting-point is that the passionate dialogues of the characters portray the opposition between the Christian absolution and condolence and the anti-Christian doubt (the questioning of the existence of God and its kindness) (Di Santo, 2010). Raskolnikov's atonement, confession and—with the help of Sonia—his rebirth certifies Dostoyevsky's effort to pass the test of skepticism and faithlessness. As we will see later on, Nietzsche's attacks against the Christian condolence, that can be identified in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Zarathustra*, are highly contradictory—especially in the light of the incident in Turin. Nietzsche's work and his tragic farewell in Turin highlights the contradictory nature of the Self. Similarly, Dostoyevsky's different and often contradictory Self-parts can be identified in his novels through their polyphonic and dialogical structure: as we have discussed this earlier it was the writer's special ability to release these “Self-parts” to act independently—as free men—in the novel and to line up next to their creator (Bakhtin, 1984). The main focus of our essay, the motive of the suffering horse—according to our thesis—aims to present the relation among power, suffering and condolence to the many-faced, contradictory Self. Regarding the motive of the tortured horse, the interpretation of two life events could help us to further clarify our topic.

In May of 1837 Dostoyevsky and his brother were taken to Saint Petersburg to begin their engineering studies. On the road Dostoyevsky witnessed, that a governmental messenger jumped on a horse carriage, driven by a young coachman. The messenger started to hit the coachman, who—in turn—began to whip the horses. Dostoyevsky, smitten with this scene, watched the parallel hitting till the carriage disappeared. Twenty-five years later the writer wrote down this memory in his notes accompanying the novel *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 1967, 64). This scenery burned in his memory, enlightening the writer's ability to quasi “soak up” sceneries and persons. The reminiscence implies that he is the messenger, the coachman and the horse, just as in Raskolnikov's dream, where the protagonist multiple identification can be also observed (Breger, 1989; Wasiolek, 1974). Many years later this childhood memory appears—somewhat modified—in Raskolnikov's first dream

in the novel. Thus we see that the picture of the little boy, running towards the dead horse and kissing its head is not only of poetic purpose, but also a personal issue of Dostoyevsky, although this association is clarified only in the writer's memoir, noted between 1873 and 1876.

A letter Nietzsche wrote to Reinhard von Seydlitz in May of 1888, describes one of his imaginations.

Winter landscape. An old carter, with an expression of the most brutal cynicism, harder even than the surrounding winter, is relieving himself against the side of his horse. The horse, poor, abused creature looks back gratefully. (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, 118)

The Turin incident a few months later, is analogous with this picture, and both scenes resemble Raskolnikov's condolence for the brutally tortured horse in his dream. After this he started to write his friends regularly, signing his letters as "Dionysus", "Crucified", "Dionysus versus the Crucified", "Dionysus, the Crucified" (Tényi, 2007, 2010). Two years later, in 1892 Nietzsche's mother reports Nietzsche's friend, Overbeck that the philosopher acts childish and keeps repeating "I don't like horses" (Di Santo, 2010, 50; Hayman, 1980, 344). We should also consider that—as a young adult in the army—Nietzsche very much liked horseback riding, (Di Santo, 2010; Hayman, 1980). Nietzsche's connection to the horse motive also appears in the well-known portrait of him and Ree as the horses, conducted by Lou Salome, a whip in her hand, holding the rein tightly.

Regarding the reaction to suffering, the fate of Dostoyevsky/Raskolnikov and Nietzsche are in harmony: the strong resemblance between Raskolnikov, who first praises immorality, then commits a sin and atones greatly; and Nietzsche, ending his life's work with the farewell in Turin. Dostoyevsky derives condolence from religious fate belief (Di Santo, 2010): the condolence of the young Raskolnikov appearing in his dream and Sonia's dominical acceptance and condolence are analogues. Dostoyevsky "believed firmly in the redemptive and regenerative power of suffering" (Berdyayev, 1975, 574). However besides the resemblance, a few differences between Dostoyevsky's and Nietzsche's—before the Turin incident—can also be observed (Di Santo, 2010).

16.4.2 Violence—Suffering—Condolence: The Background

According to Raskolnikov's own interpretation, he is Mikolka and by killing the horse, the dream manifests his own intentions towards the old pawn-broker—thus creating and clarifying his plan. In Mikolka's character the intellectualizing confirmation of the Overman's immorality has been demolished and shows its bare reality: the raw and brutal violence. The emotions of the different characters in the dream show the different sides of Raskolnikov's personality (Breger, 1989; Wilson, 1976). Raskolnikov is not only the angry and attacking Mikolka, but also the horrified, innocent child, who—unlike Mikolka—worships the mother; moreover, the victim, the murdered horse is also a manifestation of the dreamer. Raskolnikov's identifica-

tion with the vulnerable sufferer can be found throughout the novel; the unfairness of life is the central motivation for his rage. The father—who was untouched by the tragedy—is also an aspect of Raskolnikov’s personality (Wasiolek, 1974). It’s true for all of our dreams that each character represent a part of our personality, in Raskolnikov’s case these parts dissociate from each other (Wilson, 1976; Garber, 1976). According to Wasiolek (1974) in this dream the aggressors and the sufferers—Mikolka and the horse—form a mutual identification circle, Raskolnikov, the pawn-broker woman, the mother, the sister Dunya, Marmeladov are aggressors and sufferers simultaneously. The same motive can be observed when—after committing the murder—Raskolnikov looks at himself and his actions horrified, just as the young boy witnessing the brutality while the indifferent (the father in the dream) part of his Self doesn’t sense, how murdering the woman will affect his life and personality. Regarding the psychoanalytic interpretation of the dream, the authors agree that the suffering and killed horse acts as a symbol of the mother and/or sister (Breger, 1989; Florance, 1955; Gibian, 1955; Kiremidjain, 1976; Layman, 2006; Lower, 1969; Wasiolek, 1974). Florance (1955) and Lower (1969) also point out that the brutal whipping evokes sado-masochistic phantasies, the child’s imagination of the primal scene. Florance (1955) indicates, that all family members appear in the dream, only the sister Dunya doesn’t. According to the author, Dunya was indeed present in the dream: the beaten, “raped” horse is in fact the symbol of Raskolnikov’s sister (Florance, 1955). In Steffen’s interpretation (2011), hitting the eye of the horse is the phantasy evoked by castration anxiety.

Edith Steffen (2011) aimed to interpret the Turin incident as an oedipal conflict. He points out Nietzsche’s—who lost his father at an early age—identification with the mother and femininity that manifests in anger towards his mother, as a result of reaction formation. Regarding the relationship with his father—similar to Wolfenstein (2000)—she mentions the melancholic identification. This became especially obvious when Nietzsche reached the age when his father died and, according to Steffen (2011), the identification could have a role in the forming of conversion. He was brought up in a strict religious atmosphere with his father, Ludwig Nietzsche, being a protestant priest (Hayman, 1980; Safranski, 2003). According to some interpretations the “voice” of the late Nietzsche is a direct impression of his father’s influence, nothing more (Miller, 1991). Arnold and Atwood (2000) construct their view a more differentiated way: comparing his early style against the tone of Thus spoke Zarathustra they conceived that although the preacher’s voice is rather cryptic and stifled in the early phase, it becomes highly poetic and flows free without any restrictions. Steffen (2011) speculates that in Nietzsche’s case the oedipal consolidation turns over: the father was not internalized by the son, but rather—in the concept of the Overman—the son was internalized by the father. According to Steffen (2011), with his philosophy not only did Nietzsche become his own father but also his father’s father. More than 100 years ago Lou Salome argued that after the declaration of “God’s death”, Nietzsche became the father of the God-like Zarathustra, thus an Overman Nietzsche, a new God was created (Salome, 1988).

16.5 The Contradictory Self—The Nietzschean Approach

As we aimed to describe, the essential and integrated Self exists neither in Nietzsche's nor Dostoyevsky's world concept; "according to an often recurring thought of Zarathustra, the more inner contradiction an individual can stand, the stronger and richer it is" (Czeglédi, 2008, 17). From this point of view the Kohutian "Sense of Self" is rather an illusion, myth or a prejudice (Chessick, 1997). Nietzsche lived the world fragmented, which resulted in his ambiguous way of thinking and expression. According to Nietzsche "whatever is profound loves mask" (Nietzsche, 1992, 240); one wears masks to cover the silent emptiness, there is no such things as the integrity and core of the Self, its existence is its plurality and ambiguity (Chessick, 1997). Nietzsche argues that the creation of our Selves, should be similar to the creation of a work of art.

In this essay we aimed to understand violence, suffering, death, indifference and condolence from the perspective of the ever-changing, ever-forming Dionysian self. The life of Dostoyevsky, his fallen and reborn heroes, the works of Nietzsche and his tragic breakdown, the uncanny similarity between the Turin incident and the dream of Raskolnikov, the approach and analysis of anxiety-causing episodes explore the diverse, contradictory nature of the Self, which lacks a coherent center.

16.6 Epilogue

After the analysis of the human, we follow Krasznahorkai (1990) and ask:

... What happened to the horse?....

The Hungarian film director, Béla Tarr gives us a possible answer in his 2011 movie about the falling down of Nietzsche (which he directed at the end of his life's work, as the final). In "The Turin Horse" the director pictures the last six days before the absolute collapse of the world. In Tarr's and Krasznahorkai's interpretation the end of Nietzsche's sanity was the beginning of the loss of reason, the apocalypse, the end of the world.

Sensing Tarr's last film we breathe slowly as

... our mates approach towards us, we don't send a word just look at them and listen in deep condolence. We think, it's right to have this condolence inside us – and that it would be also right, that the approachers have this condolence, too... because if not, then it will be tomorrow... or ten... or thirty years later.

At the latest in Turin.⁵

⁵Translated from Hungarian (Krasznahorkai, 1990) by the authors of this chapter.

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Chapter 17

Time, Death, Eternity: Imagining the Soul of Johann Sebastian Bach



George E. Atwood

Abstract This chapter is a speculative psychological study of the music and life of Johann Sebastian Bach. It is argued that a profound division opened up in Bach's soul in consequence of a series of overwhelming losses during his early formative years. These losses included the deaths of his mother, his father, and many siblings and other close relatives. One side of this division appeared in lasting bonds to the beloved ones who had passed into Eternity, while the other side manifested as a passionate love of life and people in this world. I suggest that Bach's musical compositions, uniting sacred and secular musical traditions, embody a theme of creatively bringing these conflicting sides of his nature into an embracing wholeness.

Keywords Psychobiography · Johann Sebastian Bach · Musician · Loss · Self-division · Self-unification · Heaven and earth · Fragmentation and wholeness

17.1 Introduction

This chapter describes a search for the soul of Johann Sebastian Bach, as it is expressed and symbolized in his music. In what follows, I have drawn extensively on the well-known biography by Christopher Wolff: *Johann Sebastian Bach: the Learned Musician* (2000), and also on David and Mendel (1972) *The New Bach Reader*, Williams' (2001) *Bach: The Goldberg Variations*, Gaines' (2005) *Evening in the Palace of Reason*, and John Butt's (1997) *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*.

This exploration presents some fairly serious difficulties, in view of the immense edifice that is Bach's music. Beethoven famously remarked, on being asked what he thought of Bach's lifework, "Nicht Bach, sondern Meer sein!" Not a brook, but rather an ocean! Schweitzer (1911) regarded Bach as the product of decades and even centuries of developments in European music, the objectivation, as he put it, of a vast historical process.

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Bach was born more than 300 years ago, in Eisenach, Germany, into a culture, an early Lutheran religious worldview, and a language very far removed from our own. How can one hope to cross that great divide and actually find the individual personality, the inner feelings that were his? He left us almost nothing written describing his own emotional experiences. I would ask, though, whether Bach's music might itself be understood as a record of his life as he lived it, one that is even vividly detailed, if only we can find the right way to listen to it. This study is one of searching for that way of listening.

The chapter is less a scholarly argument and more a reverie, almost a dream, about Bach the man, and Bach the child. My goal is to create a fantasy embracing and interconnecting what is known of his life and of the patterns in his music.

The material develops in the form of a series of interconnected thought trains, with some selections from Bach's music recommended to be listened to along the way. The essay can be followed in itself, but the additional presence of the music with the ideas that are developed will immeasurably enrich the reading.

I chose as my initial recommendation the prelude and fugue in C Major in Book 1 of the collection known as *The Well-tempered Clavier*. The music is exceptionally beautiful; and the part that follows the prelude—the fugue in C major—contains, numerologically encoded, Bach's presence itself. Most Bach scholars agree that he played with number symbolism in his music, and that the number 14 was for him a representation of his own name. When the letters B–A–C–H are replaced by their respective numerical positions in the alphabet: 2–1–3–8, adding the numbers together, one arrives at the sum of 14. There are exactly 14 notes in the theme—the so-called subject of this first fugue, played in what is called “*stretto*” (the theme is played overlapping itself in different keys, over and over). So translating the fugue into its numerical and alphabetical equivalent, it is as if voices are saying: “Bach...Bach...Bach...Bach...etc.” The fact that he did this exemplifies what simply has to be true in any case: namely, that he is everywhere present in his music. After the prelude, which consists in a series of chord progressions that he originally wrote out as an exercise for one of his sons learning to play keyboard instruments, listen closely to the repeating melody of the fugue, in which the 14 notes are played again and again in different keys.

First Suggestion: Well-tempered Clavier, Book 1, Prelude and Fugue in C-major: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfQPOCazPzM>

My acquaintance with Bach originally included the melody of his cantata (147) known as *Jesu: Joy of Man's Desiring*, since this is played everywhere. I had listened a few times to one or two of the *Brandenburg* concertos, and I was also familiar with the famous melody from the cantata (140) known as *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (The voice calls to us Awake!). Cantatas 140 and 147 figure importantly in my presentation later.

17.2 Timelessness

I recall an impression from these, and others of Bach's creations, an impression of the music as cyclical and repetitive, rather than linear and progressive. The music always seemed to start and end "in the middle:" no clear origin, no intermediate section following, no identifiable conclusion. In my imagination I saw circles and cycles, always repeating, rather than journeys from one recognizable point in space and time to another. It would begin and then end, but linger forever in the middle. Could this absence of linear development, I remember wondering, be relevant to the experience of time, as if the passage of time, from the past through the present to the future, was somehow held in abeyance in Bach's works? Was there some issue in Bach's lifeworld pertaining to a resistance against the flow of time, to an attraction to a realm transcending time? What such an attraction could mean I had no idea.

I became aware some years after these early ruminations on temporality that Bach lost both his parents when he was a young child, first his mother, then his father. I wondered if what I perceived as the timeless quality of his music could possibly relate to this experience, the loss of a loved one being something that occurs in time, whereas in timelessness there is perhaps no such thing as loss. Maybe his music, I thought, provided a way of moving beyond a tragic world, ruled over by the progression of time, a world in which death is inevitable and irrevocable.

17.3 Synthesis

One of the first things one learns about Bach in a study of his life and work is that he was the great synthesizer. Traditionally sacred and secular music are freely blended and integrated in his compositions. German, Italian, French, Spanish, and many other national musical heritages are drawn together. He wrote for practically every musical instrument, and he drew upon every musical form and genre: vocal, instrumental, solo, choir, orchestra, opera, concerto, etc. Bach's genius resided in his ability to bring things together in new and dazzling combinations—his was therefore an originality of synthesis, rather than one of radical change and revolution. It occurred to me that perhaps there are two kinds of genius: one devoted to extending and integrating all that has come before, and the other to destroying existing structures and replacing them with new ones.

If Bach represents the former of these, one might say Picasso exemplifies the latter, since it was the hallmark of his long career to overthrow existing traditions, including the ones he established himself. I think genius that expresses itself by pulling elements together into new unities is guided mainly by love; but genius that leads revolutions and destroys the old, although love may be present, is full of aggression and hate as well. Eros in the one case, Thanatos in the other. It cannot be an accident that Bach was a loving husband, who worked his whole life to hold his family together and passed on to his children all that he could of his music, whereas

Picasso, in dramatic contrast, did all he could to destroy the women of his life, and seems not to have held back from injuring his children as well.

Rather than there being two kinds of genius, however, it probably would make more sense to speak of two poles of creative genius, one that synthesizes and integrates diverse elements from the past, and the other that creates revolutionary forms overthrowing the structures elaborated in the past. Both poles would therefore be present in every act of creation, differing only in their relative salience. In Bach, unquestionably, synthesis and love predominate.

He was always weaving and reweaving unities out of previously unconnected elements. One may ask: what drives a man to do this throughout a lifetime? The idea occurred to me that it might be associated with a fragmentation, a feeling of being in pieces, or of the world itself having disintegrated in some essential way, so that the synthesizing trend in his musical compositions would express an underlying need to heal his own fragmented selfhood, and/or to restore to a shattered world its lost coherence. This idea turns out to be an essential one and is developed further in the next sections.

Now, however, I suggest listening to a selection that is one of the most beautiful pieces of music in all of creation: the aria from the Goldberg Variations. The aria appears at the beginning and then again at the end of the variations making up this work. Many have thought that this arrangement creates a circular structure in the set of variations as a whole, wherein at the end one is returned to the beginning, which could mean that the entire sequence could be played forever, around and around, and therefore transcends time and partakes of eternity. This could be seen as an instance of Bach's music in its timeless aspect.

Second Suggestion: Aria from the Goldberg Variations:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv94m_S3QDo.

17.4 Music and Death

Let us now consider what is known about Bach's childhood years. He was the youngest child of eight, in a large extended family tracing back over several generations of musicians. During his childhood, there were two constant companions:

Music
and Death

His father, Ambrosius Bach, was the director of town music for Eisenach, where Bach was born in 1685. His mother Marie and her husband were 41 years old at the time of Bach's birth. The father had an identical twin, Christoph, also an accomplished musician and an important part of their lives.

What was it like to be the youngest child in that incredible family? The house was full of children and young people, virtually all of them occupied with music. At one point Johann Sebastian lived with 6 siblings (a sister had died in infancy

before he was born) as well as two cousins (orphans from his extended family whose parents had died of the plague) and his father's young apprentices. Johann Forkel, Bach's first biographer, describes an important yearly event that must have deeply influenced him: reunions in which members of the larger extended family would gather together and spend a few days celebrating and making music. I picture these occasions as times that were filled with great joy for all concerned, including the very young Johann Sebastian himself.

As the company consisted wholly of cantors, organists and town musicians ... the first thing they did, when they were assembled, was to sing a chorale. From this pious commencement they proceeded to drolleries which often made a great contrast with it. For now they sang popular songs, the contents of which were partly comic and partly naughty, all together and extempore, but in such a manner that the several parts thus extemporized made a kind of harmony together, the words, however, in every part being different. (quoted in Wolff, 2000, p. 27)

And now, let's turn to Death.

Bach's sister, his parents' first child, had died in infancy 14 years before Bach was born. He lost a brother when he was two months of age, and another sister when he had just turned one. In addition to the continuing loss of numerous more distant relatives, his eighteen year-old brother Balthasar died when Bach was six, and the next year one of the cousins who had been in the house Bach's whole life, working as an apprentice to his father Ambrosius, also died, at the age of 16. But these losses, difficult though they must have been, were not the most profound ones of his early years.

In 1693, Christoph, Bach's father's twin, then town musician in Arnstadt, not far from Eisenach, died suddenly. Bach's son, Carl Phillip Emmanuel, annotated the family genealogy with the following description regarding the twin brother:

These twins [Christoph and Ambrosius] are perhaps the only ones of their kind ever known. They loved each other extremely. They looked so much alike that even their wives could not tell them apart. They were an object of wonder on the part of great gentlemen and everyone who saw them. Their speech, their way of thinking – everything was the same. In music, too, they were not to be told apart: they played alike and thought out their performances in the same way. If one fell ill the other did too. (quoted in Wolff, 2000, p. 34)

Imagine what it might have been like for one's father to have a duplicate, someone reportedly greatly loved by the family, and then to learn that this magical double, this man who could only be distinguished from his father by his clothing, had died. What foreboding might the boy feel, then at the age of eight, knowing that everything that occurred in the life of his father's twin occurred also in his father's? Within a year, Bach's mother Marie died. Nothing is known about the cause of her death except that it was sudden. Ambrosius, shocked by the loss and saddled with the responsibility for so many young ones, after only a few months remarried within his extended family, to a widow of one of his cousins, Margaretha, who herself had two daughters. Twelve weeks into the life of the reconstituted family, Ambrosius himself died, possibly after an illness involving much suffering. (surviving records from the family indicate the presence in the Bach home of great numbers of medications). The nine-year old Johann Sebastian had lost his father, his father's duplicate, and his mother.

What was the experience of this child in the midst of such a catastrophe? The only facts concerning this time that remain available to us are his school attendance and grades in the year 1694–1695, a period that included the illnesses and deaths of his mother and father: he was absent on fifty one and one half days, a greater number of absences than are recorded in any of his other years of schooling. His grades, formerly at the top of his class, fell during this time. Can words describe the depth of trauma involved in such tragedy? Can mourning occur when so many losses are involved? What happens to a child who continues on, even in the face of such events? What happens inwardly, secretly, to the soul of the child, even as outwardly he or she resumes the activities of daily life? And how might all of this be related to Bach's music?

A few months after the death of his father, Johann Sebastian and his brother Johann Jacob, three years older, were sent to live with Johann Christoph, in Ohrdruf, a small town 25 miles from Eisenach, where the brother was the organist at St. Michael's Church. Christoph was fourteen years older than Johann Sebastian and had spent a number of years as an apprentice to Johann Pachelbel.

The next several years spent in Ohrdruf continued Bach's education, academically and musically, and his school records from that period show him at the top or near the top of all his classes, performing at a level matching or exceeding students who were years ahead of him. One story from this period may have importance for an understanding of his continuing struggle to master the tragic circumstances of his childhood, and also for knowing how these struggles became reflected in his music. I call this story: *The Moonlight Robbery*, and it appears in Bach's obituary, written by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. Most commentators believe that this story must have originated with Johann Sebastian himself:

The love of our little Johann Sebastian for music was uncommonly great even at this tender age [12 years, approximately]. In a short time he had fully mastered all the pieces his brother had voluntarily given him to learn. But his brother possessed a book of clavier pieces by the most famous masters of the day - Froberger, Pachelbel, Kerl - and this, despite all his pleading and for who knows what reason, was denied him. His zeal to improve himself thereupon gave him the idea of practicing the following innocent deceit. This book was kept in a cabinet whose doors consisted only of grillwork. Now, with his little hands he could reach through the grillwork and roll the book up (for it had only a paper cover); accordingly, he would fetch the book out at night, when everyone had gone to bed and, since he was not even possessed of a light, copy it by moonlight. In six months' time he had these musical spoils in his own hands. Secretly and with extraordinary eagerness he was trying to put it to use, when his brother, to his great dismay, found out about it, and without mercy took away from him the copy he had made with such great pains. (quoted in Wolff, 2000, p. 45)

How are we to interpret this story? What could have been the sources of Johann Sebastian's driving need to make his brother's secret musical possessions his own? Could it be that by having all of the music his brother possessed, without anything at all being left out, Bach was trying to give himself the basis for recreating the early family reunions, at which every kind of music was played, in which his early world was still intact? This much can certainly be said: in the aftermath of the family disaster, the one and only thing that survived was music. And it was to music that Bach gave himself body and soul.

I am also struck by the assertiveness, the aggressiveness implicit in this little tale; the young Bach, contravening his brother's wishes, finds a way to take what he has to have, what he must have felt was necessary for his own emerging purposes (Botwinick, 2004). He thought to himself: "to hell with Johann Christoph, I will make this music my own!" My friend Patricia Price helped me see an analogy here between Bach's defiant copying of the music in the secrecy of the night and Prometheus' stealing of fire from Zeus and giving it to mortals, a mythical crime symbolizing the child's appropriating of parental power to itself and defining its own independent identity, agency, and destiny. Pat also suggested that the imagery of this story of the robbery in the night embodies an ancient archetype of the prophet who unrolls the sacred scrolls and translates the divine word to humanity at large. Inasmuch as music in the Lutheran church during Bach's time tended to be regarded as immanently containing the word and even the very presence of God, I find this suggestion incredibly interesting.

17.5 Fragmentation

How specifically was Johann Sebastian affected by the deaths of his loved ones? If the inferences cited earlier regarding an abiding sense of fragmentation were correct, how did the losses contribute to this sense? What form did the fragmentation itself take? Trauma such as he suffered has to have left a lasting imprint on his experiences, and this imprint will inevitably show itself in the structure of his creations. With a view toward reconstructing the answer to these questions, to discovering the pattern inscribed in his music, I listened to his orchestral works and his solos, to his instrumental compositions and his vocal creations—to The Goldberg Variations, A Musical Offering, The Well-tempered Clavier, The Art of the Fugue, The St. Matthew Passion, The St. John Passion, The Mass in B Minor, a vast number of partitas, preludes, sonatas and fugues, the cello suites, to all of the concertos including especially the Brandenbergs, and finally, to many, many of the cantatas.

Here are some thoughts that occurred as I listened to one of these, entitled *Schweig stille, plaudert nicht* (Be silent; chatter not), also known as:

The Coffee Cantata.

This piece of music, generally considered to be a purely secular work, is a two-person opera, a comic opera actually, in which a grumpy, aging father—Schlendrian—argues with a spirited, defiant daughter, Lieschen. The quarrel between the two concerns coffee: whereas Lieschen has great love for this beverage, taking intense pleasure in it, Schlendrian regards her doing so as a kind of addiction she should overcome and renounce. Back and forth the two of them go, the one affirming that coffee is most lovely, sweet, and enjoyable, and the other asserting the importance of giving it up. What follows is a translation of a short section of the cantata in which one hears Schlendrian and Lieschen in conflict over her continuing enjoyment of this drink.

Schlendrian:

You naughty child
 You wanton hussy
 Oh when will I have my way
 For me and lay off the coffee!

Lieschen:

Dear Father. Do not be so strict
 For I must three times each day
 Drink my little cup of coffee
 If I do not, I'll turn indeed to my distress
 Into a dried up goat for roasting

Schlendrian:

If you do not quit coffee
 You will have no wedding feast
 Nor ever take a stroll!

Lieschen:

Agreed!
 But leave me to my coffee!

Schlendrian:

Here now I've got the little monkey
 I will most surely refuse you a whalebone dress!

Lieschen:

I can easily learn to bear this

Schlendrian:

You will not venture to the window
 And you will see no one who walks beneath it!

Lieschen:

This also, but heed my request
 And grant that I may keep my coffee.

Schlendrian:

You will not receive from my hand

A silver or golden band
 Upon your bonnet!

Lieschen:

Yes, yes, but leave me to my pleasure [coffee]

Third Suggestion: the Coffee Cantata:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7oWS8VCLYE>

I am aware that the lyrics of this cantata were composed originally by Bach's librettist, and therefore cannot be identified as uniquely his own. I would say however that in writing music for words perhaps originally penned by another, he made those words his own in the creation as it finally emerged. I have therefore chosen to understand the theme of this piece of music as an expression of Bach himself. The conjectures offered in the following therefore apply to what I have imagined that the words may have meant to Bach. A careful listening to the singing of Lieschen in this cantata makes one think that she is expressing something more than just her feelings about coffee. She repeatedly emphasizes how sweet it is—she sings out, with great passion, that it is “sweeter than a thousand kisses, milder than a fine Muscatel”. This conflict between father and daughter seems to be a more basic one than a disagreement over a particular beverage. Furthermore, in the last stages of the piece, the father tells the daughter she must refuse coffee lest she never become married, and that if she gives up coffee then the way is clear for her to marry. Lieschen, on hearing this repeated, agrees finally to give up coffee so that she can have a husband. But at the very, very end, after the argument has been won by Schlendrian, she adds: she will make it an explicit part of her wedding contract that she be allowed to haveCOFFEE! Thus the argument returns in a circle to where it began. This final twist in the story, in which Lieschen both marries and maintains her access to her beloved coffee, was almost certainly not written by the librettist but rather was added to the cantata by Bach himself.

One morning in the Fall of 2003, as I was driving to the college where I teach—a 45 min commute—and listening to this cantata, especially the last part, I recall asking the question: What is coffee? Coffee seems to be more than just a drink, based on the breathtakingly passionate way Bach has Lieschen singing about it. It emerges in the music as the most desirable of all desirable things. What, I asked, did Bach see in this story about a clash between two wills, one seeking a pleasure of the senses, and the other opposing that and affirming the renunciation of that pleasure? And what could it have meant to Bach that ceasing to drink coffee will enable this young woman to marry? In another of Bach's cantatas, No. 140 (*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*), the image of marriage is used as a symbol of the union of humanity with Jesus Christ at the End of the World, where Christ is pictured as the groom and the souls of humanity are pictured as the bride. Could it be, I asked myself as I was driving, that this is somehow also part of what is being spoken of in this music? Is it possible that Schlendrian and Lieschen symbolized for Bach two conflicting parts of himself, the former standing for intense religiosity and a commitment to union with God, and the latter to a love for humanity, for the world, for all the pleasures of the senses? I asked further, were there two sides of Johann Sebastian Bach, one orienting toward Heaven, the locus of his lost parents, uncle, and siblings, and the other orienting toward Earth, and toward all of the desirable things one finds in the realm of living human beings? The Earth includes coffee, wine, good food, the pleasure of company with others, the love of women and sexuality, professional achievement and success, parenting and family life, and a long succession of other secular purposes and goals. Heaven, in contrast, releases us from the suffering of earthly existence into a timeless realm in which death does not interrupt life, a realm that includes those most dearly, deeply

loved, namely, the lost ones of Bach's youth: his father, his mother, his father's twin brother, his own siblings and other relatives and acquaintances who had died. Could it be, I wondered, that Bach was a man torn in half between these two poles, one pointing toward Heaven, the other toward Earth, and that in his music both poles were represented, and at different moments and in different ways, brought together, fused, integrated, only later to separate, differentiate, but then again to reintegrate and fuse still again, and endlessly back and forth, separation and reunion, in cycle after cycle? A bringing together of the two warring sides (Schrade, 1946) would then be symbolically expressed in the part of the cantata's story it is believed was added by Bach himself, in the image of Lieschen both marrying (uniting with God) and continuing to have coffee (partaking of earthly life). Sacred and secular are thereby joined in everlasting union.

Let us try again to picture the young Bach's grief, the situation in which he found himself following the loss of his beloved family members. Moving forward over the years to 1727, Bach wrote Cantata 198: The Trauer Ode (Ode to Mourning/Grief), composed to mark ceremonies in honor of the recently deceased Christiane Eberhardine, wife of August II, King of Poland. I am again imagining the significance Bach's music had for its own composer, and using the resulting images in an effort to picture his experience of the tragedies of his life. This beautiful cantata begins as follows:

Lass Fürstin, lass noch einen Strahl aus Salems Sterngewölben schiessen. Und sieh, mit wieviel Tränengüssen umringen wir dein Ehrenmal.

Princess, let a ray shoot out of the starry vaults of Salem [Jerusalem]. And see with how much of a downpouring of tears we encircle your time of honor.

The departed one is here visualized as casting a look back at the world—sending a ray from the stars—and witnessing the overwhelming grief of all of those who loved her. Even as she looks back, the world is pictured here as looking upwards toward her, vowing never to forget her until the end of time.

Doch, Königen, du stirbst nicht, man weiss, was man an dir besessen; Die Nachwelt wird dich nicht vergessen, bis dieser Weltbau einst zerbricht.

So, Queen, you do not die, one knows, what one possesses in you, posterity will not forget you, until this created world is one day destroyed.

The Trauer Ode pictures the princess, also referred to as the queen, as a beloved mother to her followers, and is creating an image in which this mother looks back upon the world, as she stands upon the threshold of everlasting life. I was reminded by this of what I have understood occurs when an object falls into a black hole in spacetime—an outside observer does not actually see the object disappearing, but rather witnesses an endless process of ever closer approximations to the event horizon. This approaching of the boundary line that goes on without end has to do with a slowing of time inside such an intense gravitational field. I think of Bach's mother, and his father and other loved ones, as analogously approaching the gateway to Heaven but never quite passing in and disappearing, remaining forever in view in some essential way. I also picture them as perceiving his love for them; as the

world of the living looks toward Heaven and promises to hold the dear departed in its consciousness always. This may correspond to the part of Bach remaining forever involved and engaged in loving his mother and father and others who died, so many of whom became lost to him on the plane of ordinary temporal existence, but not on that of the timelessness of Heaven. By 1727, the year of the Trauer Ode, Bach had also lost his first wife, numerous children of his own, and all of his many siblings. His whole life was a Trauer Ode, an ode to mourning the deaths that followed him at every step. On the other hand, one could say that precisely the opposite is also the case, namely that Bach's life was equally a Freude Ode, an Ode to Joy. What was his response to the loss of his first wife, Maria Barbara, who had passed away in 1721, after bearing him 7 children (4 dying in infancy)? After a period of mourning he found a second wife, Anna Magdalena, with whom he fathered 13 more children (only 7 of these survived infancy). Bach's life was simultaneously one of never ending sorrow and ever renewed passionate creation. So he was torn between the human and the divine, between the eternal and the temporal, and he found in music a way of expressing both of these currents of his nature. This duality is interestingly reflected in the only recorded statement Bach made regarding the essential purpose of music:

true music ... [pursues] as its ultimate and final goal ... the honor of God and the recreation of the soul. (quoted in Wolff, 2000, p. 8)

If it is true that Bach was a divided soul, with the essential rift being between eternity on the one side and the temporal world of earthly life on the other, then how perfect it is that Bach's primary mode of musical expression was that of counterpoint, embodying the relationship between two (or more) voices that are independent in contour and rhythm, but interdependent in harmony. He did not invent this musical form, but he was its greatest genius. A great many of Bach's creations—especially the fugues—are marked by the presence of two separate melodies, one following the other, played concurrently, interlacing, merging, separating, and alternating, materializing in sound the duality of his inner nature.

17.6 The Marriage of Heaven and Earth

Let us now turn to another of Bach's cantatas, No. 140: *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*. As noted earlier, the story on which this cantata is based, drawn from one of the Gospels in the New Testament (Matthew), uses the metaphor of marriage to represent the union of the Souls of Humanity (the bride) with Jesus, Son of God (the groom). In the biblical story there is a great wedding to take place, but a number of people are sleeping as the moment of the actual marriage approaches. The call to the sleepers to awaken (*Wachet auf!*) stands for a call to humanity to prepare for the Second Coming of the Lord and of Eternal Salvation.

In the selection I suggest listening to from this cantata (track 4 on most CD versions, its most well known section), there are two distinct parts that alternate and overlap—one of which—the initial instrumental part—calls to mind people and

perhaps even animals in motion, dancing, walking, running, leaping, such imagery being bodily in nature, existing in space and in time, on the earth—the other part, which comes in after a short period, is a Lutheran chorale, celebrating the glory of God, giving voice to the coming union with Jesus Christ. This second part, embodying the divine side of the dichotomy, appears superimposed on the first part, representing earthly life—they alternate and then coincide, playing simultaneously, almost like a kiss at the final moment of the marriage, uniting Heaven and Earth, Jesus and the Soul of Humanity, blending and unifying the Eternal and the Temporal, the Finite and the Infinite. If you can listen to the selection, pay attention to the arrival of the chorale melody and hear it as the Coming of the Lord. And join me in picturing this unification as a symbol of a healing of the rift in the soul of Johann Sebastian Bach. Benjamin Stolorow helped me to hear the duality within the music, and the fusion of the two sides as well.

Fourth Suggestion: Cantata 140: Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lw_krZChaQ

The most famous section of cantata 147, known as Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, presents a substantially parallel structure in sound, wherein a dancelike melody (embodying spatiotemporal existence) is, after a short period, joined by a vocal part addressing the glory of God (the timeless realm of Heaven). I suggest listening to this piece of music again, and picture the alternations and integrations as reflective of Bach's inner duality and personal struggle to achieve synthesis and wholeness.

Fifth Suggestion: Cantata 147 – Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwWL8Y-qsJg>

17.7 The Goldberg Variations

The Goldberg Variations, as mentioned in the first part of the chapter, are sometimes described as circular rather than linear in their organization—the work begins and ends with the same piece of music, the aria. This circularity suggests the possibility of the work being played around and around, forever, which connotes the eternal world beyond time and space.

The Goldbergs are also sometimes described as fractal in their structure, meaning that the same organizing patterns appear and reappear at whatever level of analysis one chooses.

The 30 variations contained within the repetitions of the aria are organized into 10 sets of 3 variations each. Each of these triplets—possibly symbolizing the Holy Trinity, while the number 10 may symbolize the 10 Commandments—follows a common pattern: generally the first variation is a dance, the second is a virtuosic piece, and the third is a canon. A dance is concerned with bodily motion and the world of time and space in which such motion occurs, and therefore can be viewed as symbolic of earthly life. The virtuosic pieces that follow the dances, often involving

rapid sequences of ascending and descending notes, one can look at as transitional way stations on a journey that is being depicted in sound. The canons that then appear—involving a melody which follows itself (like row, row, row your boat)—because of their structure, are temporally disrupted and prevented from traversing a linear pathway from beginning to end. This interruption of the linear flow of time itself points toward a world beyond time, namely the realm of Heaven. So each triplet may be heard as depicting a journey from Earth through a transition to Heaven. The canons themselves (there are actually only 9, because the 10th triplet involves something different) in turn are related to one another by changes in the keys in which they are played. The first canon, variation No. 3, is played at the unison (meaning the repetitions of the melody are in the same key as the original presentation of it). The second canon, variation No. 6, is played “at the second,” meaning one key higher than that of the original presentation. The third canon, variation No. 9, is “at the third” (two keys higher), etc. etc., until we reach the 27th variation, which is a canon played “at the ninth.” If one visualizes this progression of the canons as described, they undergo an ascension and create what my friend Benjamin Stolorow pointed out to me amounts to a “Stairway to Heaven,” paralleling the movement taking place inside each triplet.

The final triplet in the Goldbergs does not present a canon—variation No. 30 is what Bach calls a “Quodlibet,” a piece of music derived from popular songs often sung at festivities, such as the family reunions of Bach’s youth. I wonder if the ascent along the stairway to Heaven thus also represents a return to an idealized time of music and joy predating the advent of tragic loss in Bach’s early years. It is interesting in this connection to review the words belonging to the melodies Bach chose to complete his sequence of the 30 variations: they concern separation and loss. I will have some further comments on the content of the Quodlibet in a later thought train.

Sixth Suggestion: Glenn Gould: Bach Goldberg Variations 1981 Studio Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEkXet4WX_c

17.8 The Chaconne

And now some brief thoughts on what is arguably Bach’s single greatest creation: the Chaconne of the Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin, a piece known among many musicians as the “Mount Everest” of solo violin. It is sometimes said that if Bach had written only the Goldberg Variations and the Chaconne, he would still be the greatest composer of Western Civilization. It was written in 1721, the year of the death of Bach’s beloved first wife, Maria, and may indeed be a kind of epitaph for her. This was also the year of the death of Bach’s older brother Johann Christoph, who served as a surrogate father to him following the loss of his parents. The death of Maria (and of Johann Christoph), leaving Bach with a number of young children, precisely replicated the circumstances of his childhood loss of his own mother and

father, and must have reawakened all of the feelings associated with the tragedies of his early life.

The Chaconne begins with a sequence of a few notes that present the primary theme of the piece in four measures, and then it is followed by a series of 60 variations on that theme, divided into two parts of 30 each. The structure of the Chaconne is extremely similar to that of the Goldberg Variations. The presentation of the theme, corresponding to the ground bass in the aria of the Goldbergs, occurs both at the beginning and at the end of the piece (the theme also appears in the middle, between the two sets of 30). The music as a whole therefore forms a circle, which suggests the possibility of it being played endlessly, through eternity. Contained within the boundaries of the recurrence of the theme are the variations. The Goldbergs are also divided into two parts, of 15 variations each.

I have two speculative, deeply personal thoughts about the content of this music, both of them relating to an interpretation emphasizing Bach's mourning of his first wife's death. First, consider the beginning of the second part of the Chaconne, occurring after about 8 min, where D minor gives way to D major and the music becomes exceptionally soft and beautiful. I always cry when I listen to this part, and visualize a late afternoon scene, bathed in golden light, in which Bach walks along a pathway through the trees, returning from his musical labors to be with his beloved wife and children. I entertain the idea that the mournful remembering of such happy times was a part of the context of this magnificent work's creation. The specific melody played here some commentators have suggested is drawn from a chorale celebrating the Second Coming of Christ. Such a view I think does not contradict my own associations to the music, because the End of the World would also mark Bach's reunion with all those beloved he had lost. The second thought relates to a short passage in part 2, occurring approximately halfway through, in which the pitch goes higher and higher, finally becoming almost a screeching, and then falls back into a lower range. I experience this rise and fall as a reaching up to the sky, an effort to climb into heaven where God resides, where those who have died have gone, followed by an inevitable falling back into the world, away from the sky and down to the earth. This would be a movement of Bach's unbearable grief for his wife, and for the many other lost loved ones, recorded in sound.

Sixth Suggestion: The Chaconne from Partita #2 in D minor, Part 1 and 2:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zvRWFD_1_M

17.9 Madness and Genius

Over the course of the last decades, I have taught a seminar at my college on the theme of madness and genius. Each year, a small group of students and I select someone from history who shows in his or her life acts of genius and moments of madness. The purpose of my seminar has been to solve the riddle of the relationship between these two categories of human experience. This is the sort of question that will never

receive a final answer, but that generates many interesting insights along the way as one engages in the search. Among the individuals we have studied have been: Carl Gustav Jung, Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vincent Van Gogh, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and a number of others. An unexpected generalization has emerged from these studies: acts of creative genius appear, almost without exception, to be associated with a rift in the soul, a duality within which the integrity of the person's very selfhood is broken, and the acts of creation, always appearing as something profoundly driven, have as one of their most important meanings and purposes the goal of unifying the broken self, mending the disintegrated soul, bridging over the abyss that has opened up within the person's identity through a creative synthesis of both sides. The circumstances and specific dynamics of this splitting of the soul differ from creator to creator, but the fact of the duality seems not to.

This generalization would appear to apply to Johann Sebastian Bach. Would it be correct also then to say that Bach was mad? Certainly not, if one looks at his life by any external standard. His was outwardly an exemplary life, both professionally and personally, and this in spite of the great tragedies that haunted him throughout its long course. On the other hand, this was a life occupied with the most stunning creative achievements, occurring again and again, and one may wonder about the driving need involved in such work and about whether this drivenness might indeed be seen as a form of madness in another sense. In the midst of thinking about this issue, and having become so focused on the inner pattern of Bach's music that I was myself driven to dwell upon it continuously, deeply, obsessively, day and night, something happened.

Eines Morgens, als ich aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand ich mich zu Johann Sebastian Bach verwandelt.

One morning, as I awoke from restless dreams, I found myself transformed into Johann Sebastian Bach.

Here are two of the dreams and my thoughts regarding them. Although my focus will be on how the dream imagery relates to what was then a still-developing interpretation of Bach, I am also aware that in this understanding I have identified deeply with him and that the ideas intensely reflect my own situation and my own dualities and associated history of traumatic loss.

In one of these dreams it was nighttime and I was in a building that was being heated by a tall brick structure that somehow was both a wood burning stove and also a chimney. The structure was built into the wall of the building, so that one part faced into the room I was standing in while the other part faced outside into the night. There was a sense of great heat being generated inside the structure. A voice intoned the words. "If the illustrator dies, madness will occur." Then there was an image of a number of dogs running and jumping up on the portion of the brick structure that was outside the building, biting and snapping at the bricks and dislodging a number of them. Fire and smoke emerged from the places the bricks had been knocked away. There was a sense that if the structure broke down, that would be the equivalent

of whatever was meant by the idea that the illustrator might die. In thinking over the dream after awakening it occurred to me that Bach was himself an illustrator, an artist who produced drawings and paintings in sound, auditory hieroglyphs as it were, displaying the bipartite structure of his soul. I suddenly saw Bach as identified with the theme-subject of his creations, e.g., as in the Goldberg Variations and in the Chaconne. The internal unity of the theme thus would represent for Bach the constancy and coherence of his own sense of personal identity. The snapping dogs seemed like they might be the variations that depart from the inner coherence of the theme, and that therefore threaten to destroy its pattern and order, symbolized by the danger of the entire brick structure being pulled down by the dogs, producing a chaos of fire and heat. This idea leads to a different interpretation of why Bach begins and ends the Goldberg Variations with the aria: here one might view the aria's two appearances as bookends serving to hold the wholeness of the structure of the variations together and preventing a disintegration and disruption of its internal pattern and order. The Chaconne as well has 3 appearances of its theme subject: at the beginning, in the middle after the first 30 variations, and then again at the end. These recurrences are like the front cover and back cover of a book, and a spine in the middle binding all the pages together inside the common structure. If the unruly, rambunctious variations were allowed to proliferate and not always returned to their origins, a calamity of unimaginable scope would occur. The illustrator might die, which would mean that Bach might plunge into the abyss.

Even as I was thinking these thoughts a different and complementary idea crystallized: perhaps the variations are embodiments of Bach's own ambivalent individuation in relation to his mother and father, his becoming a distinct person, existing in his own right. The theme subject of the variations would then correspond to the parental matrix out of which the child forms, transported by the tragic conditions of Bach's early life into the afterworld beyond death. The recurrence of this subject, in the two repetitions of the aria in the Goldbergs and in the three repetitions of the theme in the Chaconne thus represents a kind of holding environment in which the developing, emerging child is contained, and, I would add, restrained. The variations would then be Bach as an individual, carving out his unique destiny and expressing his unique individuality in a life located in the only place such a thing can occur: on earth, in space and in time. Although he could go a certain distance from the everlasting bonds of connection to his lost loved ones in this journey of individuation, there always remained a limiting boundary within which his variation from his origin needed to be contained. This was owing to his continuing connection to the lost ones, sustaining ties he could not mourn and without which he would have ceased to be himself. Bach's authenticity itself may thus be seen to have been divided between Heaven and Earth. Recall again the so-called Quodlibet, appearing as the last of the Goldberg variations. There are two melodies combined in this short piece, both drawn from folksongs as indicated earlier. The first of these begins with the words:

Ich bin so lang nicht bey dir g'west
Rück her, Rück her

I have been away from you so long
 Move near, move near

These words would seem to apply to the variations themselves, which have departed from the theme established in the aria and undergone a long journey of their own elaboration. If the aria contains the bond to the parents, and the variations represent Bach's individuation, this first song expresses a longing to return, a painful tension brought about by the separation itself, as if the aria misses the variations and is calling them back to itself. The second song offers a kind of explanation for why this separation occurred and has gone on for so long.

Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben
 Hätt meine Mutter Fleisch gekocht
 Wär ich länger g'blieben

Cabbage and beets have driven me away
 Had my mother cooked meat
 I would have stayed longer

The person who has strayed from his mother would have remained by her side if she had provided the sustaining food that he wanted and needed (Fleisch). But what she gives is unsatisfying (Kraut und Rüben). Could these images reflect as well the tension within Bach between the side of him that sought to remain forever faithful and devoted to his mother and father, even in their deaths, and that other side that wanted to make his own way and partake of what life on this earth has to offer? This latter Bach could never be wholly satisfied with the spirits of the dead, however much he loved them, because they did not and could not provide more than what a spirit can give. This was the Bach who was embodied also by Lieschen in the coffee cantata, who although she prepares herself for marriage (union with heaven), also arranges for access to coffee (participating in earthly life). And it is also true that he could never wholly break away from the ties that were never mourned, bonds with which the very substance of his being remained engaged to the end of his days. As this final variation ends, the aria returns once more, closing the distance that has opened up in the journey of the variations and healing the rift in Bach's divided soul.

The second dream concerned an international crisis between two nations, perhaps like India and Pakistan. The image was of there being two geographically distinct regions or countries that were so alien to each other that no one from the one was ever allowed to pass into the other. However, there was a small piece of territory located precisely on the boundary separating the two that was a kind of demilitarized zone, where emissaries might meet and negotiate, where very limited contacts between the two estranged realms could occur. In thinking about this dream, I saw the two regions as the two sides once again of Bach's own personality: Heaven and Earth, Eternity and Temporality, the Infinite and the Finite, the Sacred and the Secular. His music would then be like the emissaries meeting in the transitional space between these separated nations, serving to bring them together and avert the catastrophe of them somehow flying violently and permanently apart.

In regard to the question of madness and genius in the case of Johann Sebastian Bach, these reflections lead to the notion that Bach's creativity served to hold him together, to maintain the cohesion of his own identity and sanity, and this was achieved by integrating and balancing a passionate love of life with an equally passionate, continuing love for all those he had lost. It occurs to me that the drivenness of his creative work in this connection also relates to the tragic circumstances of Bach's own death in 1750. In his last years, his vision was impaired by cataracts and he became almost completely blind. His health, according to his son (CPE Bach), was otherwise excellent, and so he might have lived many more years. However, he chose to undergo two extremely dangerous, horrifically painful eye surgeries in an attempt to recover his ability to see. The loss of his sight must have meant the end of his career as a composer and musician. The result of the surgeries was that his vision was not restored and he developed a raging infection and eventually a stroke that killed him after months of terrible suffering. It is my understanding that his life was a life of musical creation, and that he could not have done otherwise than to risk all in reaching for the possibility of a restored capacity for creative work.

17.10 The End

Now consider one of Bach's last compositions, written in the late 1740s, an incomplete work known as Contrapunctus 14 from *The Art of the Fugue*. This fugue has three subjects, introduced one after another. The first is a slow, mournful theme, almost palpably expressing the experience of the loss of loved ones who have died. The second subject then appears, a melody that is extremely lively, played in a quick tempo and dramatically contrasting with the first. In keeping with the interpretation of the duality at the heart of Bach's soul, I am suggesting the first subject reflects his ties to the deceased and all the associated sadness which he felt, whereas the second subject shows his joyful engagement in the activities of the world of life. The third subject, appearing and then superimposing itself upon the simultaneous playing of the first two consists of four notes, replicating the letters of Bach's name: B–A–C–H (B in the German musical notation corresponds to B flat whereas H is B natural). Contrapunctus 14 thus crystallizes Bach's own distinctive individuality as a person divided between death and life, but whose own journey was one of giving himself over to both. He fused the two inner directions of his nature and then placed his signature on the resulting synthesis, and even as he was doing so, the composition of the music was suddenly interrupted, as his long and creative life finally came to an end.

Seventh Suggestion: Contrapunctus 14 from *The Art of the Fugue*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbM3VTIvOBk>

Endnote

A number of excellent versions of the suggested selections can be easily found by anyone with internet access (e.g., on YouTube).

17.11 An Interview with George Atwood about the Writing of the Bach Chapter, Conducted by Penelope Starr-Karlin and Originally Presented on Facebook: September 2014

Penelope Starr-Karlin (P.S.-K.) *George, a whole set of questions arose as I read your chapter on Bach, and I think it would be good if you can give us your thoughts in response to them. I will offer them one at a time and you can tell me what comes to mind.*

Why did you undertake this astonishing project?

George Atwood (G.A.) I really don't know. The work began in 2002, without any real plan of action or specific goal. One day the thought just came to me: it might be cool to immerse myself in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and see if I could get a reading on his personal lifeworld. Part of the situation at the time was that I was recovering from having spent almost two years writing a long paper on psychotic states, a project I have often said cost me a gallon and a half of blood (<http://www.georgeatwood.com/shattered-worlds---psychotic-states.html>). I felt braindead, from the extreme effort of this writing, unable to even imagine ever working on anything again in the fields of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. The obligations and pressures of collaboration had also become difficult, and I just wanted to go and play, unconcerned with pleasing anyone but myself. I guess I am answering your question after a fashion—I wrote the essay for the fun of it. Although I ended up pouring as much energy into the Bach study as anything else I have ever undertaken, it was a labor of love from start to finish.

P.S.-K. *Who is Bach to you, George? Can you say anything about the personal meaning for you of having undertaken this project?*

G.A. There is a direct affinity between us: he is my brother, a child of loss. Although we are united in having lost beloved parents in our middle childhood years, however, there is one very major difference. It pertains to the role of religion and God in our lives. I was raised Episcopalian, and for the first 8 years of my life believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I have many warm memories of my church during these early times. I played important roles in the Christmas pageants, I was a proud acolyte sometimes allowed to assist in Sunday services, and I especially liked Bible School during the summers—chocolate chip cookies and sweet lemonade were served. It was a very soft form of Christianity that was taught, emphasizing values of love and forgiveness, with almost no mention of sin and the fires of Hell. Then came my mother's sudden death, an event that changed everything. My childhood was bifurcated: before, and after; mother, and no mother. I remember sitting in the

church in the months after her passing away and staring at the stained glass window that had been set up in her memory. It was quite beautiful, depicting one of the saints, formed out of pieces of blue, green, red, and yellow-gold glass. I reached up and felt the window with the palm of my hand: it was shockingly cold and hard to the touch, at an infinite remove from the responsive, loving person I had known her to be. Sometime during the next year, a crisis of faith occurred, changing forever my relationship to God. A cute five year-old girl, Lisa, who lived a few doors down from my family, one day was hit by a car and then taken by ambulance to the hospital. It seemed she had been injured terribly and might die. It was time for a conversation with the Almighty. I spoke to Him: "God, please save little Lisa. If you don't and she dies, I will strike at you with my only weapon: I will not believe in your existence anymore!" It had never occurred to me until this moment that I could cease to be a believer, that there might be no God. As it turned out Lisa did survive, with a broken bone or two, but I continued on with rescinding my faith and became an atheist anyway. I was aware that other children are killed sometimes, and mothers are allowed to die. Johann Sebastian Bach lost both his mother and his father when he was 9 years old, but he did not in consequence become an atheist. Perhaps atheism was not an option in the year of his family's tragedies, 1694, lying beyond the horizon of a child's possibilities. It was 200 years before Nietzsche announced the death of God. If anything, the young Bach's faith deepened in the aftermath of his parents' and other family members' dying and helped him immeasurably in his life's continuing development.

A close friend of mine, herself a wonderful psychotherapist, suggested an idea about what it might be that Bach and his life story represent to George Atwood. She knows me well, and has heard about my conversation with God and the atheism that then ensued. She put it this way: "Maybe you are looking for your lost faith, George, and you are imagining you might find God again through your explorations of the life of Bach." It is interesting to me that her life too has been one of very severe trauma, with destructive effects on her religion. She was raised Catholic and was very involved during her early childhood years in the life of her church. Between the ages of 7 and 15, however, she became the victim of atrocious sexual abuse. This and other traumas that befell her young life shattered her faith in a loving, protective God and she too became more or less an atheist. So she saw her own struggle reappearing now in my life, but I like to think her idea contains truth and I thanked her for it.

P.S-K. *I have to ask you then whether your journey into Bach's music and life has helped you refind your lost faith?*

G.A. I don't really know. I can say this: atheism no longer makes any sense to me. Atheists, in their denial of God, remain engaged with God, even if only in their active effort to negate His existence. Atheists are believers who have placed a minus-sign in front of their faith. I have also noticed that in times of great helplessness I find myself praying to God. For example, when one of my patients attempts suicide and is lying there in the Intensive Care Units (ICU) in critical condition, something that has unfortunately happened a number of times, I speak to the Lord and ask for His assistance. Once the patient survives, if he or she does, I promptly resume my former atheism. An atheist who turns to the Lord when he is in trouble is not a true atheist.

Maybe there are no true atheists. Still another thought comes to me that is relevant. I was informed of my mother's death by the minister of our church, Father Channon. He promised me I would see my mother again in Heaven, but not before. Now that my own life is coming to its concluding chapters, I sometimes think back on that promise, and wonder what could lie ahead. It would be so comforting if I could know I would be with my mother again finally, and with all those other loved ones I have watched die in the meantime. If I have understood Johann Sebastian Bach correctly, I can say his faith in God and in everlasting life beyond death was absolute. I feel the pull, but I am afraid that what awaits us is the Nothing—life on earth being all that there is. So the issue still floats before my mind, unresolved.

P.S.-K. Tell us more about the writing of the chapter, George. How were you able to arrive at the interpretations and conclusions you came to? Bach would seem to lie beyond the reach of psychobiography, there being such limited information about his experiences, no written autobiography, no juicy personal confessions. How did you gather the courage to make this effort, and what specifically helped you see what you have called the division in Bach's soul?

G.A. It did not require courage in any way, because nothing was at stake. I had not promised anyone anything, no one was going to evaluate the results of my efforts, there were no deadlines, and if it proved to be impossible—who cares? It was all for fun. I pictured his music as an ocean—Beethoven called it that—and I could swim in that ocean to my heart's content. I had scarcely explored its vastness before, nor did I know much about the larger world of Baroque music to which it belonged. So I spent hundreds of dollars on books about Bach and his time, and bought essentially all of the best recordings of his compositions and began to listen to them.

I told myself that the task I had undertaken was not so different from the psychobiographical analyses of the great personality theorists that appeared in my first book with Bob Stolorow, *Faces in a Cloud*. Bach was a personality theorist, I said to myself, giving us a vision of human nature and the human condition through his music. One just has to read it properly—by listening to it carefully and deeply—and its themes and dimensions will inevitably become apparent. It was also helpful to know in advance that his repeating experience of the death of beloved family members was going to be key and I held on to that as an unquestioned assumption. You could ask: how did I know this to be the case? My answer is that I just knew it: children of traumatic loss understand this about each other. His losses were so profound that it simply could not be otherwise.

So I began to listen, and to listen, and then I listened some more—to all of it, again and again, for days and weeks and months. My wife and children grew tired of the music playing, often crying out: "Oh No, it's Bach again!" I was waiting for the Eureka moment, the epiphany that always finally comes in psychobiography when the thematic structure organizing a person's life and world suddenly becomes apparent. I learned about such things from the great Silvan Tomkins; Bob Stolorow learned about them from the great Robert White. Let me quote the passage from my chapter describing this moment in the unfolding of the Bach study. It happened in the context of my listening to the so-called Coffee Cantata.

One morning in the Fall of 2003, as I was driving to the college where I teach—a 45 minute commute—and listening to this cantata, especially the last part, I recall asking the question: What is coffee? Coffee seems to be more than just a drink, based on the breathtakingly passionate way Bach has Lieschen singing about it. It emerges in the music as the most desirable of all desirable things. What, I asked, did Bach see in this story about a clash between two wills, one seeking a pleasure of the senses, and the other opposing that and affirming the renunciation of that pleasure? And what could it have meant to Bach that ceasing to drink coffee will enable this young woman to marry? In another of Bach's cantatas, No. 140 (*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*), the image of marriage is used as a symbol of the union of humanity with Jesus Christ at the End of the World, where Christ is pictured as the groom and the souls of humanity are pictured as the bride. Could it be, I asked myself as I was driving, that this is somehow also part of what is being spoken of in this music? Is it possible that Schlendrian and Lieschen symbolized for Bach two conflicting parts of himself, the former standing for intense religiosity and a commitment to union with God, and the latter to a love for humanity, for the world, for all the pleasures of the senses? I asked further, were there two sides of Johann Sebastian Bach, one orienting toward Heaven, the locus of his lost parents, uncle, and siblings, and the other orienting toward Earth, and toward all of the desirable things one finds in the realm of living human beings? The Earth includes coffee, wine, good food, the pleasure of company with others, the love of women and sexuality, professional achievement and success, parenting and family life, and a long succession of other secular purposes and goals. Heaven, in contrast, releases us from the suffering of earthly existence into a timeless realm in which death does not interrupt life, a realm that includes those most dearly, deeply loved, namely, the lost ones of Bach's youth: his father, his mother, his father's twin brother, his own siblings and other relatives and acquaintances who had died. Could it be, I wondered, that Bach was a man torn in half between these two poles, one pointing toward Heaven, the other toward Earth, and that in his music both poles were represented, and at different moments and in different ways, brought together, fused, integrated, only later to separate, differentiate, but then again to reintegrate and fuse still again, and endlessly back and forth, separation and reunion, in cycle after cycle? A bringing together of the two warring sides (Schrade, 1946) would then be symbolically expressed in the part of the cantata's story it is believed was added by Bach himself, in the image of Lieschen both marrying (uniting with God) and continuing to have coffee (partaking of earthly life). Sacred and secular are thereby joined in everlasting union.

I remember noting the time—it was 6.45 AM, on a Friday, as I traveled down Highway 22 from Clinton, where I live, to the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, where I was teaching a course in personality theory. When it came to me that Lieschen and her love of coffee represented Bach's love of life, and her father Schlendrian symbolized his bond to God in Heaven and to all those who had died, I became so excited I almost drove off the road and crashed through the front window of Dunkin Donuts. For this was not just an interpretation of one little piece of music; it was the theme that was the key to an understanding of the whole, the golden thread that runs through every part of his life and work. I saw that Bach was divided between Heaven and Earth, between the Eternal and the Temporal, and that he was occupied at every step of his creative journey with giving expression to both of these poles and to bringing them together in beautiful structural unities. I worked for a number of years further on the paper itself before it reached its present form, but from this point on the writing was really a piece of cake: it was just a matter of composing an overall narrative and arranging and discussing the illustrations of the theme that I had found.

P.S-K. *Why is the subtitle of the chapter “Imagining the soul of Johann Sebastian Bach?” Also, you describe it as less a scholarly essay and more a reverie, almost a dream. Why the emphasis on the imaginary?*

G.A. Every psychobiography is an exercise of the imagination. One imagines oneself into the life being studied, searching for that life’s inner thematic pattern. There is never any external proof that one’s interpretations are correct, no objective evidence definitively substantiating or disconfirming the understandings that are reached. There is really only the coherence of the ideas themselves and the order they appear to bring to the case material at hand. In addition, I actually used two of my own dreams in the development of ideas about the structure of the Goldberg Variations and the Chaconne. My dreams helped me see how Bach’s creativity served to maintain his sanity and stability, by fending off the possibility of an annihilating personal disintegration. Sometimes our dreams can give us very good thoughts.

P.S-K. *Although the chapter has not been formally published before, I know it has been widely circulated, appears on your personal website, and has been offered via Facebook. What sort of reception has there been, and what did you hope would be the responses of your readers?*

G.A. I sent a very early draft of the chapter to a group of psychoanalysts, the so-called “Eastern Group” of the International Association for Psychoanalytic Self Psychology. Their reception was very positive, for the most part. One of the members of the group, however, happened to be married to a Professor of Music History, and, unbeknownst to me, she gave him a copy. Oh, No. He wrote an angry essay in response, presenting 25 serious, potentially fatal errors and problems he discovered in the manuscript. I felt that my baby had been crucified on an ugly wooden board with 25 nails, and I was only able to read 2 or 3 of the scorching criticisms at a time. Luckily, I have a strong, almost invincible heart in the long run, and so I was able to recover finally and consider carefully each of his points. They were all astute and valid, but his bitter, nasty tone remained almost unbearable for weeks. I eventually wrote to this gentleman and told him I had been working on experiencing his criticisms as a gift, and that I planned to revise the paper in light of his points. Although thanking him for his efforts, I pointed out also that he had only negative things to say, and no comment at all on the essay’s central thesis about Bach’s everlasting grief and inner self-division. He answered by saying my love for the music came through and wishing me good luck. I did work to change the paper based on the things he pointed out and it is far better now than it first was. But I would not feel safe sending the revision back to him. A few other students and professors of musicology and music history have had an opportunity to read the chapter, plus a couple of professors of English at Rutgers who know a lot about classical music. Their responses have ranged from icy silence to open hostility. They seem to experience it as a reductionistic incursion on their territory of expertise by a psychologist who needs to mind his own business.

I have also shown the chapter to a number of musicians and composers, as well as to numerous students and colleagues in psychology and psychoanalysis. Their responses have been enthusiastically positive and encouraging. I did not have a goal in mind in sharing this writing with others. I hoped they would enjoy it and find it interesting, and it occurred to me that maybe someone would pick up on the ideas

and extend them to parts of Bach's music I did not address. Dorthy Levinson, Sylvia Schwartz, and Benjamin Stolorow have actually done this and they have made me very happy. A number of other people have thanked me for "giving Bach back" to them, returning them to the beauty of the music with a new understanding of its possible human significance. That means the world to me. I think the psychological interpretation of art, in all its forms and variations, enriches our perception and deepens our appreciation. Those who say such interpretations are inevitably reductionistic and diminish the works of art to which they are applied suffer from a Cartesian madness that separates thought from life. There is no separation, as far as I am concerned.

P.S-K. *Are there other composers you have studied similarly? I am thinking your essay on Bach opens up a realm of study still largely unexplored.*

G.A. Just this, in the field of music: Gustav Mahler. There is a parallel there to Bach, a sharp division between Heaven and Earth, and an agenda to bring the two together. Mahler's losses were not of his parents, though, but rather of a number of siblings, and emotionally of his mother when she collapsed into a lasting depression because of her children's deaths. Themes deriving from this history haunt a great many of Mahler's compositions (e.g. the *Kindertotenlieder*). Someone with a few years to spare should follow up on this. I do not think I am that person, even though I have studied all the symphonies and read all the relevant biographies.

P.S-K. *Has the overall experience of presenting the Bach chapter in installments on Facebook been a good one? I certainly hope so.*

G.A. It has, and your idea of accompanying the short sections of the writing with addresses to the relevant music has made all the difference. You have given indispensable help in our creating a wonderful event and everyone who has read the chapter and listened to the selections is forever in your debt. I thank you Penelope, from the bottom of my heart.

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Chapter 18

Constructing “Georgia”: Love, Play, Work as a Central Theme in O’Keeffe’s Early and Late Memories



Athena Androutsopoulou, Evgenia Dima, Sofia Papageorgiou
and Theodora Papanikolaou

Abstract The present case study of American painter Georgia O’Keeffe, adopts the notion of “narrative construction of self” as its psychobiography lens and explores its link to life themes identified in early and late autobiographical memories. O’Keeffe’s three earliest memories, which literally constitute the beginning episodes of her autobiography published by her at age 89 underwent narrative thematic analysis. These were then compared with the three concluding episodes of the same autobiography revealing a life theme running across all memories. This theme had three intertwined aspects: “love, “play” and “work”. In general, Georgia O’Keeffe constructed herself as having continuity and directionality (“play”/exploring, “work”/creating), but also change and development (“love”/relating). The last aspect (“love”) appeared to reflect an enduring concern and became the subject of further analysis. Theme development in memories reflects a continuous effort for narratively constructing a self that makes satisfactory meaning. Further theoretical implications of findings are discussed in connection to positive psychology. Some clinical implications are suggested with emphasis placed in treating persons as “works in progress”.

Keywords Georgia O’Keeffe · Psychobiography · Memories · Narrative analysis · Life themes

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18.1 Introduction

In the last few decades, psychobiography has moved away from its sole identification with psychoanalytic inquiry and toward the adoption of other psychobiography lenses (Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 2005; Schultz, 2005; see also Fouché, 2015). The narrative turn in psychology (Bruner, 1990; Sarbin, 1986; see also Monteagudo, 2011), and the renewed interest in the analysis of life stories (Kóváry, 2011) has encouraged some psychobiographers to associate their work with the wider field of narrative inquiry (e.g. Schultz, 2001, 2003) and some narrative researchers to become intrigued by the narrative study of famous lives (e.g. Josselson, 2007a). The present case study of American painter Georgia O’Keeffe, adopts Bruner’s (1990, 2003, 2004) understanding of the “narrative construction of self” as its psychobiography lens. The study explores the link between narrative construction of self and life themes identified in autobiographical memories.

O’Keeffe’s three earliest memories, which literally constitute the beginning episodes of her autobiography published by her at age 89 (she lived to be 98) (O’Keeffe, 1976), were compared with the three concluding episodes of the same autobiography revealing a life theme running across all memories. This theme had three intertwined aspects: “love,” “play” and “work”. In general, Georgia constructed herself as having continuity and directionality (“play”/exploring, “work”/creating), but also change and development (“love”/relating). The last aspect (“love”) appeared to reflect an enduring concern.

18.2 Theoretical Background

18.2.1 *Self-narratives as Autobiography*

In Bruner’s (2004) view, “self-narratives conform to a *tacit pacte autobiographique* governing what constitutes appropriate public self-telling” (pp. 4–5). This “self-making” is an important part in the human struggle for making meaning (see also Bruner, 2003; Gergen, 1994; McAdams & Janis, 2004; Sarbin, 1986). Self-narratives are constantly updated as they unfold (Bruner, 1990; Ochs and Capps, 1996; Smorti, 2011). As a person simultaneously places herself in the role of “author” and “reader” (or “audience”), anything written or said is edited and revised almost at the same time. This is possible because of human reflexivity, the capacity to alter the present in the light of the past or alter the past in the light of the present, and because of our capacity to envision alternatives (Gergen, 1994). Therefore, like it would happen in fiction, even chapters (life episodes) that have already been written are being continuously modified so that the various incidents fit well and the whole story makes better sense (see Bruner, 1990; Eakin, 1992). As a person re-edits early stories, later stories are also modified and updated, remaining consistent with her sense of who she is at the time or who she is becoming (see Polkinghorne, 1988).

18.2.2 Memories and Self-construction

Constructing and re-constructing ourselves is necessary, in Bruner’s (2004) opinion, as we need to meet the needs of various situations we come across. The narrative construction of self is achieved “with the guidance of our memories of the past, and our hopes and fears for the future” (p. 4). Autobiographical memory itself is a process of reconstruction rather than a faithful depiction of reality (Josselson, 2000, 2009). Singer and Salovey (1993) have pointed to the significance of specific early memories as “self-defining”, a key component of narrative identity. These memories express intense emotion, they are vivid, they are often told repeatedly, and preserve enduring concerns or reveal unresolved conflicts (see Singer, Blagov, Berry, & Oost, 2013). Self-defining memories can be several, they can be positive or negative, and they suggest change and/or continuity. A self-defining memory has some similarity with a prototypical scene (Schultz, 2003), but this scene may or may not be an early memory. In its singularity, the prototypical scene reveals an important life theme that may help explain future events and choices of the person who narrates it. From a narrative construction perspective, early memories can be seen as early stories or beginning episodes in the current version of an autobiography or self-narrative which is continuously updated. This idea has been previously presented by us in connection to early memories of clients in a narrative-informed psychotherapy practice as discussed below (Androutsopoulou, 2013).

18.2.3 Constructing Memories Over Time

A number of studies indicate continuity in life themes in the telling of memories and past experiences (see Chafe, 1998; Josselson, 2000; Singer & Bonalume, 2010; Thorne, Cutting, & Skaw, 1998) even though different autobiographical memories may be chosen by participants in long-term studies (McAdams, Bauer, Sakeda, Anyidoho & Machado, 2006). In our own clinical practice and research with clients in long term narrative-informed psychotherapy, clients are asked to choose three early memories until the age of eight in the order they prefer (see Androutsopoulou, 2013, 2015). We treat these memories as three continuing episodes in their early life stories. Clients in middle phases of therapy or at the end of short-term contracts, usually revise the form of the life story they have previously narrated: the same memories, when re-told (or re-written), are often placed in a different order (one memory may be added or omitted) to present a positive last episode in the series of memories. In these re-tellings, clients often name emotions and emphasize relations previously left unmentioned. In later phases of psychotherapy, clients are often interested in presenting a different story, but do this not by interfering with the content of previously told memories, but by choosing to narrate different recollections.

18.3 Identifying Memory Themes

Narrative identity researchers believe that memories reveal important life themes (Singer et al., 2013; Singer & Bonalume, 2010) with agency versus communion, and redemption versus contamination being among the most widely studied (e.g., McAdams, 2015; McAdams & Janis, 2004). In our own clinical practice and research (Androutsopoulou, 2013, 2015), we can usually identify a life theme running across memories, which is ever developing in ways that are less restricting and more liberating for clients' lives. In fact, these same themes and their development can also be identified in other versions of self-narratives (self-characterizations, favourite fictions, and dreams) generated at different periods in time (see Androutsopoulou, 2001a, 2001b, 2011, 2013, 2015). In our clinical and research work, themes are identified through narrative thematic analysis, often done co-operatively with clients. They are therefore unique for every single person.

18.4 Studying Memory Themes in “Finished Lives”

Even though clients are a good source for generating and testing ideas, psychobiography studies can offer the perfect conditions to study “finished lives” in ways that even the best longitudinal studies or clinical case examples fail to do (Carlson, 1988). These conditions are more representative of the way persons would actually use memories to construct a self, compared to more conventional quantity or qualitative research, where the researcher would place the agenda by asking for a number of memories (e.g. Androutsopoulou, 2013; Josselson, 2009; Thorne et al., 1998). Georgia O’Keeffe is a good example of “finished life”. She lived to be 98, and her autobiography begins with childhood memories. The following question arose in our minds: “Approaching ninety, how did Georgia construct herself?” “What role did memory themes play in this construction?” But first, let us take a look at her life (Benke, 2003; Cartwright, 2007, 2017; Corn, 2017; Drohojowska-Philip, 2004; Frezier, 1990; Greenough, 2011; Pollitzer, 1988).

18.5 The Life of Georgia O’Keeffe

Origin and Early Years Georgia O’Keeffe was born in November 15, 1887 in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, and died in March 6, 1986 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Georgia was the second born child of seven children. The first born was a boy, “mother’s favorite”. Her mother encouraged her to take painting classes from an early age. Although their relationship was “strained” Georgia identified with her mother’s self-confidence and superiority. She also identified with her father, however, who was capable of building and doing things with his hands.

Beginning of Career and Marriage Georgia was educated in various art schools and later taught art to make a living. Alon Bement introduced her to the work of Arthur Wesley Dow, with whom she studied in 1914. In 1916, the famous photographer, owner of the “291” gallery, New Yorker Alfred Stieglitz, saw some of her early charcoals, which her friend Anita Pollitzer brought to him without her knowing, and exhibited them in a group exhibition. A solo exhibition followed in 1917. Alfred and Georgia became lovers and were married in 1924, after he divorced his wife. He was nearly 24 years her senior.

Feminism Soon, Georgia regretted Alfred presenting her as a sensational woman in nude photographs, and fought against interpretations of her abstract work in Freudian terms. As a member of the National Woman’s Party, a radical feminist organization, she was against interpreting women’s work in gender terms. She also disliked Stieglitz’s interference with her visions and decided to follow her own.

Troubles with Marriage and Health Georgia was hurt by Alfred’s unwillingness to have children and flirting behavior. In 1927, she underwent breast surgery. In 1928 Stieglitz became involved with young, wealthy Dorothy Norman, an affair which lasted till his death. Georgia spent the summers of 1929–1931 painting in New Mexico and discovered it enhanced her creativity. In 1933, bitter by Stieglitz’s affair and burdened by hard work, she was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown. Georgia never divorced Alfred. She rebounded from the breakdown within two years by developing a life away from New York.

Move to New Mexico Georgia settled in New Mexico, and visited Stieglitz a few months each year until his death in 1946. She had many important visitors, perhaps also lovers, stay over, but always cherished her loneliness. She continued developing a great career, known till then for her enormous flowers, by drawing views from her two Mexican houses, desert land-shapes and bones. She lived a simple life close to nature. Contemporary exhibitions depict her as an example of modernism. She chose minimalist furniture and wore minimalist clothes, many of which she made herself. Her black and white living choices were in sharp contrast to the colors of her paintings.

Late Years Almost a decade after Alfred’s death, she began traveling around the world. In 1967, she ended a fifty-year friendship with Anita Pollitzer, when she refused to authorize her biography. Despite her strictness, she was kind to young artists who she thought talented. When she began losing her eyesight, she relied more on paid helpers. One of them, 26-year-old potter, Juan Hamilton, was employed in 1973, but became an intimate friend. Some of her friends, helpers and biographers believed this friendship included elements of romance, but, most probably, Juan became an informally adopted son. With his help, she completed her autobiography and in the following year she participated in a film about her life, directed by Adato (1977). Georgia and Juan continued to travel, teach each other, and promote each other’s work in the years following the publication of her autobiography.

Death After she had a heart attack, Juan, who had become her heir, brought her to stay with his new family (wife and two children) in Santa Fe. Georgia lived with them in the last two years of her life. The informal adoption of Juan caused a lot of

turmoil, especially among nephews and close friends of Georgia's, who may have hoped to share her huge heritage or may have been afraid that Juan was dishonest.

18.6 Methodology

18.6.1 *Narrative Inquiry*

The present study adopts a narrative inquiry framework that offers a wide umbrella which covers “case studies, autobiographical approaches, psychobiography, life histories, content analysis of life narrative accounts, discourse analysis, ethnographies, and other approaches” that prefer to employ qualitative research (McAdams, Josselson, Lieblich, 2001, p. xi). Examples of using narrative inquiry to study famous artists and authors include Josselson (2007a), Schultz (2001, 2003) and Tamboukou (2010). In McLeod's view (2001), a narrative inquiry framework “combines a discursive emphasis on the construction of meaning through talk and language, alongside a humanistic image of the person as a self-aware agent striving to achieve meaning, control, and fulfilment in life” (p. 106) (see also Gergen, 2014).

18.6.2 *O’Keeffe’s Autobiography Text*

The text, titled “Georgia O’Keeffe” (1976), comprises 205 pages, half of which are illustrations of her paintings that match her narrations. No page numbers are used. The story begins with her first childhood memory and the narration continues in chronological order, reaching that present moment at age 89. A possible sub-title would be: “How I became an artist”. This is her prologue:

Where I was born and where and how I lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.

18.6.3 *Ethical and Validity Issues*

In conducting the present study, we took into account a number of best practices and ethical guidelines (Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). These cover a wide range of topics including the use of methodologies and data triangulation, alternative interpretations and accounting for historical and cultural issues. Perhaps the most important topic is the stance that the psychobiographer should adopt toward the person under study. Ponterotto emphasizes the need to avoid both “pathography” (emphasis on diagnostic labels and pathology) and “hagiography” (over-idealization). From a narrative analysis perspective, Josselson (2007b) marks that

what ultimately gives the analysis its meaning and value, is that “the researcher endeavours to obtain data from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant’s life” (p. 539). We believe that this relationship can also develop through an empathic study of one’s life through texts and other printed materials, as in the case of psychobiography.

18.7 Researchers

Initially, we spent time studying Georgia’s biographies, art, and life style. On the occasion of the centenary from her first exhibition, we travelled to see the temporary exhibition of her work in Tate Modern, London, where paintings and photographic portraits gathered from museums and collections around the world (Tate Gallery, 2016). We also read reports on temporary exhibitions in other parts of the world (e.g., Brooklyn Museum, New York; see Corn, 2017) and read analyses of her work published in newspapers and blogs, including blogs of the O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico (e.g. Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2017). Working on the principles of team based research described by McLeod (2010), brainstorming meetings followed our real and virtual trips. Data was first analyzed separately, then in pairs. Eventually, we came together as a team to compare findings and achieve consensus. This process was repeated several times. On numerous occasions, we received useful feedback from colleagues.

18.8 The Present Analysis

Presented here is a narrative analysis of Georgia O’Keeffe’s three earliest memories, which literally constitute the beginning episodes of her autobiography. These memories were then compared with the three concluding episodes of the same autobiography. Additional material was drawn from the rest of her autobiography to answer specific questions that arose from the initial analysis.

According to Riessman (2008), thematic narrative analysis “is the usual approach to letters, diaries, auto/biographies” and any type of archival document (p. 63). Following Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach, & Zilber’s (1998) guidelines, we chose two primary “markers of significance” (see Alexander, 1988, for a whole list): frequency of mention (repeated words, phrases, stories that were identical, synonymous, or similar in content), and uniqueness (what stands out as an exception). Based on these markers, several questions were formulated:

- What are some repeated elements in the early recollections (repeated words, phrases, stories that were identical, synonymous, or similar in content)?
- What may be seen as a common theme between these early recollections?

- Is there something different between these early recollections despite the common theme?
- What similarities or differences can one see between early recollections and later recollections and among later recollections?

18.9 Findings

18.9.1 *Childhood (early) memories/beginning episodes*

Love: Relating to my Mother and Aunt Winnie from a Distance In this first memory, Georgia is a little baby. Her mother and aunt Winnie do not appear to interact with her. She focuses on the detailed observation of textures, colors and patterns, including red stars and blue flowers, as well as descriptions of figures and postures.

My first memory is of the brightness of light - light all around. I was sitting among pillows on a quilt on the ground – very large white pillows. The quilt was a cotton patchwork of two different kinds of material – white with very small red stars spotted over it quite close together, and black with a red and white flower on it. I was probably eight or nine months old. [...] My mother sat on a bench beside a long table, her back turned to me. A friend called Aunt Winnie stood at the end of the table in profile. I don't remember what my mother looked like - probably because she was familiar to me. Aunt Winnie had goldish hair done high on top of her hair- a big twist of blond hair and lots of curly bangs. My mother was dark with straight hair and I had never seen a blond person. Aunt Winnie's dress was thin white material, a little blue flower and a spring of green patterned over it. [...] Years later I told my mother that I could remember something that I saw before I could walk. She laughed and said it was impossible. So I described that scene [...] She was much surprised and finally- a bit unwillingly-acknowledged that I must be right [...].

Play: Exploring the Lawn Around my House In this second memory, she has set off to explore the surroundings, and has immersed herself in soft soil that appears yummy! The sun is bright! Her mother comes to her reluctant rescue, snatches her and holds her in an uncomfortable way.

My next memory must be of the following summer - the first memory of pleasure in something seen with my eye and touched with my hand. There was a good-sized lawn all around our house. There was a long entrance drive with a high arborvitae hedge. I don't remember walking across the grass but I remember arriving at the road with great pleasure. The colour of the dust was bright in the sunlight. It looked so soft I wanted to get to it quickly. It was warm, full of smooth little ridges made by buggy wheels. I was sitting in it, enjoying it very much – probably eating it. It was the same feeling I have had later when I've wanted to eat a fine pile of paint just squeezed out of a tube. My mother came and snatched me up – her arm around my middle – my head and feet hanging down. I was most uncomfortable and I didn't like it. But I remember the strange expression on her face – something not exactly annoyance with me. I suppose she was frightened because I was in a perfect place to be run down by a horse or vehicle coming around the corner of the high hedge.

Work: Creating Figures and Clothes from Scratch and Having Fun In this third memory from childhood, she describes her solitary efforts to draw a man figure, making a dollhouse and some clothes for her dolls. She tried to turn a female doll into a man but failed to create a lean figure so she pretended the man doll was around even though he was not. All this was fun!

The first thing I can remember drawing was a picture of a man lying on his back with his feet up in the air. He was about two inches long, carefully outlined with black lead pencil – a line made very dark by wetting the pencil in my mouth and pressing very hard on a tan paper bag. His nose and eyes were worked out in profile – a bit too big for the rest of him. [...] I worked at it intensely- probably as hard as I ever worked at anything in my life. [...] When I had the man with his legs only bent at the hips, he just wasn’t balance right. I turned the paper bag around and saw that he did look right as a man lying on his back with his feet straight up in the air. [...] after all my effort gave me a feeling of real achievement to have made something – even if it wasn’t what I had intended. I kept this little drawing for a long time. The idea of drawing a man may have been connected with my dolls [...] I had a whole family of small china dolls [...] They had little-girl bodies and long golden hair. I sewed unusually well and made wonderful dresses for them like dresses I found in pictures or like some that were made in the house. In time I made a house for the dolls. Making things for the dolls and the house is the principal amusement that I remember from my childhood. [...] It was the idea that they should go boating on the lake that made me think that I should have a man doll [...] I cut and sewed and sewed, trying to make [one doll] a pair of long trousers [...] The best man I could fix was so fat that I didn’t like him. My father was lean [...] So the man was given up. I just played he was always around but we never saw him.

18.9.2 Old Age (Late) Memories/Concluding Episodes

Work: Creating Paintings from Scratch and Enjoying In this first recent memory from her old age, she describes how her painting with clouds and the horizon was inspired, and describes in detail how she constructed the frame herself and painted it, and how it glowed in the sunset light creating a wonderful feeling. Some help was received on practical matters.

One day when I was flying back to New Mexico, the sky below was a most beautiful solid white. It looked so secure that I thought I could walk right out on it to the horizon if the door opened. The sky beyond was a light clear blue. It was so wonderful that I couldn’t wait to be home to paint it. I couldn’t find a canvas the right size so it was painted on one I had – one that was too high and not wide enough. The next time I went to New York I bought the canvas and asked LeBrun, the framer, about the stretcher. [...] He made it sound so simple that when I returned to New Mexico I thought I could stretch it myself if I had a pair of strong hands to help me. So I started at it with Frank, who [...] does odd jobs for me. The canvas was rough and coarse and to rub the glue and paint into it was hard work. I was up every morning at six and at work immediately – and I didn’t have my brushes washed until about nine in the evening. A little girl from Abiqui fed me and took care of me her way as I didn’t have time to teach her mine. As I worked I could walk back long distances out onto the plain behind the garage to look at what I was doing. There is a short time at sunset when the whole world has a warm glow – and at that time the big painting with its cool light looked quite wonderful from almost any distance – even from a quarter of a mile [...].

Play: Exploring the Country of New Mexico In this second recent memory from her old age, she admires the black rocks and the dry soil of New Mexico with its sand and sun. Nature is presented as adorable, something to love.

The black rocks from the road to the Glen canyon dam seem to have become a symbol to me of the wideness and wonder of the sky and the world. They have lain there for a long time with the sun and wind and the blowing sand making them into something that is precious to the eye and hand – to find with excitement, to treasure, and love.

Love: Relating to and Being Closely Guided by Young Potter Juan. In this third recent memory from her old age, she describes how Juan teaches her to make pots and encourages her to keep on. Help is welcome. However, Juan is simply referred to as a “young potter”.

A young potter came to the Ranch and as I watched him work with the clay I saw that he could make it speak. [...] I hadn't thought much about pottery but now I thought that maybe I could make a pot, too – maybe a beautiful pot – it could become still another language for me. I rolled the clay and coiled it – rolled and coiled it. I tried to smooth it and I made very bad pots. He said to me, “Keep on, keep on – you have to work at it – the clay has a mind of its own.” He helped me with this and that and I finally have several pots that are not too bad, but I cannot yet make the clay speak- so I must keep on.

18.10 Summary of Findings

Early and late memories are very similar in the theme aspects that refer to “work” (creating) and “play” (exploring), supporting the notion of stability in the construction of self. However, early and late memories appear to have some differences in the third theme aspect, that of “love” (relating), supporting the notion of change in the construction of self (Table 18.1). In describing her early memories, Georgia constructs herself as a baby who lacks close emotional connection to her mother, and resents her help when she rescues her by grabbing her without her will. Also, Georgia is interested in proving her mother wrong when her mother doubts her ability to remember. Her father is mentioned only in connection to his external appearance, but a doll father is mentioned as missing, even though everyone behaves as if he were there. Positive emotions are linked to achievement and adoring nature. The only negative emotion (fear) is thought to be felt by her mum in the incidence of her rescue, whereas her own feeling is “discomfort”. In late memories, practical help is more welcome: Frank helps with his strong hands, a little girl from the village is allowed to cook for her while Georgia is working hard. Lessons and help received by Juan are not resented, but welcome. She does not appear concerned with proving anyone wrong. However, close emotional connection is still not evident, and emotions are still expressed in regard to achievement and nature.

Table 18.1 Comparison of memories

	Early memories/childhood	Late memories/old age
“Love”	Relating to my mother and aunt Winnie from a distance	Relating to and being closely guided by young potter Juan
“Play”	Exploring the lawn around my house	Exploring the country of New Mexico
“Work”	Creating figures and clothes from scratch and having fun	Creating paintings from scratch and enjoying

18.11 Triangulation of Data

We wished to triangulate our finding regarding the development and change in the aspect of “love”. Based on our previous analysis, we identified three sub-aspects: (i) resentment of help, (ii) proving others wrong, and (iii) difficulty in emotional connection. We studied the rest of her autobiography, isolating all references to persons in her life and her interactions with them. We placed all relevant extracts in chronological order and noticed the sequence, using the same markers of significance, frequency and uniqueness. This is a shorter version of our original sequence analysis:

- [My paintings] were framed by my mother and hung on the wall. They were never satisfactory to me, because I could always see where teachers had worked on them.
- [The Art teacher] had beautiful large dark eyes and very white lovely hands, but she always felt a bit hot and stuffy to me. I felt like shrinking away from her.
- [The same Art teacher] said I had drawn the hand too small and my lines were all too black. [...] I was so embarrassed that it was difficult not to cry.
- I didn’t like [another] the teacher. [...] But maybe she started me looking at things-looking very carefully at details.
- [...] a boy would criticize my drawings [...] I noticed later that my drawings got better marks [...].
- I looked forward to [John Vanderpoel’s] lectures. They helped me with the drawing of casts and with the Life Class.
- “It doesn’t matter what you do”, an older student said. “I’m going to be a great painter and you will probably end up teaching painting in some girls’ school.”
- [Another student] took my painting and began painting on it to show me. [...] I thought he had spoiled my painting.
- I had won a price with a painting in the Chase Still Life Class.
- I decided to start anew- to strip away what I had been taught. [...] no one to say anything about it one way or another.
- [...] Stieglitz had seen my drawings and kept them, telling the person who had taken them to him that he intended to show them.
- I went immediately to “291” and asked Stieglitz to take the drawings down [...]. Stieglitz and I argued [...]

- [...] when I arrived at “291”, Stieglitz had taken my show down, but he put it back on the wall for me.
- The only thing I remember from Stieglitz from that trip is his black Loden cape. It was a cold, windy day and it was put around me.
- In later years Bement always felt he didn’t get proper credit [...]. I think he didn’t know the many ways he helped me.
- If I must be honest, I am also interested in what anybody else has to say.
- I was more interested in what Stieglitz thought [...]
- Of course, I was told that it was an impossible idea- even the men hadn’t done too well with [painting New York]. [...] my large “New York” was sold the first afternoon. No one ever objected to my painting New York after that.
- It was in the time when the men didn’t think much of what I was doing.
- I make up my own mind about it-how good or bad or indifferent it is. After that the critics can write what they please.
- In my next show the “Shanty” (1922) went up. The men seemed to approve of it. [...]
- I’ll make it an American painting. They will not think it great [...]- but they will notice it.
- You can be much colder from the ground than the air so Maria kept a fire burning all the next day to warm the earth where we intended to sleep [and I intended to paint].
- I heard [a man] remark, “They must be of rivers seen from the air.” I was pleased that someone had seen what I saw and remembered it my way.

18.11.1 Summary of Findings on the Aspect of “Love”

Georgia constructed herself as a person who managed to change from resenting help and experiencing comments on her work as violation and criticism, to a person who:

- Receives guidance even impersonally (e.g. from lectures rather than the teacher).
- Admits guidance was offered to her in the past even if unacknowledged.
- Receives practical help as assistance to her current creative plans.
- Receives practical help and guidance to learn new things without resentment but with gratitude, as evident in the last memory with Juan.

She also constructs herself as a person who gradually moved away from wanting to prove others wrong when feeling diminished, and being able to:

- Admit others’ opinion matters, mostly Stieglitz’s.
- Be more interested in her own evaluation of her work.
- Be able to hear comments of approval, some of which even matched her own understanding of her work.

Nevertheless, Georgia did not construct herself as a person who gradually became more emotionally connected to others. Throughout her autobiography, she continued

to emphasize persons’ outer characteristics, rather than inner. She avoided naming emotions in relation to others and avoided naming persons very close to her. We know from her letters that indeed Georgia perceived emotionality as something to be avoided. In her late twenties, she had written to her closest friend, Anita Pollitzer:

Self-control is a wonderful thing — I think we must even keep ourselves from feeling too much - often - if we are going to keep sane and see with a clear unprejudiced vision.

In her early seventies, when she rejected Anita’s biography and broke their fifty-year friendship, she wrote to her (see Giboire, 1990, for both letters):

You have written your dream picture of me — and that is what it is. It is a very sentimental way you like to imagine me — and I am not that way at all.

18.12 Conclusions

The present case study used Bruner’s (1990, 2003, 2004) understanding of the narrative construction of self as a psychobiography lens, and explored the link between narrative construction of self and life themes identified in autobiographical memories. The narrative thematic analysis of the early and late memories of Georgia O’Keeffe revealed a common life theme running across her beginning and concluding life episodes. Early and late memories were narrated as if to explain her life’s directionality, and particularly her artistic career. As Bruner (1990) states, one’s summary of childhood is also prophecy.

The identified life theme had three aspects: “love, play, work” or, in other words, “relating, exploring, creating”. Even though each memory pointed to one aspect of this theme more than others, all aspects were intertwined. Georgia constructed herself as having continuity and directionality (“play”/exploring, “work”/creating), but also change and development (“love”/relating), especially in two sub-aspects of love/relating: resenting help and wanting to prove others wrong. The emotional connection to others, as a third sub-aspect of “love”, remained largely unchanged, indicating an enduring concern.

18.13 Recommendations for Theory and Practice

18.13.1 Theory

The narrated memories are told and re-told to support a developing life theme, unique for each person. Developments in this theme occur throughout one’s life and match the present understanding of “who one was”, “who one is”, and “who one is becoming”. Theme development is reflected in continuity, directionality and change, in a continuous effort for narratively constructing a self that makes satisfactory meaning

(see also Androutsopoulou, 2013; Fivush, Booker, & Graci, 2017; Fivush, & Haden, 2003; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007). Despite talk of continuity in theme development, we do not perceive the self as a unified entity. According to Bruner (2004), “no autobiography is free from questions about which self [the] autobiography is about, composed from what perspective, for whom” (p. 8). There can be numerous versions of an autobiography, told from different perspectives, with different purposes in mind, and for different audiences, all of them equally valid, all of them serving the making of meaning (see Pillemer, 1998; see also Hermans, 1999; Hermans & Gieser, 2014).

According to Fivush et al. (2017), the many ways persons create meaning from the events in their lives has important implications not just for identity, but also for well-being across the life span (see also Carlsen, 1995; Singer et al., 2013). These are core issues in positive psychology, adopted recently as another psychobiography lens (e.g. Mayer, 2017). Georgia’s “work, play, love” theme summarizes the concerns of positive psychology and positive aging (Schlossberg, 2017). If one were to examine Georgia’s life from the psychobiography lens of positive psychology as summarized by Peterson (2006), she would find that Georgia’s life satisfies all virtues (and character strengths contained): wisdom and knowledge (creativity, open mindedness, love of learning), courage (bravery, persistence), humanity (kindness), justice (fairness), temperance (forgiveness) and transcendence (appreciation of beauty, hope, humor). O’Keeffe’s personality also fits Ryff & Singer’s (2008) model of well-being, including dimensions of “self-acceptance”, “personal growth”, “purpose in life”, “environmental mastery”, and “autonomy”. The final dimension, “positive relations to others”, similar to Peterson’s “humanity”, is a dimension Georgia was working on, but in a way which did not fit conventions; it fitted her own needs, for instance she worked on resolving emotional issues with men by “adopting” Juan in the years following the writing of her autobiography. In our view, it is important not to judge any virtues or dimensions in conventional ways, but to value persons’ continuing effort to create and re-create themselves in parallel with the struggle to create and re-create meaning.

18.13.2 Practice

Because psychobiography is essentially a case study, it has the potential of strengthening clinical work (Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Clinical implications include working with client recollections to help construct a more optimistic—yet realistic - self, where work, play, and love, in the sense of creating, exploring and relating, are given equal value. Regarding “love”, therapists need to help clients develop positive affects toward the self and others, but should take into account characteristics of attachment style (Holmes, 2001). In other words, they should respect the limits of personal effort and ability to change. In our own clinical practice, clients come to see their selves as continuously constructed, as “works in progress”. A useful notion is that of “becoming”. They are encouraged to use the phrase: “I am becoming a person who...” The

way they finish this phrase each time encapsulates any work in progress, and gives us an idea of the direction that their narrative construction of self is taking.

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Chapter 19

In Search of Self: How Chanel Became Coco to the World



Leandi Verwey and Zelda Gillian Knight

Abstract This chapter is an example of psychobiographical research, and deliberately employs the object relations theory of Donald Winnicott to explore the life narrative of the selected subject, Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel (1883–1971). Chanel—also known as, and popularly referred to as Coco Chanel—was a 20th century couturier and fashion icon. She challenged conventional femininity and masculinity in her styles—and, in doing so, also challenged the gender lines and mores of the time. In the context of a difficult early life marked by the death of her mother and being orphaned, poverty, rejection, and shame she established immense prominence. Following from this ‘rags to riches’ story, there has been an interest in not only her success—but also in the intimacies of her life. This chapter examines her life in a new way by considering her development psychologically, and the formation of her identity and the impact that this had on how she related to her self and the world. Facets of this identity (such as the ‘adored self’, the ‘collapsed and fragile self’, and the ‘self-made woman’) include a powerful split between her authentic and false self; and for much of her life she seemed to struggle with this. With a new reading of the subjective world of Chanel and her creativity—that is, how Chanel became Coco to the world—this chapter contributes to the growing, but limited number of psychobiographies on fashion icons. It also demonstrates the particular relevance of the object relations theory of Winnicott to modern psychoanalytic psychobiographies.

Keywords Authentic and false self · Coco Chanel · Female figures in psychobiography · Identity and personality · Modern psychoanalytic psychobiography · Object relations theory

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19.1 Introduction

This chapter is an example of psychobiographical research, and deliberately employs the object relations theory of Donald Winnicott to explore the life narrative of the selected subject, Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel (1883–1971). Chanel—also known as, and popularly referred to as Coco Chanel—was a 20th century couturier and fashion icon. She challenged conventional femininity and masculinity in her styles—and, in doing so, challenged the gender lines and mores of the time. In the context of a difficult early life marked by the death of her mother and being orphaned, poverty, rejection, and shame she established immense prominence and success. Following from this ‘rags to riches’ story there has been an interest in the intimacies of her life. This chapter examines her life in a new way by considering her development psychologically, and the formation of her identity and the impact that this had on how she positioned and related to her ‘self’ and the social world. Facets of this identity (such as the ‘adored self’, the ‘fragile self’, and the ‘self-made woman’) include a powerful split between her authentic and false self; and for much of her life she seemed to struggle with this. Explored within the framework of the object relations theory of Winnicott, this is briefly discussed and introduced to contextualize the findings and interpretations made about this self-split. The focus, however, remains on her self-structures and subjective world. By offering a new reading of this—that is, of how Chanel became Coco to the world—this chapter contributes to the growing, but limited psychobiographical research on fashion icons and illustrates the particular relevance of Winnicott.

19.2 The Object Relations Theory of Winnicott

In the context of object relations theories, the emergence and expression of an individual’s personality is the result of early experiences of interpersonal relationships, and the internal psychological representation of these. This is because the nature of these relationships are fundamental to how ‘objects’ (that is, others) are psychologically represented; and—in parallel to these—to psychological representations of the self. If early interactions with objects are not positive and satisfactory, these become ‘bad objects’ with hate imbued in the psychological representations of these. However, if early interactions with objects are positive and satisfactory, these become ‘good objects’ imbued with love—and are psychologically represented as such. These form the primitive representations, and as the “I” exists only in so far that it has an object to relate to and seek, it is important that these are integrated and related to successfully as these also inform representations of the self (Brandell, 2010; Goldstein, 2010; McWilliams, 2011; Palombo, Bendicson, & Koch, 2009; Summers, 2014).

Extending on these fundamental ideas, Winnicott (1960a, 1960b, 1965a, 1965b) focuses on the infant as “part of a relationship” (Winnicott, 1952, p. 99), in that the growth of the infant is influenced by the initial object relationship. Furthermore,

the growth of the infant is also an ‘inherited potential’—meaning that it is a natural tendency (Winnicott, 1960a). The implication of this is that the infant is influenced by the nature of the object relationship, but her inherited potential is not situated within it. It can only facilitate the maturational processes, if provision is satisfactory; or impinge on the maturational processes if it is not satisfactory—particularly as pertaining to the ‘self’.

This is an all-encompassing and evocative intrapsychic structure that facilitates the interaction with, integration of, and relation to the domains of inner and outer reality, the objective and subjective, and the other and self (Winnicott, 1960a, 1960b; 1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1975). By accomplishing developmental milestones—in advancing from the capacities of dependence to independence—individuation and maturation occurs so that there is differentiation between inner and outer reality, and the interaction between the objective and subjective, and the other and self is successful. The degree of dependence implies that there is a movement from: (a) a self-structure that is ‘unintegrated’; to, (b) a developing or emerging self-structure; and, (c) an integrated self-structure. The degree to which the emerging self is supported and validated—that is, the degree to which the environment is facilitating of the maturational processes—determines if this movement occurs successfully. If the environment is facilitating and satisfactory, “I exist” because “when I look I am seen” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 114). If environmental failures or impingements occur, the expression of the “I” is not responded to and validated—and the “I” cannot be fully integrated because the individual cannot locate, as part of the self, her spontaneity and subjectivity. Impermanent manifestations and moments of regression, or pathology may result from this, influencing how a person positions and relates to the self and social world—particularly as pertaining to the self-structures (Winnicott, 1960a, 1963, 1967).

For Winnicott (1950, 1958, 1960b, 1971), these allude to the ‘authentic self’ and the ‘false self’. The authentic self supposes that the environment has been facilitating of the individual’s maturational processes. There is a continuity in the experience of being held, safe, and supported in the initial internalized object relationship and she comes into being from the “inside out,” and there is an expression of the self (Winnicott, as cited in Summers, 2013, p. 192). There is also capability for creative living in that there is a sense of feeling alive, feeling real, and feeling in touch with the world, because there have been experiences of a genuine and real self—that is, of a self that is true. However, if the capability for creative living is impinged on in some way—in that the environment is not experienced as holding, safe, and supportive in the expression of the self, because impingements are not repaired and have to be responded to—the formation of an integrated self is not successful; and she does not fully relate to the self and social world. Defenses result and the self becomes split—in order to protect “the kernel” there is a focus on the “shell” (Winnicott, as cited in Summers, 2013, p. 42). There is an emergence of a false self, and the environment is offered a personality.

Differentiating a false self that is ‘healthy’ and ‘polite’ from a false self that is severe, it is suggested that a healthy individual may offer a personality at times, in responding to the social world. However, she also continues to ‘exist’ from the inside out, and can be creative and feel genuine, real, and spontaneous. This is differentiated

from false-self pathology, where she is dominated in the expression of self—and the false self hides the self that is true—with feelings of isolation and loneliness resulting from this (Winnicott, 1971). For Winnicott (1971), false-self pathology potentially results in a state of tension where there is a desire to express parts of the self that are true—but to also to hide from the social world.

This chapter considers the degree to which this particular tension is evidenced in the life of Chanel, and how this impacted on her patterns of relating to the self and social world. In this regard, there is an acknowledgement and appreciation of her life path and trajectory, with an emphasis on her internalized object relationships; and, how these formed her identity and the implications that this had for her later in life and the patterns of relating that resulted from this. Winnicott is especially fitting for this purpose, because both his object relations theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Frogett & Trustman, 2014; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and psychobiographical research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Stroud, 2004): (a) acknowledge the context and definite setting of the subject; (b) encourage the identification of individualized pattern and process over time; and, (c) explore the personal reality of the subject.

19.3 From Beginning to End: Chanel's Life in Overview

To explore facets that impacted on how Chanel positioned and related to the self and the social world, her life overview is presented in summary. The emphasis is on those facets of her life narrative that are most prominent, from which findings and interpretations are made in the next sections (Figs. 19.1, 19.2, 19.3, 19.4 and 19.5).

19.4 Chanel's Creative Self

Aligned with the authentic self, Chanel's creative expression in her fashion suggests that she did not "betray" her self for an "expected self", in that she was resolute in her style and vision; and, that there was a congruence between her fashion, and her positioning of self. Chanel's creative expression also extended to many other parts of her work—she had an appreciation for the arts; she had a brief career as a performer; she collaborated with others on projects (e.g., by creating costumes for plays, and designing jewelry); and, she continued to create, design, and make things throughout her life. Of these, her career in fashion—however—was the most prominent (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). Considered an 'extension of the self' (Li, 2015), Chanel creatively expressed herself in her fashion and by "fighting for [it]" (Chanel, as cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 219) she also fought for a self that was true (Winnicott, 1960a, 1960b, 1971). This is further implied by her statements that "[She did not] do fashion, [she was] fashion" (Chanel, as cited in

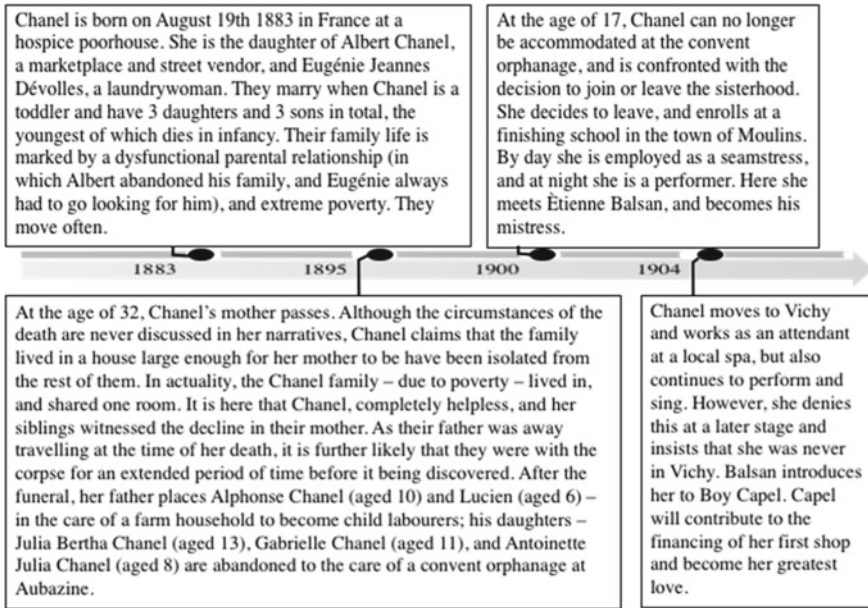


Fig. 19.1 Chanel's life in overview: Childhood and early life [Compiled from Chaney (2010), Madsen (2009), and Picardie (2010)]

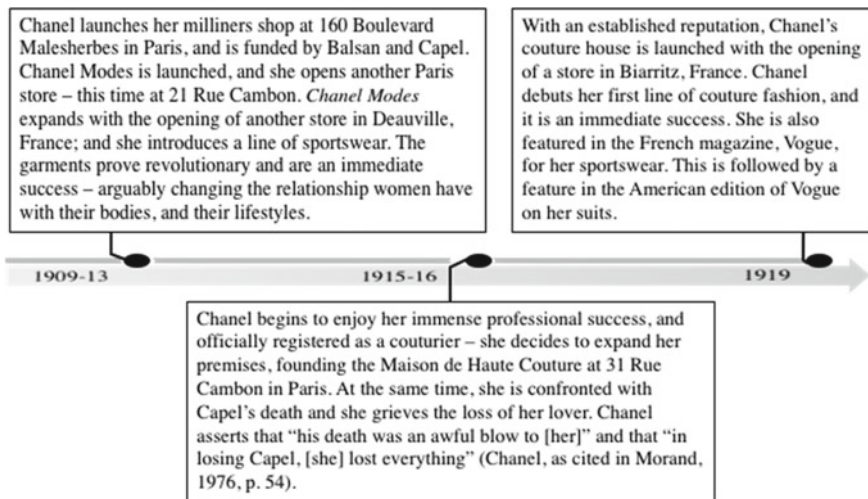


Fig. 19.2 Chanel's life in overview: The beginnings of a self-made woman [Compiled from Chaney (2010), Madsen (2009), and Picardie (2010)]

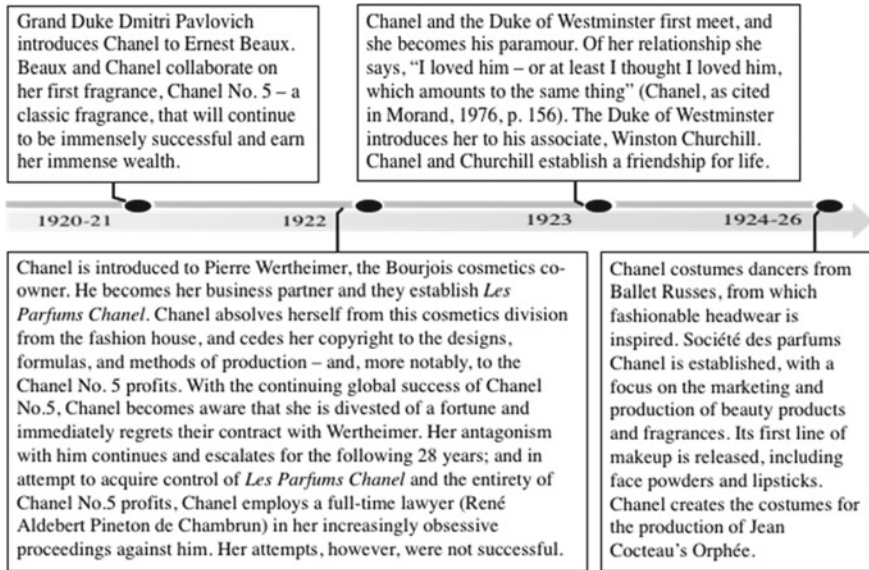


Fig. 19.3 Chanel’s life in overview: Continuing her creativity in other ways [Compiled from Chaney (2010), Madsen (2009), and Picardie (2010)]

De Fabianis, 2010, p. 8), and that “[she] could never have given [it] up” (Chanel, as cited in Vaughan, 2012, p. 54).

19.4.1 *A Fashioning of the Self*

Chanel was committed to her fashion, establishing her immense prominence and success in that she “wanted to work” (Chanel, as cited in Parker, 2013, p. 54). She also favored it to her relationships, stating that “...[she] chose the dresses... the moment she had to choose between [the dresses]...” and a man (Chanel, as cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 183). This is because it likely provided her with a sense of aliveness, feeling real, and feeling in touch with the world, which she did not experience in other ways and that was not provided in her relationships. Declaring that “[she] could never have given up the House of Chanel” (Chanel, as cited in Vaughan, 2012, p. 54), this was also her reason for not having children of her own and for her disavowal of marriage (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). Further implying the insignificance of marriage by stating that there “...[was] only one...Chanel” (Chanel, as cited in Picardie, 2010, p. 163) this points to the significance she ascribed to being herself independently from the other, and continuing to express herself in her fashion without being dominated by the other.

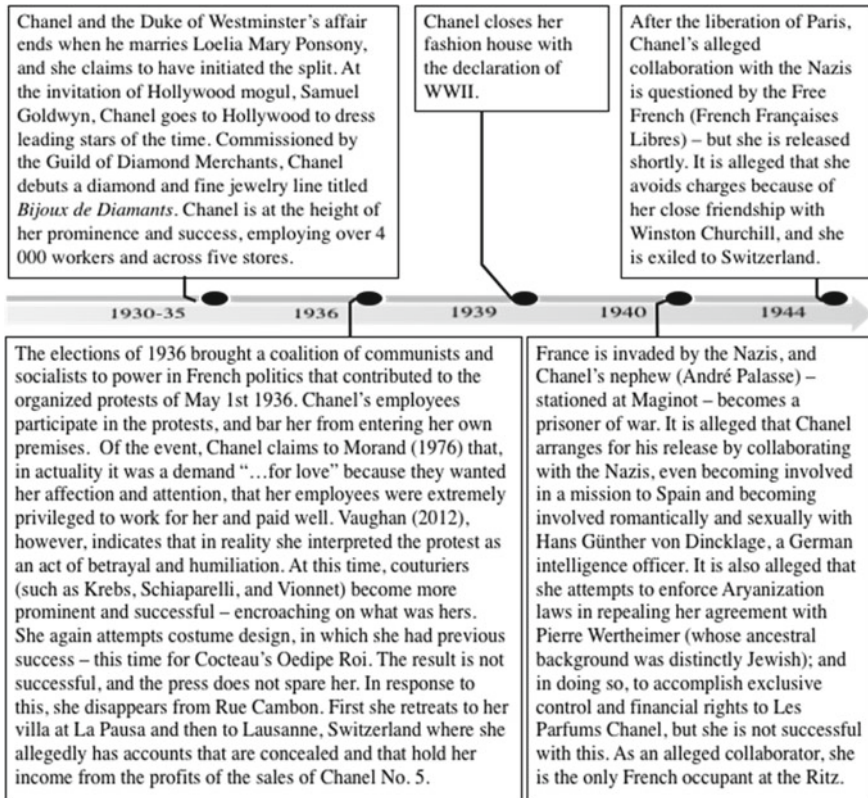


Fig. 19.4 Chanel’s life in overview: From fashion to politics [Compiled from Chaney (2010), Madsen (2009), and Picardie (2010)]

Collectively, this implies that—just as she defined fashion for herself—she also defined her own role as a woman. The congruence that existed between her fashion and this role further support this, in how she positioned and related to the self. Considering that this was during an era when gender lines and mores were outlined by patriarchal values—and when fashion was hegemonized by men—this was rebellious, but also revolutionary (Madsen, 2009; Parker, 2013; Picardie, 2010).

19.4.2 Designing a Fantasy

Abandoning cinched and constructed designs for loose silhouettes, Chanel challenged the conventions of femininity in the freedom of movement that it permitted; and the feminization of masculinity resulted from this (Dunne, 2013). Additional examples of this include her promotion of androgyny—as with the body’s cumula-

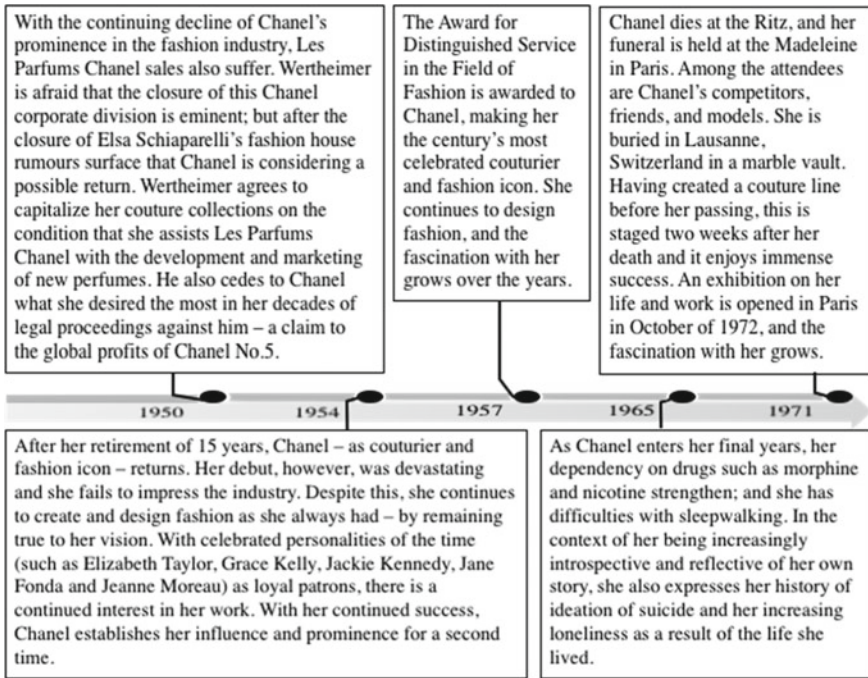


Fig. 19.5 Chanel's life in overview: A return in search of self [Compiled from Chaney (2010), Madsen (2009), and Picardie (2010)]

tive exposure in her styles (Brumberg, 1988); her “breastless” and “hipless” ideal and the promotion of slimness; and, the cutting of her hair short (Picardie, 2010). This also extended to her positioning of self, in that freedom was important to her. That is, her fashion—and the freedom of movement that it permitted—seemed to be symbolic of her desire to be free in other ways. This particularly pertained to her role as a woman (Spirito, 2010; Sun, 2012).

Here, her aggression at the internal psychological representation of being a woman—as contextualized by her early experiences—formed how she positioned and related to the self and social world. Chanel's father, a street vendor, abandoned his family often in that he was always on the move and engaged in extramarital relationships while travelling, with the implication that her mother “...always had to go looking for him” (Chanel, as cited in Haedrich, 1972, p. 21). In the context of this dysfunctional parental relationship, and extreme poverty, she “...learned that [her] mother...was ruined” (Chanel, as cited in Haedrich, 1972, p. 21). Dependency and feelings such as frustration at her powerlessness, humiliation, loneliness, and rejection—thus—were extended to what it meant to be a woman. This contextualizes her denial of ‘femininity’, in that she could express in the fantasy of her fashion another kind of woman. She also cut her hair short, because it was “crushing [her] to death” (Chanel, as cited in Delay, 1974, p. 45). As evidentially symbolic of what it meant to

be a woman, this is an example of how she freed herself from the restrictions of the social world—and how her feelings were integrated in such a way that it challenged the gender lines and mores of society at the time. This is not only evidence of a healthy personality and a positive sign—but also an indication that something was re-found, regained, and re-sought in society, because it was not previously responded to. As an expression of her fantasy and inner reality this suggests that, for Chanel, conventional femininity and ideals related to ‘death’ matters; and that to rebel from this related to ‘life’ matters (Winnicott, 1969). This extended to her financial independence, and her humiliation at the idea of being “kept” by the men that she was in relationships with—“[she] said to [herself], ‘Are you going to become...a kept woman?...[She] didn’t want it” (Chanel, as cited in Haedrich, 1972, p. 42). This is because her independence meant that she could be her “own master” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 43), and that she could be her own self.

19.4.3 Dressing for the Self

In addition to allowing her to be her own self, Chanel’s entry into fashion—and, later, her return—meant that she could position and relate to the self successfully. After the closure of the fashion house in 1939 with the onset of WWII, and her exile of 15 years that followed this, Chanel (at the age of 71) again began designing fashion in 1954. Alluding to this period she stated that it was “a filthy mess” (Chanel, as cited in Galante, 1973, p. 212), perhaps suggesting that—in the absence of creatively expressing herself in her fashion—her exile became an extension of her inner psychological world. This also explains why she was not as personally reflective of this time.

Her absence from fashion relates, in this way, to the lack of narratives that are more personally reflective—collectively creating the impression that she was just as out of touch with the self, as what she was with the world. In attempt to re-find, regain, and re-seek this self it is suggested that she again began expressing herself in fashion with her return. Chanel continued to control her designs despite the fact she handed over the house’s ownership to Pierre Wertheimer by that time—and did so strictly on these terms (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). She continued to design fashion as she always had, and despite disapproval from the fashion industry [her fashion was no longer regarded as “innovative” or “progressive”, but as insipid] and financial loss she remained resolute in her style and vision (Bellafante, 1998). With a cumulative exposure (Brumberg, 1988) as fundamental to this style and vision, it is contended that she also exposed parts of her self in this way. Following from when she was not as real or in touch she, thus, again became more in touch with the world—accounting for her desire to display her fashion at shows twice-yearly, despite the feedback and opinions from others; and her perseverance in her work. Approaching her death in 1971, she was busy with a collection that was to be displayed at a fashion show in spring of that year; and although she again established her influence and prominence by that time, what is most remarkable is that she stayed true to

her vision (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). She did not betray her self for an expected self; and, there was congruence between her fashion, and her positioning and relation to the self. The expectations of others did not prohibit her because she relied on her feelings, impulses, and needs—that is, her instincts—in locating, as part of her self, her spontaneity and subjectivity. The expression of this in her fashion, furthermore, guided her life path from the ‘inside out’ and is regarded a relative strength (Winnicott, 1960b).

19.5 Chanel’s Created Self

Chanel’s desire to express parts of the self that are true—and in doing so, experience feelings genuineness, realness, and spontaneity (Winnicott, 1960a), was considered in the context of her creative self. However, Chanel’s created self—in which she existed from the outside, and her “kernel” was sacrificed to the “shell” (Winnicott, 1960a)—met and opposed this part of her self. This contributed to a dichotomy between expressing a self that was true, and hiding the self from the world, and resulted in a significant self-split.

19.5.1 *The Adored Self*

When the authentic and false self become significantly split, individuals may have a need to “collect impingements” from objective reality to fill their “living-time” with responding to these so that they always have a “role” (Winnicott, 1960b). As explained further by Winnicott (1960b, p. 149), this is because there are “those who can be themselves and who also can act” (e.g., as with the false self that is healthy and normal); “whereas there are others who can only act—and who are completely at a loss when not in a role”. Part of this ‘role’, for Chanel, was to be adored, favored, and loved.

She had to be “applauded” and “appreciated”—that is “acknowledged as existing” by the other (Winnicott, 1960b, p. 149), beginning with her career as a cabaret performer. Although she and her aunt initially performed together, Chanel established herself as an independent performer with a regular slot (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). This is because she had to be the focus of others’ recognition, and this was her ‘role.’ By challenging conventions in her styles, and being ‘different’ with her designs and material use this extended to her fashion in that she was always the focus of the other. This desire further impacted on how she positioned and related to the self—and the patterns in her relationships that resulted from this. Establishing herself as favored in her relationships, she filled her living-time by responding to rivals (Winnicott, 1960b, 1971). In doing so, her relationships were strikingly trilateral.

In consideration of her familial relationships, Chanel depicted herself as her father's favorite and as the loved object in relation to a threat. The first of these was her sister (Julia Bertha Chanel)—Chanel stated that

...[she] loved [her] father because he preferred [her] to [her] sister. [She] couldn't have borne for him to feel the same about the both of [them]. (Chanel, as cited in Delay, 1974, p. 19)

In this context he was the only family that she ever loved, or stated to. This is consistent with her creative fantasy in which he was her protector in her reinvented her remembrance of him—he did not abandon her; but adored, favored and loved her in that he 'addressed countless letters to her', was 'always present', 'affectionately kissed her on her forehead', 'brought her gifts', 'called on her', and comforted or pacified her in some way (Charles-Roux, 1976; Delay, 1974; Haedrich, 1972; Picardie, 2010). This led to a notable split between him, as an 'all-good' object representation, and 'bad' mother object representation—both in her fantasy of him and, in her narratives that were more reflective of the truth (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). In these she comprehended her father's judgment for leaving them, and did not express envy at his

"new family, and new life," "...he was right. [She] would have done the same thing. No one...could have coped with the situation... He loved [her]". (Chanel, as cited in Haedrich, 1972, p. 29)

As the 'bad object', however, Chanel's mother was regarded as dependent, fragile, and incapable; and as a parent, unavailable, uninterested, and unloving (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). This 'badness' extended to her other relationships with women, with the implication that her mother—as psychological representation—was projected into these relationships. This resulted in a significant split in her subjective world, where 'all-good' male object(s) were differentiated from her psychological representation of women. In this context she embodied 'maleness' in relating to the self and social world, and established herself as the 'good object.' She also favored friendships with males in that her only really significant friendship with a woman was with Misia Sert. This friendship, however, was not always friendly—but jealous and hateful at times (Picardie, 2010). Chanel claimed that, "We love people only for their faults, and Misia (Sert) gave [her] ample and numerous reasons for loving her" (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 86). The implication of this is that Chanel could be the loved object in particular relation to her as a threat; but, Sert also importantly became the mother representative (Winnicott 1947, 1950).

As such aggression could be directed towards her (e.g., in that Chanel described her as having 'faults')—but contrary to her fragile mother, she could survive and tolerate this (e.g., in that she and Chanel had a friendship of many years). This also contextualizes her engagement with other women in that her aggression could be expressed in the 'impingements' she had to respond to in filling her living-time. In the context of fashion, her rivalry with Schiaparelli was of significance—Chanel condescendingly described her as "that Italian woman who makes dresses" (Chanel, as cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 199), and in doing so expressed her feelings over which she had 'rights' [as with "...the mother over whom she has rights" (Winnicott, 1965b,

p. 125)] by responding to her. In an exploration of her love and personal relationships, she responded by: diminishing the importance of the men’s mistresses, partners, or spouses (e.g., by not mentioning them in any of her narratives); and, further implying that the men—such as Capel, Reverdy and Stravinsky—were discontented in their marriages. The function of this was to protect the self and her subjective world, in that she was loved—and points to a self that was vulnerable.

19.5.2 The Fragile Self

Chanel’s apparent fragility of self—and the implications this had for how she positioned and related to self—contextualizes the contradictions and errors in her narratives, her denial of events, and her distortion of reality in that she had to protect her subjective world. As with a narcissistically organized personality structure (Winnicott, as cited in Summers, 2014), this suggests that there was a conflict with objective reality, so this was “magically” and omnipotently relieved because any possible rejection was a threat (Winnicott, 1960b).

19.5.2.1 Chanel’s Childhood Wounds

As with all events in her life, “...the truth of [it] for Chanel lay not in the fact but in the feeling” (Chaney, 2010, pp. 20–21), and in consideration of her critical early experiences these feelings included frustration at her powerlessness, loneliness, rejection and shame. Chanel claimed that her “childhood...[made] her shudder” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 22) and that “...[she] lived with insensitive people” (Chanel, as cited in Gidel, 2000, p. 24). For Chanel, these experiences and the feelings related to these represented to her that she was not appreciated for expressing parts of the self that were true—but invalidated by the other and rejected. From this she learnt that she would be loved only for her pretend self (Winnicott, 1960a, 160b, 1971).

Aligned with this, she abandoned her first name because “...[her] father didn’t like the name Gabrielle at all—it hadn’t been his choice. So he called [her] ‘Little Coco’ instead” (Chanel, as cited in Delay, 1974); and she then became Coco (Chanel) to both her father and the world. This communicated to her that she was not ‘enough’, and contributed to an internal psychological representation of herself as rejected, and others as rejecting. This is evidenced further by narratives in which she was locked in a room (with this as likely a metaphor of how the other was not ‘obtainable’); her expressed resentment at always having to be silent, because of the fragility and illness of her mother; and “the humiliation...[she] never forgot” for being “whipped” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976). There is also a focus on her being orphaned, specifically, because—after the death of her mother—her father left her and her siblings. This loss of love objects presented a significant trauma, magnified by her perceived rejection of the ‘aunts’ who cared for her and her sisters (the elderly nuns at

the orphanage she was sent to, and that presented a re-traumatization. In protecting her subjective world from this, Chanel denied having lived with nuns and being orphaned (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010).

19.5.2.2 Injuries and Personal Relationships

Chanel also denied other parts of her story, and distorted factual information about her life. Examples include her relationships with Balsan, Capel, and the Duke of Westminster—all of whom had aristocratic connections and relations at the time, which impacted on the nature of the relationships. In her and Balsan's relationship, she ate her meals with the servants and was isolated from the other residents and visitors at *Château de Royallieu*. He also favored his relationship with Émilienne d'Alençon—an actress with notable social status in French high society, and his mistress at the time. Capel was daunted by any public recognition of their relationship; and in this relationship she was secondary too. First, to the many women he had affairs with, and that Chanel had knowledge of but trivialized; and later to Diana Wyndham (née Lister)—the daughter of a lord with notable social status, who he married in the passage of his and Chanel's relationship of 8 years. The Duke of Westminster also had many mistresses while in a relationship with her, and later married Loelia Mary Ponsony—also with notable social status at the time—during their relationship of 5 years (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). This implies that in most of her relationships, she was rejected because of her social status because she could not bear heirs to the men, was not fitting for marriage, or was second to other women. Although this led to a likely pattern of abandonment, infidelity, and latent shame she diminished the importance of the other women; and, in doing so, established herself as the loved object—reshaping and retelling it as a romance (Madsen, 2009).

Chanel also established many financial relationships later in her life, so that she could be in a position of power and could not be rejected. Examples of this include her relationships with Diaghilev, the Grand Duke of Pavlovich, Pierre Reverdy, and Igor Stravinsky—she accommodated them at her properties, funded their projects, and granted them monthly stipends. Although these could be examples of her generosity and kindness (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010), this also meant that she did not need the other—but that they needed her and that she could protect herself from any threats. However, in order to not only protect—but also repair—her subjective world—it was necessary for her to have her needs responded to in such a way that the other did not humiliate, hurt, and reject her; but loved and protected her.

This corresponds to how she depicted herself in many of her relationships. She declared that “[she] told Balsan that [she] was 20, in actual fact [she] was 16” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 28). This, however, was a lie and in reality she was 22 when she arrived at *Château de Royallieu*, meaning that she portrayed herself to be significantly younger than what she was—a pattern that persisted throughout (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). In doing so, she presented herself as someone with no certainty or control of her future—a dependent girl and lost

youngster, who was discouraged from leaving, had no home to return, and relied on him for support (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976)—with her dependency needs, and her desire for these to be responded to revealed symbolically in this way. As with her narratives about her relationship with Capel—in which he commented on her conduct to edify her, and “...treated [her] like a child” because he implicitly loved her, and “really understood [her]” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 39)—these dependency needs persisted, with a desire for the other to respond a specific way. This was in a way where she had the experience of the other positively responding to her so that—in Winnicott’s (1962) words—she got back the evidence she needed that she has been recognized, in a love that ‘repaired’ what has been ‘wounded’.

19.5.2.3 Protecting from Threats Is Work

In the absence of this repair to her subjective world, Chanel continued to defend with denial. After her career as a performer was not successful, she denied ever having lived or performed in Vichy (Charles-Roux, 1976). She also forgot about the 18 months she lived and worked at the House of Grampayre, and did not mention those who were partly responsible for some of her success (Madsen, 2009). After her early success, furthermore, Chanel was consumed and exhausted by her work, and by 1939 her control over the fashion industry was potentially threatened (Parker, 2013). Couturiers and designers such as Balenciaga, Balmain, Cardin, Courrèges, Lanvin, Piguet, and Vionnet were successful at the time, and destabilized her prominence and success. Likely presenting a self-threat, this could have contributed to the closure of the fashion house and exit from fashion for 15 years (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Vaughan, 2012). It is further interesting to note that she only returned after the closure of her rival, Elsa Schiaparelli’s, fashion house in 1950—when she could reclaim and restore her success without any threat (Madsen, 2009; Vaughan, 2012). This may metaphorically represent, from a view that Winnicottian (1960a), her claim to that which has been ‘lost’ but possessed previously; extending to her increasingly obsessive proceedings against Pierre Wertheimer. As this is explored further it is inferred that what she lost was a part of the self that was true; and that she, instead, perpetually pretended to be someone (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009).

19.5.3 *The Pretend Self*

In an amalgamation of falsehood and truth, Chanel denied her own reality, and distorted and exaggerated factual information about her life in offering and perpetually revising a romanticized story (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010; Vaughan, 2012). “[Chanel] made up things” (Madsen, 2009, pp. 3–4) about her childhood, her family, and her history and estranged those who knew that the legend she offered as part of this story, was at odds with the truth. For Winnicott (1952, 1962) this is consistent with a disconnect from objective reality and its’ relationship to the self

in that she was ‘loved’, a ‘star’, and a ‘success’—not an orphan who was rejected and shamed. Experiencing an intolerable and significant threat so ‘unthinkable’ with the incursion of the objective reality that this was not true, she protected her subjective world. In doing so she ‘magically relieved’ the threat, resulting in a self-split.

Chanel “acted” according to a false-self structure, in offering a personality—that is, the loved self, the star, and the successful woman (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 45)—to the world. With an apparent need to be ‘seen’, she perpetually pretended to be someone (Parker, 2013; Picardie, 2010). Expressing that “[she] didn’t so much love as want to be loved” (Chanel, as cited in Delay, 1974, p. 19) and that “It’s not money for money’s sake that [she was] interested in, but money as a symbol of success” (Chanel, as cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 161), she implied that to be loved meant that the other would only respond to or ‘see’ her if she had this symbol of success. The implication of this is that there was no real self—only the offered personality and role of the star (Winnicott, 1960b). With loneliness and possible regret resulting from this she stated that it would have been “...best for her to adhere to conventional morality...” because she was extremely lonely, and that “...[t]here’s nothing worse...” (Chanel, as cited in Vaughan, 2012, p. 198)—suggesting that she was not connected with others, the self, and the world, but was dominated in her expression of self and did not feel real and true (Winnicott, 1965b, 1975).

Assuming a different name, and becoming Coco to the world, she changed her nascent self and lived from “from the outside” (Winnicott, as cited in Summers, 2013, p. 192) in order to be positively responded to—both by her initial and later love objects. In its extreme form there is an implosion because the ‘kernel’ is sacrificed to ‘shell’, and the real self is suppressed (Winnicott, 1960a). Feelings of rage result from this, but because the love object is perceived as not being in a position to psychologically survive or tolerate this, they are protected and the rage is turned on the self (Winnicott, 1950, 1963). Examples of this include narratives in which Chanel made herself bleed by chafing her face at night (Madsen, 2009), and expressed “that [she] fed on her sorrow...[she] wanted to kill [herself] many times” (Chanel, as cited in Charles-Roux, 1976, p. 42). She also further implied that this was a response to her ‘aunts’ and the hate she had for them (as love object representatives), in that it would demonstrate to them “how wicked they were” (Chanel, as cited in Morand, 1976, p. 36). Here, her hate could not be integrated with love and led to this part of the personality being split (Winnicott, 1950).

This also accounts for her addiction and dependency in that emptiness and feelings of non-reality possibly resulted from this split; and she could only gratify her impulses and needs physically. Chanel was addicted to cigarettes for most of her life, and developed a dependency on morphine (Chaney, 2010; Madsen, 2009; Picardie, 2010). Although also considered destructive, this is evidence of an experience that was ‘good’ but that has been interrupted, lost, or withdrawn. This was physically re-found, re-gained, and re-sought—because it could not be relationally re-found, re-gained, and re-sought (Winnicott, 1951, 1956). The impact of this on her inner reality resulted in boredom, emptiness, and feelings of non-reality. Capel, as an example, mentioned that he did not agree to finance her premises in support of her work—but because he was displeased by her idleness. Although dedicated, indus-

trious, and productive in her work it is further implied that she was notably restless (as metaphorically represented by her sleep-walking with which she struggled). In exploring her statement that “[w]ork has always been a drug for [her]” (Chanel, as cited in Madsen, 2009, p. 183), it follows that her productivity was related to being in—and maintaining—the role of the star and successful woman. Although perceived as real to the social world, she did not experience it as such and persisted in searching for evidence that she existed. That is, someone to ‘hold’, love, ‘see’, ‘survive’, ‘tolerate’ and ‘understand’ her—not for her pretend self as the self-made woman and star, but for a self that was true, without which she was isolated and lonely in relating to the self. For much of her life this meant that she needed physical relating in seeking wholeness because her lived psychic reality in relating to the self was not sustained (Winnicott, 1958).

19.6 How Chanel Became Coco to the World: A Summary

Chanel’s creative expression in her fashion suggests that she did not betray her self for an ‘expected self’—there was a congruence between her fashion and her positioning of self, and she was resolute in her style and vision. She came to exist independently and had a full life, and by expressing herself from the ‘inside out’, was guided by her ‘kernel’ on her life path and trajectory. That is, there was a degree of integration of self (Winnicott, 1960a, 1960b). However, her self was also threatened at times—and moments of regression and pathological responses resulted from this. The most notable of these was a self-split, in which defenses emerged and the false self hid the self that was true (Winnicott, 1960b). This false self was theorized from the adored self, the fragile self, and the pretend self. From the adored self it was suggested that Chanel had to be “acknowledged as existing” (Winnicott, 1960b, p. 149) by the other to have a self and sense thereof. As such, she also ‘collected impingements’ from objective reality to fill her ‘living-time’ with responding to these, and maintaining a ‘role’ (Winnicott, 1960b). This was of the loved object in particular relation to a ‘rival’, meaning that her relationships were strikingly trilateral.

However, that she had to fill her ‘living-time’ with this role suggested that Chanel did not have enough of a “lived psychic reality”—that is, an experience and maintained sense of self—to feel whole; and that there was a collapse in the domains of inner and outer reality, the objective and subjective, and the other and self (Winnicott, 1958, 1960b, 1965b, 1971). This contributed to depersonalization and derealization states—and defenses developed to protect her subjective world. This is because her ‘child self’ did not have her dependency needs positively responded to (Winnicott, 1962). As explored with the fragile self, this formed internal psychological representations of both the other (e.g., ‘Others will humiliate, hurt, and reject me’) and the self (e.g., ‘I am not enough’). This was followed by an organized reestablishment of, and tendency towards her dependency at an earlier stage (that is, the developmental need) so that it could be responded to—but her derivative fear from previous traumas, exaggerated by the fear of having to re-live these, and the feelings related to these

was followed by further re-traumatizations (Winnicott, as cited in Newman, 2013). Her feelings of frustration at her powerlessness, loneliness, and rejection resulted in her offering the personality of the ‘self-made woman’ and ‘star’, so that she did not have to re-experience or re-live these. This pretend self was taken to be true by the world, but she did not experience it as such and feelings of loneliness, feelings of non-reality, and restlessness resulted from this (Winnicott, 1960a); and she searched—to her death—for evidence that she existed from the ‘inside out’ and to be positively responded to for a self that was true.

19.7 Conclusion

This chapter considered Chanel’s development and expression of her identity and self from a psychological view. This contributed to the development of fashion icons as psychobiographical research subjects, and demonstrated how modern psychoanalytic psychobiographies can make use of Winnicott. This is because his ‘authentic self’ and ‘false self’ do not only describe parts of the self—but evoked a “fundamental, but subjective” understanding of Chanel’s embodied experiences, rather than with schematizing it theoretically (Anderson, 2003, p. 80). His ideas improved the interpretation of her specificity and subjectivity, in making meaning of her narratives; and were practically and theoretically valuable (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, Froggett & Trustman, 2014; Green, 1978; Summers, 2014). This illustrates his pertinence to this and other psychobiographies, because:

Both consider the context and definite setting of the subject; encourage the identification of individualized pattern and process over time; and, explore the personal reality of the subject.

Although Winnicott (1965a, 1965b, 1975) considers critical early experiences and initial object relationships as significant to the formation of the identity and personality, he also explores the implications of this for the individual later in life in the positioning and relation to the self and the social world. This makes it applicable to the adult analysis of a subject in that it also considers influences during later life (Bonaminio, 2012), and facilitates a lifespan perspective in the psychological reading of the subject.

- It has descriptive, evaluative, interpretive, and theoretical value in the formulations of interpretations.
- It encourages a eugraphic, rather than pathogenic perspective (Fouché, 1999; Stroud, 2004), because there is a focus on the ‘inherited potential’ of the subject (Winnicott, 1960a).

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Chapter 20

“I Have to Be All Things to All People”: Jim Jones, Nurture Failure, and Apocalypticism



James L. Kelley

Abstract In 1978, Jim Jones and over 900 of his followers perished in what has been called “The Jonestown Massacre”. This study uses methods of psychobiography and objection relations theory to account for Jones’ lifelong ambivalence toward those to whom he acted as caregiver. The author proposes a psychological schema he names “nurture failure” to account for Jim Jones’ style of leadership, which mixed solicitude with violence in the context of a religious organization that promised to right all of society’s wrongs. The means by which this utopia was to be brought about became more and more extreme until the infamous murder/suicide shattered the dream for good. The study’s findings expand our understanding of the motivational dynamics that undergird religious leaders’ often Januslike relations to their followers.

Keywords Psychobiography · Jim Jones · Peoples temple · Hermeneutic philosophy · Object relations theory

20.1 Introduction

On 18 November 1978, over 900 human beings perished at Jonestown, Guyana. Controversy has since surrounded almost every aspect of the event, from the motivations of the victims (Kilduff & Javers, 1978, pp. 186–188; Dieckman, 2006), to the plausibility of a government conspiracy behind the tragedy (Moore, 2002). However, attempts to make sense of Jonestown, it could be argued, falter most when they make pronouncements about the life of James Warren Jones, the man who founded Peoples Temple, the church that planted the Jonestown colony after leasing land in Guyana on 26 February, 1976 (Chung & Government of Guyana, 1976). Was Jones an evil psychopath, another Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler? Or was Jones, with his

The chapter’s title was uttered by Jim Jones sometime in the mid-seventies, as relayed by eyewitness Hue Fortson in an interview by Guinn (2017a, p. 225).

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dark spectacles and slurred Southern drawl, simply an inscrutable instantiation of evil's "banality", of modernity's "terrifying normality" (Arendt, 1994/1965, p. 276)? Thus far, most biographical studies of Jim Jones have fallen into either the Scylla of true crime caricature or the Charybdis of journalistic chronicle. The present study attempts to avoid these pitfalls through a multidimensional portrait of Jim Jones that reads his life through the lens of psychoanalytic drive theory (see section Theoretical Background below). The hope is that by invoking mid-level concepts derived from object relations theory we can forge a path between the extremes of peremptory labeling and bare reportage.

"Nurture failure" is the present author's label for the psychological schema or frame that presented Jim Jones, throughout his life, with distorted pictures of his relation to others. These pictures were not only charged with uncontrolled extremes of high and low affect (and so reflected mood disorder); they also represented sequences of violent and self-aggrandizing actions and thoughts (and thus indicated narcissism). While paying due heed to narratives by and about The Peoples Temple and its members, the present study will explicate recorded and reported utterances and actions of the subject Jim Jones as parts that relate to the proposed whole, the life of the subject as illuminated by the defining frame—nurture failure. Such an oscillation between mutually-illuminating parts and whole is in keeping with recent work in psychobiography (Kóváry, 2013; Mayer & Maree, 2017), which makes frequent reference to the "hermeneutic circle" and its underlying assumptions about how "facts" can be sifted from "background knowledge" (Mantzavinos, 2016) by making a series of judgments about the meaning of relations between multifarious data, on the one hand, and the individual person that is the subject of study, on the other.

The remainder of this section will present a synopsis of Jim Jones' nurture failure schema. The second and third sections detail the theory and methodology of the study. The penultimate section is a consideration how nurture failure operated in the four phases of Jim Jones' life: childhood in Indiana, adulthood in Indiana, life in California, and the short time in Guyana that ended in suicide. Implications of the study's findings are elaborated in a closing section.

Throughout his childhood, Jim Jones experienced what I term "nurture failure": his parents failed to meet his basic emotional and physical needs; relatives, school companions, and others in his community failed to meet his social needs (Kelley, 2017). By the time Jones reached school age, he began to reinvent himself as something between a promoter and a preacher; in taking on this new role, Jones reversed the polarity of his succorance deficit by focusing his every effort on meeting the needs of others. As the present author has written elsewhere, in a case of nurture failure, the "neglected child, in turning away from the shortcomings of his own nurturers, appoints himself as nurturer, often reinterpreting and elaborating the abortive strategies and styles of nurturing observed in the adults closest to him" (Kelley, 2015). Jones' own reflection on his early experience speaks volumes:

...[H]aving been cruelly let down [as a child] - when I needed things, basic, elementary things, and they were not provided - I made a covenant that as long as it appeared someone needed me, I wouldn't let them down. (...) I died very early to the need for reinforcement from people. I can't even remember when I had a real need for people.

It wasn't a matter of whether people really appreciated it or whether, when they got through with you they tossed you aside like an orange with all the juice squeezed out. I expected that, but I thought, "I may not be a person of great talent, but one thing I could give was loyalty". (Jones, 1977b)

Jones also tells of how he overcame his failure to find anyone to meet his own needs by deciding

to be true to [his] own conscience because...not being accepted...relieved [him] of a lot of the pressures that a lot of people have to deal with. (Jones, 1977b)

Jones' later pattern of doing good works in public while abusing his follows behind closed doors—a pattern that came to a nightmarish head in Jonestown, where there was little or no privacy, and where all were within earshot of Jones' amplified tirades—can be traced back to this nurture failure “covenant”, according to which a person ceases to need others precisely by transforming herself, by sheer force of will, into an unflinching nurturer.

Once the child has inverted his passive endurance of neglect into active nurturance, though, a new problem arises. Jones, the victim of nurture failure, now seeks to be the perfect nurturer. In this role Jones cannot fail as did his mother, his father, and his whole community; if Jones falls short in his newly-minted role of nurturer, he himself shares in the forces that led to his childhood of trauma and neglect. As Jones once proclaimed,

I don't know how to selfishly use anybody. (...) I couldn't do that. I've always [been] in a role of giving. (Jones, 1978a)

In a sense, Jones was a shepherd obsessed with keeping his flock intact at any cost. However, Jones viewed his followers with the same ambivalence that he must have felt toward his grandiose, yet distant mother Lynetta: on the one hand, Peoples Temple members were victims of society's inequality, having been being “treated cheatedly” (Jones, 1974a) just as Jones had been as a child; on the other hand, from early childhood (Hall, 1987, p. 10) until his final destructive act (Kelley, 2016b), Jones had no qualms about using violence against followers who slackened their efforts or who thought of leaving him (Reiterman & Jacobs, p. 161; Jones, 1974b).

Complicating matters considerably was The Peoples Temple founder's death wish, which he claimed originated when a childhood pet that he had been nursing died (Black, 1990, p. 295–296). If we can believe Jones' own reminiscences of his elementary school days, his suicidal impulse became stronger when an elementary school teacher who showed some motherly concern for him died of cancer. Jones' death wish, however, was just as susceptible to drive inversion as was his passive experience of neglect: after the beloved teacher's burial, the child stole a casket and a number of wreaths from the local funeral home and hung them on the doors of the homes of

every [person] I thought should be dead in the community. (...) I got the casket up in my room and I got in it. I wanted to die I guess. (Jones, 1977b)

Indeed, this is the pattern we will look for in our more in-depth consideration of Jones' life (see Sect. 21.4): Jones felt violent anger toward family, community, nation, and world for failing to nurture him; once he had hoisted himself above this pain by appointing himself nurturer par excellence, Jones masked or managed his inner fragility by abusing others who refused to accept his care. As Jonestown resident Vernetta Christian described Jones' confrontation with a wayward follower,

Nawab [Lawrence]...didn't want to shower, had to be forced. [Jim Jones] told him that every time he defies authority the more force he will use to equal his force. Five children came up and socked Nawab. (Christian, 1977).

20.2 Theoretical Background

This section will give a brief account of *drive vicissitude*, the *theoretical basis of nurture failure*. As we have argued previously (Kelley, 2016b), nurture failure is Jim Jones' psychopathological schema: In accordance with it, Jones turned resentment against failed caregivers into a conviction that he must prevail as a super-nurturer, and who at the same time held a death wish that could shift into murderous sadism in an instant.

In Freud's "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" we are presented with a theme that might be termed passive-active drive vicissitude (Freud, 1999a/1915), according to which drives "change their objects easily" (Sugarman, 2016, p. 51), as when passive resentment toward a neglectful parent is turned into an active self-hatred. In the case of masochism, Freud offers a scenario whereby the self-loather can reverse the drive yet again by inflicting pain on another person. Thus, the pain accrued passively from the parent's neglect is first turned on the self masochistically; only then can the abuse be redirected toward other persons both actively and sadistically. The "fort-da" game that Freud witnessed a youth playing—during which the boy gained control of his grief over parental abandonment by throwing a reel-and-string out of sight and then pulling the string to cause it to reappear—is another instance of the sadism at the core of drive vicissitude, which begins with caregiver abandonment and ends with an emotionally dysfunctional child:

As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute. (Freud, 1959/1920, p. 37)

Ferenczi (1980/1920), a contemporary of Freud's, stressed that the analysand may have experienced a caregiver's "empathic failure," (Rachman, 1997), and thus may have

"to be induced [by the analyst], by means of an immense expenditure of love, tenderness and care, to forgive his parents" or risk falling back into "non-being," that is, suicide. (Ferenczi, 1980/1920, p. 128)

In the generation after Ferenczi, each of the three schools of British psychoanalysis added their own embellishments to the drive vicissitude motif. Anna Freud relayed

a seven-year-old's daydream that he was a lion tamer who had turned his abusive father into a circus animal that he bridled and used to fight crime (Freud, 1946). Melanie Klein, among other insights, pointed out that when the unnurtured child projects the hated aspects of her own self onto others, the abuse that accompanies the schizoid projection often takes the form of control rather than overt harm (Klein, 1946, p. 104). As a representative of the so-called Independent or Middle Group of British psychoanalysts, Winnicott held that the child whose trust has been betrayed puts on a “false self” that “compulsively anticipates the reactions of others” (Elliott, 2015, p. 68). Winnicott's “primary maternal preoccupation” is the ego-relatedness of the active mother to the passive child. If the mother does not meet the child's needs, the latter is unable, in a literal sense, to find herself. The child cannot turn her imbibing of the mother—either in terms of milk or in terms of communicated affect—into the self-building dynamism of “going on being” (Winnicott, 1982).

The Klienian Wilfred Bion adds even more insights to the concept of object relations and its underlying drive-flux. Whereas Freud remained somewhat unclear about how the pre-Oedipal child related to its caregivers (Freud, 1999b/1925, p. 212), Bion has no doubt that the child's love is possible only through the mother's acting as a “container” for the former's envy and fear. Without the “reverie” of the caregiver, who does not fail to bear with the child's projection of active-passive-love-hate, the child is unable to reintroject his inchoate affect as a continually-renewed affirmation of life (Bion, 1962a, 1962b, 1970).

20.3 Methodology

This study utilizes aspects of the methods of psychobiography put forth by writers such as McAdams (1985, 2008), Hermans & Kempen (1993), and Kőváry (2011) to examine a single case over a whole lifespan. These psychobiographers share with certain psychologists and philosophers (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015; Orange, 2011; Taylor, 2017) a sympathy with the hermeneutic approach to explaining how humans find meaning in their experience. Against the still dominant Cartesian picture of man as a processor of sensory atoms, as a compounder of percepts that somehow equate to realities outside the mind, hermeneutic thinkers “regar[d] every form of knowledge, including self-knowledge, as grounded in agential interaction with a shared lifeworld” (Guignon, 2017, p. 267). Both Schön (1983) and Polanyi (1962) have suggested that scientific researchers cut off from considering their own and other humans' life experiences would be unable to produce any fruitful results. Such an epistemic paralysis is avoided, so Polanyi claims, only because all persons, be they scientists or non-scientists, unconsciously adopt a pretheoretical, commonsense stance toward the world, even when they are considering the most abstract types of data. In fact, even physicists (who practice what is perhaps the hardest of hard sciences) uncover meaning only by transposing what Polanyi calls “personal knowledge” (Polanyi, 1962, 2009/1966) into their observations. All of this suggests that the salient virtue of psychobiography's portrayals of life narratives lies in its effort to

embrace consciously the repressed methodological realities that allow both soft and hard sciences to operate. By vacillating between multiple levels of discourse—words or terms, statements, narratives, and metanarratives—we produce research that has the potential to not only reflect real structures in the life-world, but to shed light on the biosocial processes that bridge facts and values.

In order to assure both ethical research practice as well as historical accuracy, the author used primary sources that were already cited as valid by other major secondary studies. The author safeguarded the study from possible offense to surviving Peoples Temple members and their associates by avoiding the unfortunate anti-cult methodology that has tainted many studies of new religious movements (NRMs). The anti-cult approach views followers of NRMs as “brainwashed” and otherwise duped by religious leaders (Dawson, 2006). Such a one-dimensional view must be discarded once we take into consideration the multifarious motivations and circumstances that lead individuals to join a religion (Dawson, 1996). We would do well to keep in mind the tearful words of former Peoples Temple member Laura Johnston Kohl when she faced-off with a supposed cult expert: “I disagree that we were brainwashed. Being in Peoples Temple was the best time of my life” (Fondakowski, 2013). That being said, we can also join Kohl and other Jonestown survivors who decry the Jonestown murder/suicide as an unfortunate yet partially foreseeable outcome for a religious group that combined utopian ideals with exploitative, violent antinomianism.

20.4 Findings

20.4.1 *Childhood (1931–1948)*

Jim Warren Jones was born in the farming community of Crete, Indiana on 13 May, 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression (Hall, 1987, p. 4). By all accounts, his childhood was troubled, as we can demonstrate by considering, in turn, the influence upon the young Jones exerted by (1) his father, James Thurman Jones, (2) his mother, Lynette “Lynetta” Putnam Jones, and (3) the community of Lynn, Indiana, where Jones spent his formative years.

“Big Jim,” as Jones’s father was known around Lynn, was “an invalid from World War I” (Jones, 1977a, p. 1), having been victimized by a German mustard gas attack (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982). Though Big Jim is remembered as an amiable man by many Lynn residents, his son seems to have had nothing but contempt for a father who seldom arose from his easy chair and whose voice could not rise above a tortured rasp on most days (Guinn, 2017a, p. 12). Jim’s dislike of his father was doubtless encouraged by his mother. Lynetta seems to have married Big Jim under the mistaken impression that the Jones family was wealthy and that she was entitled to a share in this imagined largesse. Instead, the Jones family expected Lynetta and Jim to hold their own financially, and thus Lynetta had to work menial jobs for most of her married life. In one of Lynetta’s later recollections, her seething resentment of Big

Jim is palpable. The implausible account paints a picture of little Jim as a pied piper who charms an army of rats to gnaw at the foundations of the pool hall where his father is supposed to have presided over a crooked game of dominoes (Jones, 1977b).

Ironically, Lynetta's screed reveals her own parental neglect: her son is described as a "sprite" who runs in and out of the bushes around Lynn, perching on fences and muttering words of wisdom "so unusual, so apart from the reasonings of this world" (Jones, 1977b). Lynetta's tendency to idealize is further evinced in her partly-invented narrative about her grandfather Lewis Parker, who for her was a noble soul who used his wealth to ease the burdens of the poor in southern Indiana. Indeed, Jim Jones' mother taught her raven-haired boy that he was a great, world-changing soul, a reborn Lewis Parker. By contrast, Big Jim, so Lynetta taught her son to believe, was incapable of having any effect on the outside world, and was thus the moral opposite of her saintly grandfather (Jones, 1977c).

Throughout her life, Jones' mother Lynetta made no secret of her aversion to caring for children (Hall, 1987, p. 7), a sentiment that applied even to her own son, especially when, during Jim's infancy, she alone bore the onus of caring for him, Big Jim being physically incapable of any consistent parenting (Guinn, 2017a, p. 14). Lynetta even found her child's dark skin and sable hair repugnant: For her Jim "resembled most a baby Eskimo, and an ugly one at that" (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982, p. 10). Toward the end of her life, Jim Jones' mother recalled guiltily her emotional "tormen[t]" at the prospect of mothering Jim, and surmised it was a result of "insecurity" that made her "just beside [her]self" (Hall, 1987, pp. 7–8). In another of Lynetta's reminiscences, she describes 4-year-old Jim as having morphed from ugliness to beauty. However, in keeping with her tendency to conceive of the people in her life as atavars of black-and-white abstractions, Lynetta depicts her son more as an embodiment of the principle of equality than as a real flesh-and-blood child: "He was so handsome...when [he spoke of] having to come to earth to do what others could not or would not do. It made me feel he was only loaned to me for a time" (Jones, 1977a).

Not only was Lynetta a frenetic and high-strung mother; she was also given to fits of spleen against her husband that included screaming and other violent gestures. The foregoing suggests that the first three or four years of life for Jim Jones were deficient both in affect regulation and in Winnicott's "good-enough mothering" (Winnicott, 2005/1971, p. 45).

In 1934, when Jim Jones was three years old, the family moved to nearby Lynn, where Big Jim's clan had lived for many decades. Now Lynetta was forced to spend much of her time working in a factory, leaving Jim either alone or in the care of relatives. A few years later, when Jim started the first grade, his mother set down a peculiar rule that must have added to his confusion about the meaning of "family" and "home": Jim was to remain outside the Jones' abode when Lynetta was away at work (Guinn, 2017a, p. 25). The child was often seen traipsing forlornly around the byways of Lynn, and many residents who felt sorry for him invited him into their homes for a much-needed meal and bath (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982, p. 13). Some of these well-meaning Lynn residents who were later interviewed recalled a cheerful

little boy whose refined manners made him seem more a tiny adult than a typical child. However, this facade had its flip-side, for once back on the streets, Jim could often be heard screaming obscene greetings such as “good morning you son of a bitch!” to children and adults alike (Chidester, 2003, p. 2).

Though his parents were emotionally unavailable to Jim Jones during his formative years, on occasion Lynetta did regale her son with rambling discourses about “the meaning of life” (Kelley, 2015). These monologues—often delivered to her son while Lynetta prepared for them a quick meal after a long factory shift—centered around her belief that history is peopled with superior souls with the rare ability to envision a better, more equitable society. Both Jim and she were reincarnations of these exalted ones, Lynetta held, but their current lives were nonetheless tragic because the world was fated to thwart their heroic efforts (Guinn, 2017a, p. 123). What happens to a great soul confronted with such a cosmic imbalance? According to Lynetta, she and her son had infinite potential. In fact, Lynetta intimated to her son, no matter how many martyrdoms high-principled souls such as themselves endured, they would nevertheless continue to inhabit new bodies until their vision was made a reality.

20.4.2 *Indiana Preacher (1948–1965)*

When Jim Jones was in his last year of secondary school, he set himself apart from other students by refusing to respond to other students’ greetings. Though no one could speak to him, Jones would initiate conversations himself on occasion, but the subject was always the same: there is injustice in the world, and the Bible teaches us to right society’s wrongs. Discussion was not in the cards, however, and Jones’ tendency to drown opposition through a torrent of biblical slogans insured that he made few friends. In 1949 he began study at the University of Indiana at Bloomington, where he occupied a dorm with a group of ebullient young men whose carefree lives were the opposite pole to Jones’ activism. One roommate, Ken Lemmons, recalls waking up in the middle of the night with a sharp pain in his back. He heard a hissing noise from the bunk beneath and peered over the edge of his mattress. It was not a snake, however. It was Jim Jones, who held out the hatpin and leered at the terrified Lemmons (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982, pp. 35–36). Here it seems Jones was venting his frustration at finding no followers in the well-adjusted, complacent student body at Bloomington; if he found no one who needed his nurturing, he could lash out violently, giving them a “need” if only in the form of an impetus to flee from injury.

In 1949, Jim Jones married Marceline Baldwin. He made it his mission to turn her allegiance from the Methodist God of her upbringing to his form of quasi-Christian social activism. Jones’ projected image as a perfect nurturer with no needs, aside from the desire to have subjects to nurture, was apparent even to his young wife. Marceline later wrote to Jones:

You had always been so strong, self-reliant and surrounded by people.... As a matter of fact, your tendency to pull or almost force others into your life indicated to me that [I] had not met your need. (Jones, 1970)

Jones became an assistant minister in the Methodist church, but he was soon asked to leave for financial wrongdoing, and so he went on the Evangelical preaching circuit, where he mixed a social activist message with “faith healings” some of which Jones and others later admitted were faked (Beck, 2005). Her son Stephan described Marceline as an exceedingly kind and loving person whose Achilles’ heel was her “inability to leave Dad,” which caused her to “set about making her penitentiary [i.e., her life with Jim Jones] a livable place” by doing what good she could for those around her. (Jones, 2005)

However, Marceline’s complicity in Jones’ deceptions was often quite profound: she would bake chicken gizzards every week that could be set out to rot and thus become the “cancers” that were held up as evidence of Jones’ healing ability at Evangelical revival meetings (Kilduff & Javers, 1978, p. 65).

Over the course of the 1950s the Joneses adopted seven children (including two Koreans and a black child) and had one by birth. In the early part of the decade, however, before they had any children of their own, the Joneses made a bizarre attempt to “adopt” Marceline’s cousin, Ronnie Baldwin. The ten year old boy came to live with the Joneses when problems arose with his foster family. Ronnie later revealed that Jones had a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality: in one moment he was sincere and kindly; in the next cagey and aggressive. Ronnie later told a journalist about a chilling incident that illustrated Jones’s mercurial temperament: a calm moment of play with the Joneses pet monkey turned to sheer terror when Jim sicced him on the boy. The monkey suddenly lurched and Ronnie was forced to run into the bathroom to avoid the beast’s teeth and claws. A high-pitched chortle—the same eerie laugh heard later in Jonestown while children and elders were abused (Jones, 1978b)—was Jim Jones’ response to the child’s distress (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982, p. 40).

After Ronnie had stayed with the Joneses in their Indianapolis apartment for some months, Jim placed previously drafted adoption papers in front of the boy and enjoined him to sign. Ronnie, who hoped one day to reunite with his biological family, refused. Jones’ need to control those whom he felt had been placed in his charge was never in more evidence: Ronnie was harangued for days about signing the papers. Once Ronnie left the Joneses’ home, Jim increased his efforts. He even phoned Ronnie’s elementary school and begged the child to return; later on, Jim cornered Ronnie at a Baldwin family reunion, going so far as to chase the boy for several blocks to convince him to return to the Joneses’ fold (Guinn, 2017a). For those Jim Jones took under his wing, leaving was not an option: it was either stay, and endure his intermittent abuse, or escape, and hope he gives up the pursuit.

Between 1955 and 1965, Jim Jones went from being an unknown assistant pastor at a small Methodist to being recognized as one of Indiana’s most progressive civil rights figures, having “almost by force of personality integrated Indianapolis: the schools, the stores, the restaurants” (Guinn, 2017b). All of this Jones accomplished shortly after he founded his own racially integrated church, The Peoples Temple, which opened its doors in 1956. While Jones was touted by local and regional public figures, those on the inside of Peoples Temple saw a different picture. Jones became paranoid and railed incessantly about enemies of the Temple who were supposed to have stuffed dead animals in Peoples Temple toilets and thrown rocks through his

bedroom windows. The latter claim foreshadowed the tall tales Jones later told in Jonestown about being shot at by C.I.A. agents (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982, p. 361). Another point of concern was the tight circle of devotees Jones drew to himself, who met with him in closed-door meetings and acted as his eyes and ears, spying on persons both inside and outside the Temple. It could be argued that these true believers—whose position mirrors that of the “inner circle of the dedicated within a broader circumference of the affiliated” (Billington, 1980, p. 8) in revolutionary organizations—were the prototype for the handful of “nurses” who later carried out Jones’ orders in Jonestown, in at least one case helping to decide on the use of the Flavor-Aid concoction on that fateful day (Moore, 1985, pp. 306–307; Jonestown, 2018).

20.4.3 *California Dreaming (1965–1976)*

In 1965, Jim Jones moved Peoples Temple to Ukiah, California. Around one hundred people came along, and more were soon to make the trek from Indianapolis to Mendocino County. Jones’ newly established Temple was more of a commune than a church, and Jones took the opportunity to reveal to his remaining followers the deeper meaning of his teachings (Silva, 2007). The Bible teaches that God ordained or at least allowed inequality, and thus the “black book,” as Jones dubbed it (Jones, 1974a), cannot be relied upon. Jim Jones was a “great soul” like Christ in that he attained to a level of psychic evolution that allowed him to guide all people to a state of equality through “divine socialism” (Kelley, 2016a). This ideology—sometimes also called “democratic socialism” (Jones, 1975)—held that social inequalities are a side-effect of the human race’s ongoing rejection of “communism,” the latter being for Jones nothing other than “sharing” (Jones, 1978a).

Jones wasted no time establishing churches in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and he even entered civic politics in the latter city until reports of abuse of Temple members began to reach area reporters. At this point, Jones’ nurture failure paranoia—centered upon individuals who tried to leave Peoples Temple because they did not have the higher consciousness of “communism”—expanded to take on American society in general, which Jones believed was conspiring to enslave and even exterminate its poor citizens, especially Black ones (Robbins, 2016, p. 44).

Along with the ratcheting up of socialism-talk came an intensification of efforts to guarantee that Peoples Temple members would remain under Jim Jones’ wing. Members were

intimidated [by Jones and his lieutenants] into signing power of attorney to Peoples Temple and signing false confessions to such crimes as child molestation.... (Harris, 1978)

Others were cajoled into “going communal”, which amounted to signing over land deeds and social security checks to Jim Jones (Guinn, 2017a, p. 190). At the same time, Jones’ inner circle was asked to cross over ever widening moral chasms: Temple members were sent on missions to gain access to potential recruits’ homes

and to obtain information that could be used to bolster Jones’ claims to clairvoyance (Scheeres, 2011, p. 25), and more than one member found him or herself being importuned by a Temple secretary to satisfy Jones’ sexual needs (Guinn, 2017a, pp. 224–226). Violence was never far from the surface of Jones’ controlling ways, as one of his sermons from the California days suggests. In this fire-and-brimstone rant, Jones’ fear of nurture failure is in evidence, especially as Peoples Temple followers have been reduced therein to images held within the leader’s mind. Jones baldly states that he could kill Temple members instantly, through his mere thought:

Your life’s gonna be gone in June...I’m just gonna breathe on you in a mirror, and you’ll be finished. Because I have a picture of you in my mind, and my mind’s just not like any mind you ever see, and so I’m gonna out-picture on you, and I’m gonna...reverse the energy, you’re in trouble, brother. (Jones, 1974b)

When Peoples Temple shifted its focus from Mendocino County to San Francisco, Jim Jones made a number of powerful friends, among them Assemblyman Willie Brown and Mayor George Moscone (Taylor, 1998). However, Jones—focused as he was on his need to control his followers at any cost—failed to see the suspicion that his efforts to support local politicians provoked. Hundreds of Temple members were bused to various districts of San Francisco to vote (illegally, it must be stressed) for local political offices; the same number of Jones’ followers were pressed into service to write daily letters to local newspapers in order to ensure a favorable slant on a Peoples Temple story, or even to quash items critical of Jones (Reiterman & Dooley, 1977; Bebelaar & Cabral, 2010). Onlookers at voting queues were shocked at the sight of Temple members filing out of Greyhound buses, expressionless and silent, only to be whisked away in a convoy of Temple vehicles once their ballots were cast (Kilduff & Javers, 1978, pp. 47–48). Jones’ and Peoples Temple’s involvement in San Francisco politics brought them much more scrutiny from local journalists, however, and Jones decided to leave the country rather than face possible criminal charges relating to fiscal misconduct, electoral fraud, and the ongoing abuse of Temple members.

20.4.4 Endgame: Jonestown, Guyana (1976–1978)

Between May and September 1977, Jim Jones and around 1000 of his followers left the United States for Jonestown, Guyana, a jungle outpost designed to accommodate no more than a third of that number. Around fifty Peoples Temple members had already been in Jonestown for a year, clearing land and building structures, including the central pavilion, where residents were summoned for the infamous “white nights”—all-night gatherings in which Jones began “suicide drills” that culminated in the November 18th tragedy (Nugent, 1979). In one of Jones’ pavilion rants he offers insights into his death wish, which began with Jones’ crisis over how to repay the cosmic “debt” he accrued when a pet in his care expired:

First time I felt guilt, when a little dog died, I wanted to commit suicide. But I had still some little dogs and cats alive that had me alone to take care of them. (...) Because I owed the debt to somebody. At that time, I didn't even think my mother give a shit. I later found out she did, but I knew my dad didn't, so it was just little animals that I stayed alive for, because I didn't know who in the hell was going to feed them, I was too young to know how to kill them. And...you finally wake up that life is shit, and any way I could have killed them - I soon learned it.... (Jones, 1978c)

In terms of the object relations basis of nurture failure, we can surmise that Jones first felt abandoned by his parents, then reinvented himself as a nurturer who would succeed where all had failed him. However, death intervened to rob Jones of his attempt to separate himself from “bad objects” (Fairbairn, 1943), in this case the internalized failed nurturers, Jones’ parents, classmates and teachers. The fact that Jones cannot hope to redress the imbalance of succorance in a life that ends “unfulfilled” (Jones, 1977b) leads him to extreme guilt. Jones seeks to deflect this guilt over being a failed nurturer by transforming it into violence that moves in two directions: toward Jones himself as one whose life is nothing but pain (Jones, 1977c: “All I’m getting out of this is pain...”), and toward Peoples Temple members, who must be cared for but for whom the future can only mean an ever-increasing cosmic imbalance in such “an inhumane world” (Jones, 1978d). Once we take into account the nurture failure schema of Jones, as well as the strange apocalypticism lurking beneath Peoples Temple doctrine, the decision of Jones and his inner circle to plan and carry out the murder/suicide that ended Jonestown is more comprehensible, though no less horrific.

In the white night speech quoted above, Jones pointed out that he had avoided suicide only by dedicating himself to unremitting care for his remaining charges; in the same breath, though, he cited his dawning knowledge of how “to kill them” as part of what “kept [him] through” (Jones, 1978c). We know that Jones actually killed some of his childhood pets (Kelley, 2015), even while he cared for others as if they were family members (Jones, 1977d). But what explanation can we offer for this lifelong vacillation between selfless care and inhuman harm? Nurture failure begins when negative feelings about failed caregivers are drowned out by a self-appointment as caregiver; however, this shaky attempt at burying the bad objects (failed parents and teachers, etc.), does not annul the reservoir of rage and fear accrued from childhood trauma (Gil, 1988, p. 58). Rather, the mental states charged with negative affect that originate in childhood neglect and abuse are split into two incompatible halves—the ascetic and the retributive—as they are projected outward as templates for interpersonal relationships. The ascetic aspect explains how Jim Jones found the inner strength to work more or less around the clock for years to improve the lives of his often poor, often minority followers; the latter half, while remaining connected to the ascetic side of the psychic dichotomy, found expression in Jones’ brand of tough love, which allowed him to feel that he could commit acts of violence, up to and including murder, against followers who were perceived to be losing their zeal for Jones and the Temple.

20.5 Conclusions and Directions for Research

This study has provided evidence that every phase of Jim Jones' life was guided by the schema we have termed nurture failure. As a child, Jones underwent persistent neglect and occasional abuse at the hands of his parents and other caregivers (Jones, 1977b); during his college years he cruelly manipulated many people who entered his orbit, including his wife and her cousin. Ominously, Jones threatened to commit suicide if his wife Marceline continued to pray to her Methodist God (Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982). This was a pattern that intensified once Jones founded Peoples Temple: no one was allowed to deny anything Jim Jones wanted, and the thing he dreaded most was being abandoned by anyone. The denouement of this sad drama is only too well known: over 900 people lost their lives in the Guyanese jungle, among them the subject of this case study.

A fruitful path for future psychobiographical research may be to combine this study's insights about Jones' nurture failure schema with considerations of religious psychology and the history of socialism. Jones believed that he was a reincarnation of an age-old “great soul” whose extreme demands, if met, would usher in a world without suffering, a world of true equality, where no one was “minority” (Jones, 1978c). Outside of his mother's homespun New Ageism, Jones' main inspiration doubtless was the Civil Rights Movement. Interestingly, scholars have likened the 1960s American movement to that of the earliest socialists in France over a century and a half earlier. To obviate elitist threats to the social order, some early French socialists hoped for an *association universelle* (Sewell, 1980) that amounted to a this-worldly activism centered upon redemptive suffering under a charismatic spiritual authority (Strube, 2017). There seems to have been no common denominator among the many systems of early French socialism when it came to proposing just who was fit to wield this spiritual potency. This socio-religious authority figure could be almost anyone, from Simon Ganneau, a reclusive guru with new teachings about gender and sexuality (Andrews, 2003, pp. 446–449), to a journalist-intellectual such as Pierre Leroux, who may have seen himself as a reincarnation of Pythagoras, the founder of the first religious commune (Andrews, 2002). Such a comparison between early French socialism and the milieu of 1960s utopianism may shed light on how such an eccentric figure as Jim Jones could command the allegiance of so many well-meaning followers.

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James L. Kelley, After receiving his education at three American universities, scholar James L. Kelley settled in to a life of researching and writing about, among other things, the fascinating lives of religious notables. His first two books are *A Realism of Glory: Lectures on Christology in the Works of Protopresbyter John Romanides* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute), published in 2009, and *Anatomyzing Divinity: Studies in Science, Esotericism and Political Theology* (Walterville, OR: TrineDay), published in 2011. His third book, *Orthodoxy, History, and Esotericism: New Studies* (Dewdney, B.C.: Synaxis Press, 2016), is a history of esoteric influences on Western religious culture.

Chapter 21

The Concept of “*Cratism*” and “*Heteropathic Feelings*” in the Psychobiography of Jesus from Nazareth (Psychobiography in Lvov-Warsaw School)



Amadeusz Citlak

Abstract At the beginning of the 20th century, the philosophical-logical Lvov-Warsaw School was also a psychological school in which several interesting psychological theories were developed. This includes the theory of actions and products of Kazimierz Twardowski and the theory of *cratism* (the theory of power) of Władysław Witwicki. Based on the *cratism* theory, the assumptions of which are very similar or an alternative to the Individualpsychologie of Alfred Adler, Witwicki created two original psychobiographies: of the Greek philosopher Socrates and Jesus from Nazareth. The origins of Socrates’ psychobiography date back to 1909, so it is one of the oldest psychobiographies in the world, and certainly the oldest non-psychoanalytical world psychobiography. Witwicki’s psychobiographies are distinguished by a few interesting elements, but two of them seem particularly important: (a) a cratic motivation (or the pursuit of a sense of power) was the main motivational mechanism for life, teaching and activities of Socrates and Jesus Christ; (b) the concept of heteropathic feelings, i.e. social feelings, whose constellation in the society and life of the individual depends, among others, on the intensity of their cratic desires. However, these psychobiographies were quite free and sometimes controversial, without empirical verification. The psychological assumptions developed in the school of Kazimierz Twardowski seem to me, however, to be of great importance for a better understanding of the dominant feelings and psychological motivation in ancient times, and therefore also particularly important when we try to create a historical/ancient psychobiography. In the proposed Sects. 21.1 and 21.2 will briefly present the basic assumptions of *cratism* theory in light of the psychological Lvov-Warsaw School, and then I’ll focus on the cratic psychobiography of Christ. I will not refer to it in detail here, because it was discussed in the available literature (Citlak, 2015, 2016a;

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Rzepa and Stachowski, 1993). I would like to take a step forward, namely to make a certain verification of Witwicki's assumptions:

- did the cratic motivation play an important role in the life of Jesus of Nazareth?
- what kind of heteropathic feelings (social feelings) can be attributed to the founder of Christianity?

The oldest image of Christ available to us is present in the four canonical Gospels, so we will reconstruct the abovementioned variables based on psycholinguistic (mainly quantitative) analysis of the original (Greek) text of the Gospels.

Keywords Psychobiography of Jesus · Theory of Cratism · Władysław Witwicki · Lvov-Warsaw School

21.1 The Lvov-Warsaw School and the Cratism Theory

The Lvov-Warsaw School was founded by Kazimierz Twardowski, who was a student of Franz Brentano. He came to the University of Jan Kazimierz in Lvov in 1892 (after finishing his education in Vienna) and took over the Chair of Philosophy (Kosnarewicz, Rzepa, & Stachowski, 1992). At that time, Lvov was not a significant center of philosophical thought, so by starting his scientific and didactic work from the basics, Twardowski could create a scientific environment according to his plans (Woleński, 2003). Lvov had been under the strong influence of the German philosophical tradition for a long time, and the most important problems of contemporary philosophy were quickly identified at the center of interests of Twardowski and his students. One of the key problems was the question of credibility of scientific philosophy, which could be supported—as many philosophers seemed to believe—by a nascent new branch of science—empirical psychology. For this reason, the first works created at the Lvov-Warsaw School (at that time still the Lvov School) were of a philosophical and psychological character. For example, Twardowski's dissertation *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen* (On the Content and Object of Presentations. A Psychological Investigation) from 1894, or later, the extremely important dissertation *On Actions and Products* (1912), can be included in those both disciplines of science.

Hope for use of psychology in philosophy, and especially in logic, were abandoned by Twardowski and his students after the publication of Edmund Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900–1901), who convincingly proved that the subject matter of logical research could not be replaced by the subject matter of psychological research, and the laws of logic could not be replaced by the laws describing the functioning of the human mind. Therefore, representatives of the Lvov School focused on philosophical and logical problems, treating psychology as a complement and not the main subject of interest. Nevertheless, in the first years of the school's existence (and later) psychology was very popular. Most of Twardowski's students took part in Wilhelm Wundt's experimental works in Leipzig, and sought inspiration

for their own research in Poland. Twardowski educated the first generation of Polish psychologists: Stefan Błachowski, Stefan Baley, Mieczysław Kreutz, and Władysław Witwicki (Rzepa, 1997).

Due to the focus on psychology in this chapter, I will skip achievements and research in the field of philosophy, about which the reader can easily learn from the very rich literature in English (Brożek, Chybińska, Jadacki, & Woleński et al., 2016; Rzepa and Stachowski, 1993; Woleński, 2003). However, it should be emphasized that several important theories and psychological concepts were developed during the Lvov period. The first is Twardowski’s theory of actions and products (Twardowski, 1912), which coordinates issues related to the subject matter and methodology of psychology in a very coherent way, and today may also be an important source of inspiration for psychologists in cognitive, and historical, and cultural areas (Bobyryk, 1997; Citlak, 2016a). The second is the tradition of introspective research, developed by Mieczysław Kreutz (Kreutz, 1949), referring to the introspective theory of F. Brentano. Introspection was understood here as the only way to reach the directly psychological experiences of a man with a much greater reliability than the experimental method or research using psychological tests (Rzepa & Stachowski, 1993). The third was Władysław Witwicki’s *cratism* theory (Witwicki, 1900, 1907, 1927), which I’m going to present later. It should be added that the character of the Lvov psychology deviated from the typical physiological psychology of Wilhelm Wundt in Germany or Edward Titchener in the USA. Its constitutive feature was the analytical approach and the tradition of descriptive psychology. The primary focus was on psychic/mental phenomena and how to adequately describe and understand them. To a lesser extent it was an experimental research, with purely causal relations. It was analytical, descriptive and humanistic psychology (Rzepa, 1998), and even to some extent phenomenological psychology (Płotka, 2017).

Unfortunately, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 ended the splendor period of the Twardowski’s school. Some of his students died, some emigrated abroad, conducting research in other countries (as for example Alfred Tarski at Berkeley University). Of great importance for the future of the school was, paradoxically, Poland’s regaining of independence in 1918 after 123 years of non-existence on the map of Europe. Special emphasis was placed on the development of the Polish language, and publications of philosophical or psychological achievements in Polish scientific journals were particularly appreciated. Unfortunately, this rapidly led to the encapsulation of the Polish scientific community. This was because most of the psychological works of the Lvov School, then the Lvov-Warsaw School, did not become integrated with the most important achievements of contemporary world psychology, and for many years it was not even published in German or English language.

21.2 Basic Assumptions of the Cratism Theory

The cratism theory was created in the circle of Lvov psychologists by Władysław Witwicki, one of the closest students of Kazimierz Twardowski (Citlak, 2016a).¹ Witwicki first presented the basic assumptions of the theory in his Ph.D. dissertation *Psychologiczna analiza ambicji* [Psychological analysis of ambition] (1900). This dissertation is considered to be the prototype of the later theory, because it contains its most important elements. In this dissertation, the basic motivational factor of human behavior is ambition, which (in short) leads people to overcome adversities, their own weaknesses and to compete with others. The essence of ambition is the desire to be above others, above one's own weaknesses, or the desire to be independent of all limitations. Witwicki considers ambition as an instinct that is innate, biological and occurs in this form for every healthy person. The gratification of ambition becomes a source of pleasant sensations and satisfaction.

This fundamental motivational mechanism, guiding human behavior and life, was presented by Witwicki during a congress of doctors and naturalists in Lvov in 1907 in a short treatise *Z psychologii stosunków osobistych* [On the psychology of personal relationships]. He introduces there the notions of cratism (from the Greek *kratos*—strength, power) and cratic cravings/desires. Here, the cratic motivation has two apparently opposite forms, namely the pursuit of destruction and humiliation (negative cratism) or the pursuit of support and uplifting (positive cratism). In both cases these opposite forms may concern oneself or others. In this way, Witwicki distinguished four possible constellations of cratic desires: (a) striving to humiliate others, (b) striving to self-humiliation, (c) striving to support/raise others, (d) striving to self-support/uplifting. However, despite different behaviors, they should be understood as manifestations of the same mechanism, which is the pursuit of a sense of power, domination and strength, and thus as manifestations of the cratic motivation, gratification of which provides deep psychic satisfaction and pleasure. In other words, the cratic desire means the pursuit of a sense of power.²

Witwicki presented the most advanced form of the theory in 1927 in the second volume of his *Handbook of Psychology*. Based on the cratism theory, he made a detailed and original analysis of interpersonal feelings that dominate between people, the so-called “*heteropathic feelings*” (in relation to others). What's more, the pursuit of a sense of power has become the basis for original analyses of comic phenomenon, art and religious experiences. To put it in a nutshell, Witwicki claims the emergence of certain heteropathic feelings whether the person is perceived by us as stronger, equal or weaker than us (in terms of subjectively perceived “life force”). Another important factor regulating the feelings we experience is the hostile or friendly attitude of a

¹W. Witwicki was the head of the Department of Psychology at the University of Warsaw in 1919-1948, a long-term lecturer in psychology, and he is the author of the first Polish two-volume *Handbook of Psychology* (1926, 1927).

²Witwicki was convinced that the pursuit of self-humiliation may result from the need to achieve greater self-control and may be a manifestation of the pursuit of a sense of power.

person towards us.³ In this way, Witwicki obtained six dominant constellations of “heteropathic feelings” based on the cratic motivation:

- (a) feelings towards stronger friendly people (respect, adoration, surrender);
- (b) feelings toward equals friendly (love, friendship, trust);
- (c) feelings towards weaker friendly (compassion, pity, mercy);
- (d) feelings towards stronger hostile (fear, anxiety);
- (e) feelings towards equal hostile (hatred, anger, hostility);
- (f) feelings towards weaker hostile (contempt, disgust, disrespect).

Based on the assumptions of cratism theory, and especially in relation to the four cratic tendencies, Witwicki also speaks about four types of character: a type predisposed to self-uplifting, a type predisposed to uplifting others, a type predisposed to self-humiliation, and a type predisposed to humiliation of others (Witwicki, 1939).

Although there is no place for detailed comparisons, I will add that the cratism theory is very similar to the theory of striving for superiority (striving for a sense of power) of the Austrian psychologist and student of S. Freud, Alfred Adler. What’s more, it is a theory that was created earlier than Adler’s theory, which is widely known in the world, and it is Adler who is considered to be the creator of the psychological theory of striving for a sense of power.⁴ But the blame lies on the side of Witwicki himself, who quite quickly got acquainted with the Adler’s theory and although he knew the German language, he never made a dialogue or polemics with Adler, and moreover, he never published his theory in German or English.

21.3 The Cratic Motivation of Jesus from Nazareth According to Witwicki

The basic assumptions of the cratism theory, which can already be seen in the Ph.D. dissertation (1900), were derived by Witwicki from personal research on ancient texts, above all from Plato’s Dialogues and Aristotle’s texts. He also translated Dialogues from Greek into Polish, using among others, the world’s most known translation of the Dialogues by E. D. Schleiermacher. Witwicki was fascinated by the character of Socrates and saw in his life cratic motivation. In comments to the Dialogues, Witwicki presented a psychological portrait of Socrates, which today we can call the cratic psychobiography of the Greek philosopher. This portrait was created slowly and in stages, because subsequent elements appeared during the translation of Dialogues (Rzepa, 2002). However, already in 1909, in the comments on *The Symposium*, there were the most important theses on the cratic motivation of Socrates

³An important role is also played by the above-mentioned four cratic tendencies, but they have not been adequately developed and woven into the whole of cratism theory.

⁴Adler announced first theses of his theory in the *Studie über Minderwertigkeit von Organen* (1907), then in *Über den nervösen Charakter* (1912) and *Praxis und Theorie der Individualpsychologie* (1928).

(Witwicki, 1909). By generalizing comments and psychological interpretation of Socrates' personality, it must be said that Witwicki interprets Socrates' aspiration to acquire knowledge, to know the world and to know eternal ideas as an attempt to gain an intellectual control over the surroundings and himself. He was guided by "the need for power, potency, superiority over the environment and over his own drives." According to Witwicki, Socrates

would not endure anybody's moral superiority (...) he was disgusted to see (...) a gourmet and a lecher, or any man who succumbs (...) to his own passions. He needed a sense of power. (Witwicki, 1999, Vol. I, p. 13).

The need for independence and "being above" did not allow him even to escape from prison just before his execution:

He will not come out of prison. He will not leave, because he could be humiliated in exile. He will not leave because he could not walk without an Apollo's wreath on his head, or bow down his head to escape (...) Ambition kept him in prison. (Witwicki, 1999, Vol. II, p. 607).

Excellent knowledge of the ancient Greek language and culture encouraged Witwicki to create a psychological portrait of another figure of the ancient world, Jesus Christ. However, it was a rather risky step because the preserved documents, such as the biblical Gospels, were written in Greek, but they reflect the realities of the Semitic world and Semitic mentality, i.e. that of ancient Israel. The Gospel of Matthew and John were written by Jews and the Gospel of Mark and Luke by the pagans, but they were people closely associated with the Jewish milieu of the apostles. Witwicki did not know the Hebrew language, and he also had poor orientation in the theological and biblical themes of that period. Nevertheless, the fact of creating the original theory of cratism to a large extent based on the analysis of ancient texts created great opportunities for research on other ancient documents. Therefore, during World War II, in 1942, he translated the Gospel of Mark and Matthew, attaching to them a large, 200-page commentary. This text was published in 1958 entitled *Dobra Nowina według Mateusza i Marka* [Good News according to Matthew and Mark].

The psychological portrait of Jesus is presented in the commentary on the Gospel, but it should be emphasized that the specificity of this commentary is largely based on the translation of the original text made by Witwicki. Unfortunately, this translation should be regarded as a free interpretation of biblical originals, which in many places is beyond the established (and contained in the original text) meaning of words and sentences. I described this issue some time ago and it is available to the reader (Citlak, 2015), so there is no need to discuss it in detail. I add just that this translation of the Gospel has two essential features. Firstly, it shows serious semantic shifts for important biblical concepts (e.g. *salvation, light, good*), which makes them devoid of religious significance and gain a secular sense, detached from the culture of ancient Judaism. Similar modifications can also be seen in the narratives regarding the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert and in Gethsemane, in which Jesus—according to Witwicki—experiences purely human dilemmas, and not as it is shown in the original, religious and redemption dilemmas. Secondly, the translated Gospels have

a clearly lower level of abstractness (abstractness of description) in relation to the original and the other Polish translations, whereby many of Christ's words and deeds have been deprived of universal meaning and have obtained an episodic, accidental character. It is difficult to say how much Witwicki was aware of such surgery, but in modern psychology it is a well described and empirically verified phenomenon as an operation to sustain or diminish stereotypes (Maass et al., 1989, 2006; Semin & Fiedler, 1991, 1992). According to this translation, whose central points obtained a slightly different characteristic than required by the specificity of Jewish culture, Witwicki created a new psychological portrait of Jesus Christ. And this portrait is surprising, if not shocking.

Analyzing the speech and deeds of Christ, Witwicki claims that it combines two difficult to reconcile motivational tendencies: the awareness of being the Son of God (as a source of constant striving to be above others) and the awareness of being a man. In Christian theology it is called the divine and the human nature of Christ; here it is treated as manifestations of psychological tendencies. This fact is visible on every page of the Gospel, and is an irrefutable proof of text's authenticity for Witwicki, because none of the evangelists were able to make such manipulations and to create such an extraordinary portrait of Jesus.⁵ Thus, Jesus from Nazareth always felt the “superhuman power” (p. 203), “he felt himself an exceptional and chosen being destined for power and triumph over the world” (p. 205). The author of the commentary goes much further and ascribes to the founder of Christianity tendencies that show his moral and religious message in a very negative light. First of all, when Christ heals the sick or the possessed, Witwicki perceives here the desire for domination and even for humiliation of those healed by Jesus. He helps those who suffer on condition that they “accepted humiliation without protest and recognized his beneficial power and the messianic dignity, regardless of his coldness, rejection and trampling” (p. 298). This means that the condition for healing and being helped was the acceptance of Jesus' domination and power as well as the willingness to self-humiliate.

The most surprising portrait of Jesus is presented by Witwicki on the analysis of the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). As the main message of the sermon, he sees Jesus' striving to make listeners feel a constant sense of guilt that would result from an impossibility of suppressing anger against enemies and sexual desire for women. Anger and sexual desire are natural reactions for the human body and psyche and cannot be eliminated. The Galilean peasant was not able to cope with such inhuman demands, which were causing the listeners a permanent sense of guilt. However, it was a deliberate exertion of Jesus, because it is to people so tainted with sin that he directs God's redemption. In other words, Jesus created his followers: “Such a picture of the believer's psyche would be adapted to the mission of the Anointed One as a gypsum form to the model (...) Among the people who are

⁵“Personality disorder could not be a innovation of the Evangelists - it is undoubtedly an authentic feature, which caused considerable difficulty and trouble to writers of memories and traditions, and also readers, it had to exist in reality. This cannot be invented if it is thought devious” (Witwicki, 1958, p. 202).

calm about their fate, who are engaged in own life, cheerful and content, Jesus would have no place to act. His sense of greatness and readiness to fight evil (...) demanded to the listener a sense of smallness, defilement, intimidation, submission and trust in him. It was difficult to find such environment already existing. Jesus created it in Galilee with the help of disciples, fishermen” (p. 241).

Witwicki also interprets the psychological characteristics of Jesus in light of the personality typology from the works of the German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer (Kretschmer, 1929). Namely, he sees in him a schizothymic type, i.e. similar to a personality with tendencies to schizophrenia. In his behavior Witwicki notices emotional coldness, relationship disorder and internal split (pp. 203, 213). It should be emphasized that despite the surprisingly negative interpretation, Witwicki did not consider Jesus from Nazareth mad, unable to evaluate the situation objectively. “Messianic fettle was a driving force for him, and a healthy, human assessment of the situation—he maintained it—served him as a regulator of own action” (p. 210).

Thus, how is Jesus from Nazareth presented in the light of the Witwicki’s cratic interpretation? He is a man consumed by a very strong desire for a sense of power. Cratic motivation is the foreground element of his psychological portrait. Unfortunately, this is an example of a negative cratism whose characteristic is the humiliation of others and self-exaltation. This is another example of the cratic motivation attributed to Socrates: the Greek philosopher sometimes exalted himself by humiliating others, but in the case of Jesus this tendency seems to be the basic. Witwicki attributes to Jesus generally difficult and disturbed relations with the environment, and therefore also more negative, hostile emotions (heteropathic emotions). Socrates’ cratic desire is characterized by much greater subtlety and optimism; he tries to compete with educated people and philosophers. Jesus stays in relationships with the poor people, the crowd, and he is rejected by the rabbinical community and the priestly elite. He makes the poor dependent on him, and he gains power over them. With some reservations it can be generally assumed that (although it was not formulated by Witwicki) Socrates reflects another type of the ancient culture, i.e. a highly developed, “democratic” Greece. Jesus from Nazareth could represent the theocratic Jewish world in which domination, power and obedience revealed a significant (valued) role. Unfortunately, in Witwicki’s interpretation, Jesus is an example of the extreme (and therefore unreal) intensification of such qualities.

It is not necessary to explain that Witwicki’s proposal did not meet with the approval or recognition of Polish biblical scholars. It was a psychological portrait so far inconsistent with the findings of the contemporary biblical literature that it did not gain the support of the theological environment, apart from people criticizing the position of the church during the domination of communism in Poland. One of the most serious disadvantages of this psychobiography was the omission of the important problems of biblical science, above all, the problem of Jesus’ self-awareness, that is how and in which sense Jesus from Nazareth was convinced that he was the Messiah and the Son of God. Another issue is the lack of references to the psychobiography of Jesus, already known in the first half of the 20th century (Hitchcock, 1908; Schweitzer, 1913a; Hall, 1917). In both cases, the theoretical conclusions that had been developed at that time did not allow to Witwicki to formulate the psychobi-

ography of Jesus in such a negative way and contradictory to the basic message of the Gospel.

Thus, why didn't Witwicki use this theological and biblical knowledge? Probably the author's personal religious experience had a significant influence on the final shape of the psychological portrait of Jesus. He grew up in an orthodox Catholic family; his mother grew up in one of the monasteries in Lvov, and his sister was a member of the religious congregation. The family atmosphere was overwhelmingly religious, full of Catholic duties and rituals. After the passage of years, Witwicki increasingly receded from the church and then from religion in general. Ultimately, he adopted an atheistic worldview. Personally, I see in Christ's psychobiography the influence of unpleasant childhood experiences and an aversion to the Christian (Catholic) religion, resulting from the family home. Although, as a man of science, Witwicki always emphasized that he only fought with superstition and religious fanaticism.

Does the psychobiography of Jesus have any value? The answer to this question is only in the source documents, which should be analyzed from the point of view of the basic assumptions of the cratism theory. The fact that Witwicki arbitrarily and peremptorily imposed his own convictions on the biblical text does not yet disqualify his theory. Moreover, it was based on the analysis of ancient Greek literature, which allows to suppose that it contains some explanatory potential which may be useful in the investigation of other ancient documents.

21.4 The Cratic Portrait of Jesus from Nazareth Regardless of Witwicki

In 1986 a therapist Jay Haley published the essay *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ*, in which he presented his own psychological theory, used in family therapy (Haley, 1969/1989), to analyze the life and activities of Jesus Christ.⁶ As a psychologist-therapist he is convinced that one of the fundamental features of human and animal communities is to create hierarchical organizations, in which the structure of power and domination plays a key role. Communities are always hierarchical and their members strive to get the highest possible position. Each member also uses complex impact techniques to achieve higher status or greater control over himself and the environment. Haley defines “power” primarily as the ability to control the social environment and the course of events. This is also how he understands the activity of Jesus, who used various techniques to gain control and power over the social environment in Israel. He was “a man with a passion to determine what was to happen in his environment” (Haley, 1986, p. 50). Haley draws attention to the various strategies of Jesus directed to gaining popularity and eventually domination: the criticism of the establishment, offering the right interpretation of the Torah, the

⁶My interpretation of Haley's work is based on Donald Capps (2004). Jesus as Power Tactician. *Journal for the Study of Historical Jesus*, 2/2, 158–189.

creation of a new religious organization. Jesus had extensive plans for his disciples, and he was creating tensions between them and their families and authorities at that time. The process of gaining power was going to be culminated in Jerusalem during the final confrontation with the priests. Jesus, in a conscious and aggressive manner, according to a well-thought-out strategy, wanted to lead the non-force (non-military) overthrow of the priests and rabbis. Haley refers to Konrad Lorenz's research and likens this to a rivalry between animals (especially wolves), when the physically weaker individual wants to force the winner to give up their mortal blow, then at the last moment unexpectedly show their neck and throat. Surprised by this behavior, the winner often doesn't take the life of the victim. The remnants of such a behavior are also common between people in both individual and group competition in history. Haley calls this the "surrender tactic",⁷ claiming that it was a key element of Jesus' strategy in the process of taking power. Jesus "did not intend to die but wanted to be arrested because he was pitting himself and the strength of his organization in a final power struggle with the establishment" (Capps, 2004, p. 172). Unfortunately, this tactic was very risky and—as it often happened—it could end in death. That's what happened to Jesus.⁸

Regardless of the extent to which Haley's argument is correct, it seems extremely interesting that both psychologists (Haley and Witwicki) present at least a similar position regarding the motivation of Jesus.⁹ In both cases, striving for power or at least striving for a sense of power played a significant role.

In this context, the monograph of Capps (2000) *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*, in which the author interprets the figure of Jesus through the prism of the theory of psychoanalysis, appears extremely interesting. One of the main theses is the assumption that in the social opinion of those times, Jesus had to be seen as an illegitimate child or bastard, deprived of contact with his biological father. In result, it had to have a profound impact on his mental state and his attitude towards himself and the world.¹⁰ Jesus was aware of a such negative social assessment, and also had

⁷Haley recalls the acts of Roman violence against the Jews during the reign of Pilate in Palestine, described in the texts of Joseph Flavius, when civilians in the act of opposition and helplessness literally threw themselves on the ground and uncovering the neck while demonstrating in this way, willingness to die. Sometimes this act ended with the withdrawal of the Roman army. Similarities are sought by Haley also in the peace struggles conducted e.g. by M. L. King or M. Gandhi.

⁸Haley concluded "It would seem possible to interpret the execution of Jesus as the result of a miscalculation on his part. Who could have guessed the Sanhedrin would condemn him without evidence, that Pilate would happen to ask the crowd for a decision, and that the crown [Jesus] had never wronged would ask for his death? Even a master tactician cannot take into account all the possibilities, including chance occurrences".

⁹Intriguing is also the conclusion of D. Capps after his reading of the works of J. D. Crossan. *The historical Jesus: The life of a Mediterranean Jewish peasant* (1991) and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994), that "they do not undermine his (of J. Haley – A. C.) portrayal of Jesus as a man who was oriented toward power and used it skillfully" (p. 185).

¹⁰The importance of the lack of a father in the life of Jesus is also discussed by A. G. van Aarde (2001).

to deal with a deep alienation. His religious activities, like criticism of priests and expulsion of traders from the temple, should be understood as attempts to deal with a sense of rejection and a negative self-esteem, and above all as an attempt to create a new identity. This identity was based not only on the apocalyptic tradition or on the pursuit of a social reform, but mainly on the feeling of being the Son of God, the Son of Abba. Initially, Jesus could even feel a deep grief for his mother (Mary), that she would allow him to become a child deprived of his natural father, but then this sorrow, anger and humiliation were internalized and became a part of his personality. Capps uses a lot of psychoanalytic explanations that seem to be quite coherent in the case of Jesus, but in my opinion they are difficult to verify (see Schultz, 2005; Anderson, 2002).¹¹

In this perspective the main motivational mechanisms could be deeply embedded in the unconsciousness of Jesus, and they could be formed in childhood. At that time his “utopian-melancholic personality” might also have been created. It will not be an exaggeration to say that when it comes to the motivation of Jesus, it is the most important (probably unconscious) desire to overcome the sense of social rejection, which in Alfred Adler’s psychology would be considered as a classic example of striving to overcome a sense of inferiority and achievement of a sense of power (Adler, 1907, 1920), and in W. Witwicki’s psychology it would be considered as a manifestation of the cratic desire—self- uplifting.

Harold Ellens also speaks in a similar way when he characterizes the psychological specificity of Jesus’ activity:

Jesus is not gentle, meek, or mild. He is robust, aggressive, uncompromising, incapable of negotiating his perspective on God’s ways with humans, argumentative in the uttermost, abusive with people he did not like and with ideas he thought were erroneous or simply false. He was immensely tough minded, and uncompromisingly courageous in what he stood for, without the slightest willingness to back down or compromise (...) Jesus’ life was one of perpetually aggressive claims for his vision of God’s reign. He constantly and intentionally provoked conflict and disruption of the status quo, spiritually and politically. He refused to negotiate, compromise, palliate, or mollify his insistence upon keeping his elbow perpetually in the eye of the people in power. In all this he would not back down. (Ellens, 2014, pp. 1.6)

Cratic motivation can also be seen in one of the first and important biblical-theological works of the modern period, in which the problem of the messianic self-awareness of Jesus was analyzed, namely in the dissertation of Reimarus (1778) *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten: Ein Anhang zu dem Fragment vom Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger*. As it is known, the main author’s thesis was rejected, but then Reimarus claimed that Jesus considered himself a political messiah, but his plans to take over political and religious power failed.

The vastness of literature available today on the aspirations and consciousness of Jesus from Nazareth does not allow everything to be reviewed here (e.g. Schweitzer, 1913b; Ellens & Rollins, 2004; van Os, 2011). However, it should be asked whether and to what extent the life of Jesus from Nazareth can be seen as the pursuit of power

¹¹This problem concerns especially the psychoanalytic interpretations of Jesus’ life, which are usually a fairly free interpretation of historical data or literary texts (see Miller, 1997; Wolff, 1979).

or strength. But even in such a question and in the literature on the subject that has been quoted here, one can notice at least several aspects of the same problem. In all interpretations of Jesus' behavior, whether psychological, historical or theological, we are dealing with some form of pursuit for power or a sense of power. In cases where we are dealing with a Jesus-revolutionist (e.g. Reimarus, 1778), it is described as striving for political power, and when Jesus is a religious reformer (Bultmann, 1920; Wrede, 1901) it is described as the pursuit for religious and more or less social domination. The same problem concerns the interpretation of Jesus as a religious messiah and redeemer of the world, in which the aspect of religious or spiritual domination comes to the foreground. The nature of these aspirations is usually multi-faceted, i.e. political, religious, and social, with a different distribution of accents. The complexity of the problem is additionally tangled by the use of contemporary psychological categories like personality, defense mechanisms, unconsciousness, motivation, individuation, etc. On the one hand, thanks to it the old problems of biblical studies take on a new theoretical perspective and enrich the existing knowledge about Jesus from Nazareth (Charlesworth, 2014). On the other, it causes some threats (Theissen, 2007; Lohfink & Pesch, 1987).

However, in all cases we are dealing with the activity of Jesus, whose distinguishing feature is—as it is said by W. Witwicki—cratic character. Although this cratic desire can be interpreted differently, it seems to be a permanent element of the psychological or theological analysis of the life of Jesus.

21.5 The Quantitative Analysis of the Gospel Based on Cratism Theory

The canonical Gospels clearly show the cratic character of both Jesus' activity and the socio-religious environment of that time. Using the word "cratic" I mean the mental perspective of authors of the Gospel and Jesus from Nazareth, according to which the distinguishing feature is the perception of the world in terms of strength, power, domination and asymmetry in social relations. This is actually quite an obvious statement, because it was just the world of Semitic culture, including the Jewish one. The social foundations of the ancient Jewish world were based on the principles of a theocratic state in which priests and prophets performed the decisive religious (and sometimes legal and political) role. The Mosaic law defined the life of the ordinary Israelite, prince, king, father, mother, son, etc. It existed as an absolute religious order, and the deviation from it was severely punished. In the early stages of the development of the Israeli society (at the turn of the second and first millennium BC), the foundation of social relations was tribal relations and tribal structure, which slowly faded into the institution of the king and the state administration for Saul, David and Solomon in the tenth century BC. However, the change processes were very slow and ultimately did not change the main religious foundations that determined the Jewish world in the first century AD. The Torah was still the foundation of both the

legal and mental culture of Israel of that time. One of the basic concepts of this culture was the concept of obedience and respect for authorities and divine laws. The religion of Judaism was distinguished by submission to God Yahweh and his messengers. Moreover, God Yahweh, besides being a merciful God, was above all a Lord and a ruler, a judge and a warrior, a defender of the faithful, but also a mortal enemy of the ungodly. Therefore, the conception of submission and anxiety played a significant role, and this was a clear sign of a respect and loyalty.¹² Obedience, respect, fear, and surrender belong to the central categories of Old Testament thought as well as New Testament’s thought, although it must be added that the New Testament’s world, influenced by the Greek-Roman culture, presented only some elements (remains) of the theocratic order.

This was clearly visible in the quantitative research of the Old and New Testaments, which I carried out using frequency analysis. Frequency analysis consist in counting appropriately selected words whose meaning refers to the studied concepts. This method is widely used in sociology, psychology and discourse analysis (Ertel, 1986; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1997). The increasing frequency of words or phrases is treated here as an indicator of linguistic and mental changes in the way we think about the world. In my actual study, the main concept was the concept of cratism in the sense of Witwicki: the pursuit for a sense of strength, dominance, and as tendency to perceive the social world in terms of power, asymmetry in interpersonal relationships, and being above others. The cratic perspective of the world is closely related to the emphasis of such relationships, which are characterized by submission, obedience, worship, reverence, and at the same time readiness to humiliate, show contempt, etc. The cratic orientation was studied here as the ratio/quotient of all Greek words referring to the concept of cratism (e.g. “strong”, “weak”, “worship”, “despise”, “rule”, “humiliate”, “master”, “servant”, etc., Morgenthaler, 1958) to all verses that were composed in the text. The higher the index is, the higher the level of the cratic perspective and perception of the world. The cratism quotient was only counted in the historical books of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint; Rahlfs, 1979; Morris, 1974)¹³ and the historical books of the Greek New Testament (Nestle & Aland, 1993)¹⁴ in order to be able to compare similar types of discourse.

As it is shown in the Fig. 21.1, the cratic orientation in the Old Testament historical books is higher (the difference is also statistically significant $z = 4.82$),¹⁵ which is consistent with the social changes of ancient Israel and slow disappearance of the strictly theocratic system. In the New Testament books the perception of the world in terms of domination and strength is clearly weaker. It also means that social relations in the environment of the early Christians (followers of Jesus) were characterized to a lesser by asymmetrical relations, differentiation in the hierarchy, and such cratic

¹²Ex 24,7; Josh 1,17; 1 Sam 15,22; 12,24; Ps 22,24; Is 1,19; 8,13; Mic 5,14; Mal 2,5; Luke 12,5; Rom 5,19; 6,16; 2 Cor 10,6; Phil 2,8; Heb 5,8; Rev 14,7.

¹³Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemia, Esther.

¹⁴Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles.

¹⁵See Table 21.1 at p. 385.

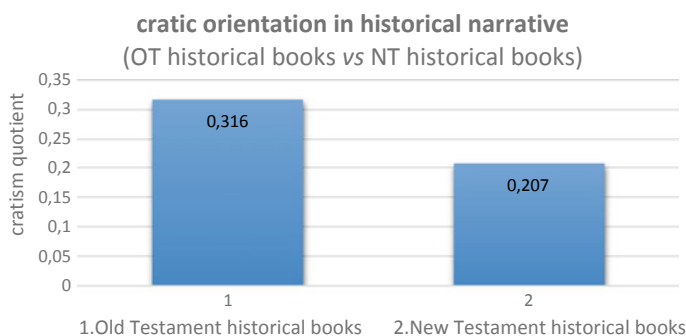


Fig. 21.1 Cratic orientation in historical narrative

feelings as worship or contempt-disgust. These results are similar to the outcomes in another of my studies of biblical texts, namely in all Hebrew books of the Old Testament and all Greek books of the New Testament (Citlak, 2016b¹⁶).

The proposed explanation of the above changes is of course not the only possible one. An important role could be played by Jesus from Nazareth and his teaching, which in many moments seem to differ greatly from the traditional social order of those times. This is a characteristic element of his monologues and dialogues with the apostles: “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9,35)¹⁷ or “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15,15).¹⁸ Different levels of cratism in traditional Jewish society (in Old Testament) and the Jewish-Hellenistic environment (in New Testament) should therefore also be visible in Jesus’ speeches. To test our assumptions, we carried out a similar analysis of the cratic intensity in Jesus’ speeches presented in the four canonical Gospels. We counted the frequencies of linguistic (cratic) elements in the Greek text of the Gospel, i.e. in the Greek speeches of Jesus to the people as well as the apostles and rabbis. The obtained results (all cratic words to all verses which were composed the text) are as follows:

¹⁶In the recent study (in 2016), the cratic quotient was calculated in the Hebrew Old Testament, taking into account the broader “cratic” vocabulary, including such terms as the “king”, “ruler”, “war”, etc. This caused an excessive increase of the index in Old Testament (0,612), but did not significantly affect the index in New Testament (0,231).

¹⁷English version according to *The Holy Bible. New King James Version*. New York: American Bible Society, 1980.

¹⁸However, in another place, Jesus presents a traditional (we could say a more cratic) line of social relations: “So likewise you: when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say: We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17,10).

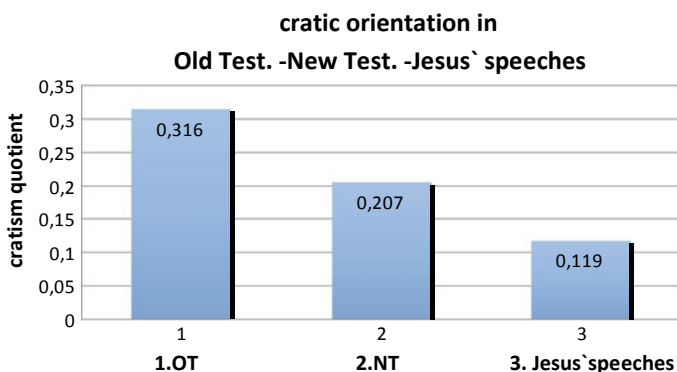


Fig. 21.2 Cratic orientation in the Old Testament—New Testament—Jesus speeches

Figure 21.2 clearly shows that the general level of cratism in Jesus’ speeches for all Gospels (0,119) is almost two times lower than the general cratic level in the New Testament historical books (0,207, differences statistically significant $z = 4.40$), and almost three times lower than the general cratism level in the Old Testament historical books (0,316). This means a less cratic perception of the world and a less cratic model of social relations preferred by the founder of Christianity. Indirectly, this also means that his teachings contributed to changing social relations in the early Christian environment in comparison to traditional Jewish society.

However the question arises: are the speeches of Jesus from Nazareth the same in all four canonical Gospels? It is obvious and emphasized by biblical scholars since a long time that the image of Jesus Christ shown in the Gospels is quite diverse. For example, Jesus’ portrait through the eyes of evangelist John differs in some aspects from the portrait of Jesus seen through the eyes of evangelist Matthew. Therefore, we assumed that one could expect a similar differentiation of the cratic orientation in Jesus’ speeches in four Gospels. By using the same cratic quotient, the following results were obtained (Fig. 21.3).

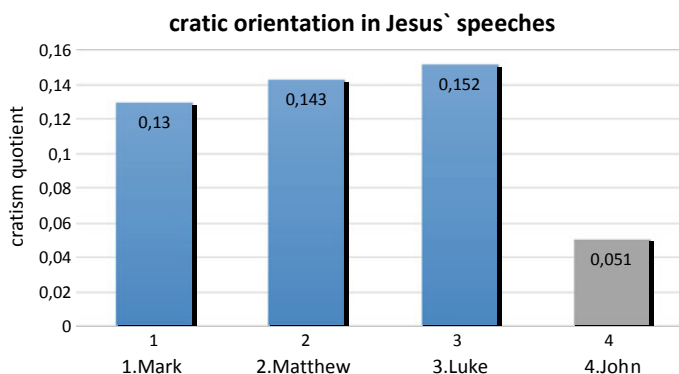


Fig. 21.3 Cratic orientation in Jesus' speeches

The values of quotients are consistent with the assumptions, i.e. the cratic orientation of Jesus' speeches is not identical in each Gospel. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the differences between the cratic quotients for the synoptic Gospels, although different arithmetically, do not show a difference at the statistical level (see Table 21.1, $z < 1.96$).

It can be said that there is not a significant difference, which in practice means that the cratic vision of the world, which we see in Jesus' speeches in the synoptic tradition, refers to a similar social order and similar social relations. This is an extremely important result, as it confirms the findings from contemporary biblical studies, according to which the synoptic tradition presents a rather coherent picture of the theological message of Jesus. However, we could add that the synoptic tradition also presents a coherent psychological and social image (at least when it comes to cratic vision of the world). It is worth adding that the compatibility between the findings of biblical scholars and psychologists is not as frequent as we would expect, and that increases the value of the above result.

In addition, the characteristic feature of Fig. 21.3 is the large difference between the synoptic tradition and the Gospel of John (the difference is statistically significant, $z > 1.96$). Jesus' speech in this Gospel reached the lowest level of cratism. The image of Jesus in this version moves away from the synoptic tradition and this vision of the social world is clearly different: key categories such as submissiveness, domination, and strength are less important. In the light of cratism theory, such a large change in the cratic orientation is directly related to the another type of social relations. If the feelings of praise, submission, or lord-servant hierarchy did not play a dominant role in those relations, what kind of social relations played a prevailing role here? According to the assumptions of W. Witwicki's theory, the natural effect of such changes is usually the appreciation of relationships based on trust, friendship and emotional closeness. Such a perspective seems particularly interesting in the case of the Gospel of John, where love, friendship and a kind of intimate relationship

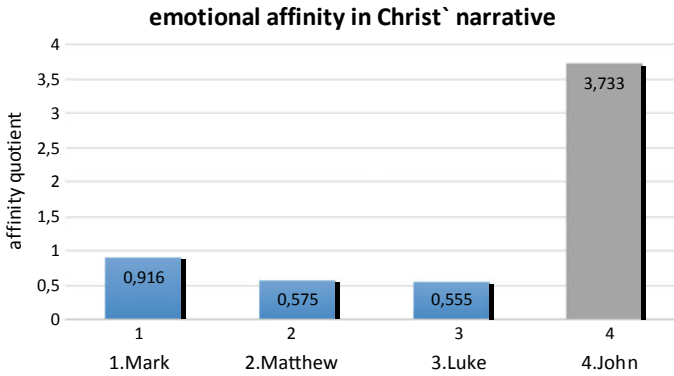


Fig. 21.4 Emotional affinity in Christ’s narrative

between Jesus and his disciples seem to be more strongly exposed than in the synoptic tradition.

To test this hypothesis, we performed a simple frequency analysis of selected heteropathic feelings in four gospels. It included the frequencies of Greek words meaning emotions, in a sense “from the inside”, of a whole range of heteropathic feelings (love, friendship, trust) in relation to words denoting emotions typical for cratic relations (worship, adoration, admiration, contempt, disgust, humiliation, anxiety, fear). We call this indicator, which is calculated as a quotient of both groups of expressions, the affinity quotient (Fig. 21.4).

As we can see the affinity quotient (emotional closeness) is several times higher in Jesus’ speeches described in the Gospel of John than the speeches contained in the synoptic tradition. This result is fully in line with the results presented in Fig. 21.3, and it shows a very important psychological dependence, consistent with Witwicki’s theory: the higher the level of cratism is, the lower the emotional closeness between members of the community/society. By combining the results from Figs. 21.3 and 21.4, we can conclude that in the Gospel of John we have the lowest level of cratism and at the same time the highest level of emotional closeness, whereas in the synoptic tradition it is the opposite.

21.6 Conclusions

The theories and frequency analyses discussed here allow us to draw several conclusions. First of all, I believe that the psychological tradition of the Lvov-Warsaw School, including the cratism theory which was developed almost a hundred years ago, may be very helpful in the interpretation of ancient documents, including biblical sources. Its great advantage is the fact that the main theses were worked out on the basis of ancient text analysis by the psychologist and classical philologist

Władysław Witwicki. It is rare (also today) to find an expert of these fields of science. Because usually there are psychologists who do not have biblical preparation, or there are biblical scholars/theologians who do not have psychological preparation (not to mention knowledge of classical languages). The usefulness of the psychological concepts of Witwicki’s cratism theory can be clearly seen when we analyze canonical Gospel texts and try to reconstruct some aspects of the psychological image of Jesus from Nazareth. And although the psychobiography of Jesus presented by Witwicki in 1958 is generally a misinterpretation and an attempt to get his atheistic view into the Gospel, it is appropriate to modify the cratism theory and to use its basic assumptions independently of the personal relationship with religion.

Secondly, I think that in light of the above analyses, one should ask about the possibility of constructing Jesus’ psychobiography based on the Gospel texts. The difficulties in creating a psychological, or rather psychiatric, image of Jesus have already been emphasized by Albert Schweitzer (1913a), Klaus Niederwimmer (1968), and currently by van Os (2011¹⁹), but here is something else and we need a wider perspective. I pass over the obvious fact that there are no texts written by Jesus of Nazareth himself, so we will never create his psychobiography, but only the psychological interpretation of the image of Jesus shown in the Gospels. However, the point is that the vast majority of authors of psychobiography do not make a special difference between Gospels and treat them as important and complementary sources of information about his personality or motivation. However, in light of the above results, it seems obvious that there is no single psychological portrait of Jesus presented in four Gospels. After generalizing minor differences between the synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke), it should be said that we are dealing with at least two portraits: synoptic and John’s. The cratic orientation and heteropathic feelings explored here also include important elements of social perception and social relations, so they should be considered as significant theoretical constructs and significant psychological variables. Even if we base our conclusions on ordinary frequency analysis. The contemporary psychobiography of Jesus from Nazareth should take into consideration the diversity of both traditions (John’s and synoptic).

Thirdly, everything indicates that there is some relationship between the intensification of cratic desires/the cratic perspective of the world and the dominance of some heteropathic (social) feelings. Jesus, with a lower level of cratism, prefers—or is presented as someone who prefers—a greater emotional closeness with the environment, especially with his disciples. Such dependence was confirmed not only in Figs. 21.1 and 21.2, but also in other studies on the biblical discourse (Citlak, 2016b) in relation to large social groups, such as Israeli society and the first Christian communities. In addition, we see this relationship in the case of one person only—the founder of Christianity: we have two early Christian traditions in which the change of one variable (the level of cratism) goes hand in hand with the change of a second

¹⁹In this context, the words of B. Van Os are also worth noting “The studies of Capps, Miller and van Aarde are excellent examples of integrating biblical scholarship with psychology. But their psychological reconstructions can only be regarded as challenging and stimulating hypotheses, as there is simply not enough data to write a good psychobiography of Jesus on the basis of his childhood experiences” (van Os, 2011, p. 23).

variable (heteropathic feelings). Considering the fact that Jesus' speech is characterized by the lowest—in comparison to the Old and New Testament—level of cratism, one can suppose that it had a significant influence on social relations prevailing in the first Christian environment (see Theissen, 1977).

The notion of cratism seems to be a variable sensitive not only to social changes, reflecting a different type of social relations, but also a variable that reflects changes in social perception and social cognition, which affected early Christian communities in the 1st century AD, modifying their image of Jesus—Savior. I don't explain exactly why and for what reasons two psychological images of Jesus were created. This problem should probably be solved by biblical scholars, theologians or sociologists. But I think that an important role was played by the socio-religious context of Christian communities. Probably, a different *Sitz im Leben* forced Christians to focus on other aspects of the activity and teachings of Jesus from Nazareth... but this is just an assumption that requires a separate investigation.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the quantitative (frequency) analyses, although having their drawbacks, enable us to reach the structural properties of the text, closely related to the cognitive perspective of the authors. The frequency of using certain language categories can be an important indicator of mental changes. The big advantage of such a source study is the ability to collect empirical linguistic data in a quantitative and numerical form, and then subject them to simple statistical tests. This creates a chance to draw the research in the field of psychobiography (which usually has the character of free interpretation of documents) closer to the requirements for psychological research. And most importantly, it minimizes the subjectivity and latitude of conclusions drawn by the researchers. As Charlesworth says "Perhaps a Popperian-like "falsification" of any psychological hypothesis about Jesus should become integral to the study of the historical Jesus; then we would avoid any form of bias and self-fulfilling conclusions that obstruct the way toward a faithful portrait of Jesus (...) Taking this psychobiographical approach might lend more "viability" to Jesus Research" (Charlesworth, 2014, p. 449).

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Chapter 22

Psychological Reflections on the Build-Up to the First Heart Transplant



Roelf van Niekerk, Tracey Prenter and Paul J. P. Fouché

Abstract On the 3rd December 1967, Professor Christiaan Neethling Barnard performed the first human heart transplant at the Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. His extraordinary career as physician and cardiac surgeon included many exceptional achievements that culminated in the first human heart transplant and contributed to his international reputation as medical pioneer. Barnard was born after the end of World War I and grew up in rural South Africa. He adjusted well to school and early in his career demonstrated ability to work hard. Apart from his initial medical training, it took Barnard 21 years to prepare for the operation that revolutionised the treatment of heart diseases. Ultimately, the preparation for the first heart transplant included intensive studies, methodical goal-setting, demanding laboratory experiments and operations, the acquisition of a repertoire of surgical skills, as well as training a team to support his work, investigations into organ rejection and networking with international experts. Although it is based on an academic psychobiography (Master's dissertation), this chapter is an attempt to formulate a non-academic psychobiography of Barnard's career. In the academic psychobiography, the career development framework of Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk was employed. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Barnard's general career development, this chapter aims to illuminate the specific events and experiences that culminated in the first human heart transplant.

Keywords Career development · Christian Barnard · Heart transplant · Psychobiography · South Africa

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22.1 Introduction

Barnard died in 2001 at the age of 79 years. His death ended an illustrious career that spanned six decades. Barnard has clearly, as a colleague remarked, *written his name in the history of medicine* (Novitzky, 1992, p. 269). Although he is mainly known for performing the first human heart transplant, his extraordinary career included many achievements, such as (1) the production of prosthetic heart valves; (2) the use of pacemakers; (3) the establishment of international surgical standards for treating rare heart defects; (4) the treatment of tuberculous meningitis; (5) the reduction of the mortality rate for intestinal atresia from 90 to 10%; (6) the successful transplantation of a dog's head; (7) the first kidney transplant in South Africa; (8) the world's first human heart transplant; (9) first piggy-back heart transplant, (10) heart-lung transplant; as well as (11) the publication of more than 200 scientific articles and 18 books (van Niekerk, 2007). These achievements contributed to his international reputation as medical pioneer.

This chapter focuses only on the first part of Barnard's career that culminated in the first heart transplant in 1967. It reviews his childhood; medical training; initial jobs in private practice and general hospital; specialist training in Cape Town; studies in the United States; and his ensuing career as specialist and academic.

Essentially, this chapter represents a response to three questions: (a) Who do we write psychobiographies for? (b) How are psychobiographies formulated? and (c) How could we make psychobiographies more relevant in society? It attempts to make a psychobiography accessible to a wider readership. We approached the challenge by adapting the aims of the original study. Although references were retained, they will be eliminated should an article be submitted to a popular publication. The original aims were replaced by one question: What factors enabled Barnard to transplant the first heart? The chapter is based on a thesis (van Niekerk, 2007), two conference papers (van Niekerk & Vos, 2007; Vos & van Niekerk, 2006), a journal article (van Niekerk, Vos & Fouché, 2015), and two existing book chapters (van Niekerk, Perry, & Fouché, 2016; van Niekerk, Prenter, & Fouché, 2019).

The data suggests that a combination of experiences and events contributed to Barnard's development that culminated in him transplanting the first heart in December 1967. These include at least seven factors, namely (a) the death of Barnard's siblings, (b) inferiority feelings experienced during childhood, (c) appropriate career choice, (d) a combination of personality characteristics, (e) exposure to a range of extraordinary role models, (f), innovation, and (g) the South African medical context.

22.2 Death of Siblings

Barnard was the third of five sons. Two siblings died before his birth. Abraham, died at the age of two years because of a heart disease, while an unnamed sister (one of twins) died at birth. The death of children/siblings usually has a profound

influence on families and change the way members experience themselves, others, and the world. Naturally, emotional relationships with the deceased continue and often become stronger over time.

Psychologists discovered that children who lose siblings tend to react in a predictable manner (Crehan, 2004). To some extent, their grief reactions are similar to those of adults. However, in the case of children, emotions are expressed differently and may dissipate sooner. The grief reactions include denial, sadness, longing, anger, withdrawal, and guilt (e.g., survivor guilt). In some cases, grief-stricken children present with behaviour problems, for example attention-seeking behaviour or regression. However, in some children the loss of a sibling may contribute to the development of personality strengths.

During Barnard's early childhood, his parents were still processing the deaths of their two children. The way they commemorated the deaths made Barnard aware of the important role played by childhood diseases (including heart disease) and death. Children initially view death as a temporary separation. It takes years for children to grasp the finality of death. A more realistic understanding emerges at approximately the age of eight years. Thereafter death is understood as final and something that can happen to anyone at any time (Miles, 2010).

Witnessing the sadness of his parents, Barnard had to process the deaths of siblings he never knew. It seems that he tried to make up for the loss by being a good child, working hard, performing well at school, making his parents proud, and making something of his life. Later in his life, Barnard symbolically honoured the memory of his deceased siblings by devoting himself to the cause of healing and saving lives. According to Doctor David Cooper, a surgeon who studied under Barnard and who later compiled a book of testimonials to Barnard to mark the 25th anniversary of the heart transplant:

One of the major achievements of his career... was the development of the practice of intensive care of patients at Groote Schuur Hospital and the Red Cross Children's Hospital... The Cape Town heart surgery programme grew from strength to strength, particularly in the field of children's surgery for congenital heart disease. The results were outstanding, ranking with the best in the world. (Cooper, 1992, p. 44)

During his studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) Barnard was again confronted with the inevitability of death when a close friend, Michel Rossouw, died as a result of pulmonary tuberculosis. The loss overwhelmed Barnard with grief and guilt. Barnard knew for some time that Rossouw had been ill, but the hectic academic schedule prevented him from visiting his friend.

In the absence of clearer evidence we can only speculate about the influence of the siblings' deaths on Barnard's career. However, it is likely that these emotionally charged experiences influenced the Barnard household and had an impact on his early experiences and decision to study medicine.

22.3 Inferiority Feelings

Barnard grew up in Beaufort West, a rural town in the Karoo (an indigenous word meaning hard or dry), a vast and sparsely populated region in central South Africa. Beaufort West—also known as the Capital of the Karoo—was founded in 1818, just more than a century before Barnard was born. It is situated in an agricultural district based mainly on sheep and game farming, and serves as administrative centre of the region.

Barnard's father was known for his unwavering faith and as a humble, gentle, considerate and dedicated missionary. Louwtjie, Barnard's first spouse, described his father as the only holy person she ever met (Barnard, 1971). Marius, Barnard's younger brother, concurred:

I sincerely believe he went straight to heaven when he died. He was a man whose consideration was only for others. He was the kind of person who would give someone in need the last crumb out of his own mouth. (in Logan, 2003, p. 24)

Barnard's mother, on the other hand, was a reserved, determined, and perfectionistic woman. It was difficult, if not impossible, for her children to meet her standards. Barnard commented:

I could never please my mother...She was a strongly determined woman – insisting everything be perfect, that the boys be first in school, and that we never admit defeat. I was afraid of my mother, of displeasing her and making her angry. (in Logan)

Some children become discouraged and may act out when facing extreme parental standards. In contrast, the same set of circumstances motivate others to try harder to achieve the impossible. The available data suggests that Barnard never gave up trying. At the age of 45 years, and immediately after the first human heart transplant operation, Barnard phoned the hospital superintendent and his wife, Louwtjie, to inform them that the operation had been performed. But, on the way home early in the morning he first drove to the retirement village where his mother stayed to tell her about his achievement.

During most of Barnard's life, South Africa was organised according to the government policy of racial segregation. This policy had direct implications for Barnard's family as his father was the religious leader of the so-called *coloured* community. In South Africa and neighbouring Namibia, the term *coloured* has a particular connotation. It is an ethnic term used to describe persons of mixed race who have ancestry from various groups inhabiting the region. During the Apartheid era the term was used to describe one of the four racial groups defined by law in an effort to promote segregation and maintain white supremacy. The groups were black Africans, coloureds, Indians or Asians, and white Europeans. Generally, the European people looked down on coloured people and on white people who associated with them. Apart from the lower status afforded to people who worked among the coloured population, Barnard's father also received a lower salary than, for example, the religious leader serving the more privileged white community.

Barnard's parents did not allow salary differences and the prevailing racial relations to influence them. They single-mindedly devoted themselves to their calling. Although they were not influenced by the discriminatory attitudes of the townsfolk, the Barnard children paid a price. At school, the Barnard brothers were teased because their father worked with coloured people and because the family was poorer than the other white families. A school friend, Pieta Fourie commented:

He usually wore hand-me-down khaki shorts, cut from his father's trousers and often worn first by his older brothers... Whenever there were birthday parties Christiaan would arrive in his khaki shirt and shorts, always with a patch on the seat. I used to feel sorry for him, so I asked my father to make him some shorts for free. (in Logan, 2003, p. 32)

Naturally, the effects of the teasing and poverty resulted in anger and bitterness. Years later, after Barnard achieved fame, his childhood friends recalled that as a child he had a chip on his shoulder because of his father's occupation and the family's socio-economic status.

The positive role of adverse experiences in the development of strengths has been carefully documented by psychologists (e.g., Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). For example, feelings of inferiority may serve as motivation to go out of one's way to demonstrate skills and worth, often in competitive situations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the teasing had a motivating effect on Barnard. From an early age he took his school work as well as extra-mural activities seriously. He was a versatile achiever and this afforded him popularity. For example, when they celebrated the end of their school careers, Barnard's classmates nominated him to make the valedictorian speech.

Another area where Barnard's strong motivation had been evident was athletics. Barnard excelled in middle distances. While at high school, Barnard competed in two one-mile races against the son of Reverend Rabie, his father's counterpart who served the white community. Barnard was younger than Daantjie, an accomplished athlete, and therefore the races were run on a handicap basis. Barnard put in a determined effort, but lost on both occasions. Despite the losses, these races achieved symbolic meaning in Barnard's life, and he often referred to the role they played in the development of his competitiveness.

As Barnard's popularity at school increased, the effect of his father's occupation and the family's socio-economic standing decreased. However, at the start of his medical studies at the UCT, financial pressure troubled Barnard again. Fortunately, he managed to obtain scholarships on condition that he passes all his subjects. Again, the pressure motivated Barnard to the extent that he passed the first year with distinction.

The above information suggests that Barnard's motivation to work hard and achieve were rooted in deep-seated inferiority feelings that he experienced during childhood.

22.4 Career Choice

Career choice is one of the most important developmental tasks adolescents face (Sharf, 2013). It is basically a process of matching a particular occupation with a combination of aspirations, personality traits, interests, needs, talents and limitations. A match between individual and occupation requires considerable self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the world of work.

The information on Barnard's career choice is interesting. He considered only one option, namely medicine. There are three explanations for this. Barnard said that he was motivated by money and that he therefore chose a career that guaranteed a good income. A school friend confirmed this and said that Barnard was obsessed with money from an early age (Logan, 2003). Barnard's mother had a different view. She believed that the death of Barnard's older brother, Abraham, due to a heart condition played an important role in his decision. Logan (2003) added to the speculation by highlighting a government policy that existed during World War II when Barnard started his university career. The government motivated learners to study engineering or medicine by offering them exemption from military service. This policy popularised the two professions and resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications. Barnard's older brother (Barney) chose engineering, but he did not pass his subjects first time around. He advised Barnard to rather study medicine.

With his choice made, Barnard committed himself to medicine. However, later in his career he often experienced ambivalence about his choice (Cooper, 1992). For example, after he qualified, he was uncertain about what to do next. He did not have a clear goal in mind and was not particularly ambitious. Although he was offered a position in a maternity hospital and an opportunity to work with Professor Cuthbert Crichton, one of his role models in the field of gynaecology, he wavered. Cooper drew attention to his uncertainty:

Though Chris had some deep feelings that his long-term future was more in the field of hospital practice, possibly in obstetrics and gynecology, he and Louwtjie were planning to marry and were attracted by the increased security and financial rewards of a family practitioner compared with those of a junior hospital doctor. (1992, p. 39)

Within two years, Barnard's decision to join a private medical practice backfired. Barnard's partners found it difficult to work with him and requested him to leave the practice. Barnard had no choice. This introduced a brief period of unemployment, considerable strain on his young family, and intense self-reflection. After a few months, Barnard was offered a position at the City Hospital in Cape Town, a hospital specialising in contagious diseases. Here, he worked for approximately two years before joining academia as a clinical assistant.

The initial ambivalence and fallout with colleagues impacted on Barnard's career. Psychologists estimate that most people conclude the career choice process—the choice of both occupation and the preferred context to work in—between the ages of 18–25 years (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010). Due to the duration of medical training and the problems he experienced in his first job, Barnard completed

this stage six years later at the age of 31 years. This suggests that he had a slow start to his career and required additional time to find his feet.

Barnard's initial uncertainty and floundering came to an end when he accepted the position of clinical assistant at the Groote Schuur Hospital in 1953. Logan commented:

By now, in his early thirties, Barnard had discovered his true talents – the drive to see a way forward where others saw only obstacles, a fascination with research and new ideas, the nerve to take a step others might ponder...now his mind was set on moving on and up, and he found his persistence had paid off. (2003, pp. 78–79)

In the year he joined Groote Schuur Hospital, he was awarded two post-graduate degrees, namely a master's degree in medicine (M. Med.) and a doctorate in medicine (M.D.) degree. It was clear that the hospital environment was a better match for Barnard's interests and abilities than private practice. Here, the ambivalence and instability gave way to drive and ambition. The new job and the postgraduate degrees established him in the career of his choice and offered him the opportunity to focus on the next development task, namely to develop competence and confidence as a medical specialist and researcher.

Barnard coped successfully with the next challenge. He required little time to acquire and demonstrate expertise. In fact, he soon established a reputation as a remarkably versatile and innovative surgeon. He conducted ground-breaking research and was responsible for several surgical breakthroughs. On top of that, he developed proficiency in academic administration and management.

However, the uncertainty and ambivalence returned again as he approached the middle stage of his career. Midlife crises are typical occurrences experienced by workers in their 40s (Sharf, 2013). Barnard's midlife crisis had three components. Firstly, he received tempting job offers from institutions in the United States. By now Barnard was aware of the disadvantages of being geographically removed from the institutions that were at the forefront of heart research. The job offers added to his ambivalence and frustration. Secondly, his demanding approach to work resulted in intense conflict with colleagues. Logan commented on Barnard's temper:

Barnard's impetuous temper in and out of theatre was gaining notoriety...He worked slowly, thoroughly, generating enormous tension during an operation. For some it had the effect of an electric charge that kept them alert. For others, it created unbearable pressure. Many would avoid working with him altogether or eventually left for jobs elsewhere. He sought and expected perfection from the people around him. Those who failed to make the grade suffered abuse. (2003, p. 106)

Thirdly, the hard work of the previous decade was beginning to take its toll. Barnard devoted much time to his career. In fact, he was prepared to make any sacrifice in order to make progress. This influenced the quality of his life, particularly his family life. He was not convinced that this was the career and lifestyle he wanted and considered scaling down.

The uncertainty about where he wanted to pursue his career, the mounting conflict between him and other senior specialists, as well as the quality of his life, were resolved when Barnard's mentors intervened and convinced him to stay on in South

Africa. With the uncertainty out of the way, Barnard renewed his commitment to a career in South Africa as well as his international surgical and research reputation. He announced that he was getting bored with heart surgery and wanted to focus attention on heart transplantation. He followed this up by doing the first kidney transplant in South Africa in October 1967 and the first heart transplant in December 1967 (Louw, 1992).

It is clear that Barnard experienced considerable ambivalence and doubt during the early part of his career. Ironically, ambivalence and doubt are core underlying characteristics of perfectionistic personalities.

22.5 Personality

The achievement of scientific breakthroughs require a combination of factors, including task-specific competence (i.e., knowledge, skill, ability), motivation, values, personality traits, enabling contextual factors, team support, and an element of luck. In this section we review the information on Barnard's fascinating and complex personality. The information suggests a high level of perfectionism. Psychologists suggest that higher levels of perfectionism are associated with conscientiousness, motivation, orderliness, self-discipline, industriousness, and self-control, but also with ambivalence, conflict, hostility, and stubbornness (Millon, 1996).

From a young age, Barnard demonstrated the ability to work hard, intense drive and energy. Logan (2003) commented on his behaviour as a student:

While other students were enjoying themselves on the rugby field or in the bar, he spent many hours hanging around the operating theatres; occasionally he would be called upon to help in some small way. (p. 56)

In the early years when Barnard worked as clinical assistant, his dedication had adverse effects on his family life. His relentless pursuit of career goals reached a peak during the period Barnard spent in Minnesota. Here, he accomplished in 28 months what normally takes five to six years. Doctor John Perry (1992, p. 282) who also underwent training in Minnesota, described the commitment Barnard demonstrated:

Barnard went to Prof Wangenstein and asked to do a number of things in a seemingly impossible period of time. He wanted to become a heart surgeon. He wanted to obtain a PhD from the university. He wanted to expand his experiments on the origin of intestinal atresia to provide material for a thesis for his degree. He wanted to learn to read in two languages to fulfil the requirements for his degree. He wanted to do all of these things in a period of two or three years...

Professor Wangenstein, one of Barnard's mentors at the University of Minnesota commented that Barnard did not allow anything to interfere with his work and stuck to challenging tasks until he saw them through (Logan, 2003). Barnard's family joined him after he had been in Minnesota for about four months. Almost immediately his work involvement caused unhappiness. This resulted in his wife and children returning to South Africa 14 months before their planned return. But, Barnard's

drive did not only impact on his family life. It also influenced his health in the form of rheumatoid arthritis.

Upon his return to South Africa, Barnard had the responsibility of leading the newly formed heart team. In the process he encountered power struggles, resistance, competition, conflict, and work pressure. In this intense emotional context Barnard benefitted from his determination to get to the top. Barnard disregarded power struggles as well as the physical discomfort caused by rheumatoid arthritis and carried on with his work, refusing to admit defeat or giving up. A family friend, Enslin (1992) commented:

Chris Barnard possesses two very strong characteristics, namely determination and a refusal to admit defeat under any circumstances... [he] carried on with the job with incredible determination and a complete disregard for the acute physical discomfort he must have been suffering... I realized then that he never gave up, whatever he tackled, for he possessed that extra force that transcended mere physical strength – as future events in his life were to prove. (pp. 154–155)

Barnard was known for his surgical prowess. Cooper (1992, p. 43) stated:

As a heart surgeon he had almost unequalled range; there was no operation he could not perform – from valve replacement, to the correction of complex birth defect, to repair of an aortic aneurism (weakening of the wall of the main blood vessel of the body), and so on.

However, colleagues highlighted another dimension of his surgical expertise. For example, Frater (1992) a classmate of Barnard at UCT, commented:

It was obvious, soon, that Chris was not a natural surgeon. The technical manipulations standard to surgery did not come easily to him and when he operated there was clearly both a significant effort of will to perform manoeuvres successfully and a significant element of anxiety while doing so. To counter this, there was a high level of determination, tenacity and resilience. There was no question of not achieving the tasks at the best possible level of surgical execution... Characteristic of his operating was the functioning by instinct... this tendency to inductive rather than deductive reasoning, to instinctive rather than planned thinking and acting, was carried through to the postoperative period. (pp. 163–164)

Early on in his career, Barnard demonstrated unusual professional demandingness. He insisted on doing things correctly and demanded the same attitude from co-workers. He quickly gained the reputation of a hard taskmaster and a doctor who did not resist opportunities to reprimand colleagues. A colleague, Richenda Fry (in Logan, 2003), who studied medicine with Barnard at UCT, summarised his style as follows:

He was just 24, and working with many nurses of much greater experience. But his insistence on getting things right, which marked him throughout his career, was already making him a hard taskmaster... He hadn't been among the very brightest of medical students but he was very firm about what he believed in. He was a go-getter even as a houseman. If the nurses did anything that was not right he told them off. (p. 62)

Barnard demonstrated the same demanding orientation in family matters. In the early 1960s Barnard noticed that his teenage daughter, Deirdré, had extraordinary water-ski talent. He was determined in assisting her to establish an international

water-ski career. He pursued this objective with tenacity and forced her to work hard. In 1962 at the age of 12 years, Deirdré received her national colours.

Barnard demonstrated a high level of achievement-orientation. His older brother, Barney studied engineering at the UCT. However, he initially struggled academically and failed several subjects. Barnard witnessed the effect this had on his parents and this strengthened his resolve to succeed at all costs in his studies. He vowed that he will never have to tell his parents that he failed. In an interview published in the *Time Magazine* Barnard commented:

When my brother failed two years of his studies, the house was in mourning. He told me medicine was a better choice than engineering, and when I went to university, I vowed I'd never have to tell my parents I had failed. And I never did. (Heart to heart, 2001, p. 158)

Years later, in the early 1960s, Barnard performed complicated operations on young children. At the stage, there were long waiting lists for operations. The Head of Cardiology and one of Barnard's mentors, Doctor Vel Schrire encouraged Barnard to perform more operations. However, Barnard declared that he was not interested in statistics. Chris Logan reported that

Chris told him he would rather do 100 cases with 100 per cent success than any more and lose some. He was a perfectionist.... (p. 110)

From the above it is clear that the following traits characterised Barnard's personality: ability to work hard, intense drive, energy, perfectionism, and need for achievement. Generally, perfectionistic personalities tend to experience inner conflict and ambivalence (Millon, 1996). These traits also characterised Barnard and added to the complexity and paradoxical qualities of his personality. For example, Barnard respected his patients to the extent that he was obsessed with the quality of patient care. Yet, his relationships with colleagues and subordinates were often characterised by intense conflict, rudeness, and abruptness. Similarly, although he harboured inferiority feelings early in his life, he demonstrated self-confidence and self-assuredness later in his career. Also, colleagues experienced him as an intense, competitive researcher and surgeon. However, others enjoyed his self-effacing sense of humour and ability to let his hair down at social functions.

22.6 Role Models

Learning by observing and imitating the behaviour of role models plays an important role in growing up. It also plays a critical role in career development. Many of our habits and skills are shaped by others with whom we identify (Funder, 2013). Essentially, role models perform three functions. They teach by example, motivate, and reduce anxiety that tend to inhibit experimenting with complex new behaviours. These functions enable learners to acquire behaviours and attitudes and are powerful drivers of development. Barnard's career benefitted from the influence of a range of role models. These included a famous palaeontologist, general practitioner from

Beaufort West that took an interest in his career, lecturers at the UCT, and international experts he collaborated with.

A chance event resulted in a youthful Barnard working side-by-side with a prominent academic and scientist. When he was 14 years old, Professor Robert Broom (1866–1951) visited Beaufort West during a fieldwork expedition. Broom had a remarkable career that included working as medical doctor, professor of zoology and geology, and palaeontologist. He made a significant contribution to the study of prehistoric life and is regarded as one of South Africa's foremost scientists. While in Beaufort West, Broom required the assistance of two helpers. Barnard was fortunate enough to be one of them. Although there is little information available on exactly what happened on that day, this arbitrary opportunity helped Barnard to gain an understanding of three roles: that would later determine his career: medical doctor, academic and researcher. During university holidays in Beaufort-West, Barnard assisted a local medical practitioner, Doctor Jacobus van der Merwe and learnt important lessons in the process:

It was valuable training...for I learned from him that acute attention to the smallest details, to the tiniest clues, can lead to success – and also that no doctor knows it all. (Logan, 2003, p. 55)

At UCT, Barnard was fortunate enough to study under several outstanding lecturers. Here, Professor Maxie Drennan was the first academic role model. Barnard was particularly attracted to his impressive anatomical knowledge, ability to communicate, precision and attention to detail, as well as the value of additional interests in philosophy, anthropology, and hunting. Other influential lecturers included Professors Jannie and James Louw, Cuthbert Crichton, and Velva Schrire. Barnard worked with Professor Jannie Louw for almost 30 years and was one of his protégés. James Louw helped Barnard to acquire an impressive range of basic surgical principles. Crichton impressed Barnard with the empathy with patients and his quality of patient care. Cooper (1992) singled Schrire out as a particularly influential role model:

The success of the heart surgery team at Groote Schuur at this time was in no small part due to the vision and support of Professor Velva Schrire, the professor of cardiology, a quite outstanding clinical physician who acted as Chris's mentor in this field for many years. Chris had immense respect for Schrire. (p. 44)

Barnard also acknowledged the role played by several international specialists in his own development. During his studies at the University of Minnesota he worked with a group of pioneering surgeons led by Professor Owen Wangenstein. Wangenstein adapted the training programme to accommodate Barnard and also used his influence to secure a heart-lung machine for UCT. Barnard viewed him as a father figure. Barnard was also drawn to the sensitive and inspirational influence of Professor Walton Lillehei, as well as one of the important innovators and teachers of open-heart surgery, Doctor Richard Varco:

From Varco he learned 'respect for the human body and its tissues...Varco told him: 'Nothing must be crushed or tied or burned unless there is reason for it. Eventually the body must repair every trauma you create. If it has to use energy to recover the damage you have done it cannot use it to fight the essential disease we want to cure'. (in Logan, 2003, p. 95)

Other international role models that influenced Barnard included the kidney transplantation expert, David Hume, a liver transplant expert, Thomas Starzl, as well as heart specialists such as Denton Cooley, Richard Lower, Norman Shumway and John Kirklin (who taught Barnard critically important shortcuts and precautionary measures). These role models helped Barnard to stay at the forefront of developments in heart surgery and transplantation work. In the process, they helped him to prepare for the one operation that would bring him international fame.

22.7 Innovation

The sixth factor that contributed to Barnard's career and preparation for the first heart transplant operation is his tendency to break new ground. Barnard was a pioneer in more than one way. From early in his career, he was attracted to difficult medical problems for which solutions were not readily available. In many cases, his hard work paid off and resulted in medical breakthroughs. In 1951 he was appointed in the City Hospital, a position that he held for two years. Here, he encountered many patients suffering from tuberculous meningitis. He soon turned the clinical problem into a research question. Two years later he received a doctorate in medicine for designing an effective treatment regime for tuberculous meningitis. In his next job as clinical assistant he focused his attention on an unrelated clinical problem, namely the causes of intestinal atresia. After 43 operations on pregnant dogs, he identified the cause. This breakthrough had dramatic medical implications because it changed the mortality rate of 90% to a survival rate of 90% (Louw, 1992). It also paved the way for the development of further intra-uterine surgical procedures. These successes confirmed Barnard's growing reputation in experimental medicine.

Early in his career and following his breakthrough with the causes of intestinal atresia, one of his supervisors, Prof John Brock, asked Barnard if he wishes to study in the United States under Professor Owen Wangenstein who had the reputation as an international leader in surgery. This opportunity turned out to be a definitive turning point in Barnard's career. At the time, the University of Minnesota had the reputation as the *Mecca* for brilliant young surgeons (Perry, 1992). It was a hotbed of innovation. The few available surgical training positions were viewed as some of the most prestigious in the world. Minnesota was the place where it was all happening in heart surgery.

Barnard seized the opportunity and through ingenuity and industry he managed to win Wangenstein's favour. Wangenstein responded by providing Barnard with an individualised training programme. Barnard referred to the time in Minnesota as the most exciting time in his career. He wasted no time, was involved in more than 300 operations and rubbed shoulders with international surgical experts. One of his lecturers, Professor Walton Lillehei described Barnard as follows:

...he had intense personal drive. In those two and a half years he accomplished what normally takes about five or six years...I think everybody who knew him in those days was struck by his intense ambition and ability to work. (1992, pp. 215–216).

While in Minnesota, Barnard refined the surgical procedure for the effective treatment of intestinal atresia. With this problem resolved, Barnard identified his next challenge, namely the design of prosthetic heart valves as well as the replacement of defective heart valves. Within two years, he was awarded a M.Sc. degree for the study *The aortic valve—Problems in the fabrication and testing of a prosthetic valve* as well as a Ph.D. for the study *The aetiology of intestinal atresia*. Furthermore, the first patient whose heart valves Barnard replaced lived for more than 30 years after the operation.

Moreover, through the generous intervention of Wangenstein, Barnard was able to return to Cape Town with a brand new heart-lung machine without which open-heart surgery is not possible. Apart from the time Barnard spent at the University of Minnesota, he also spent time at the Mayo Clinic where he benefitted from the expertise of Doctor John Kirklin, as well as the Texas Heart Institute where Doctors De Bakey and Cooley performed innovative work.

Back in South Africa, Barnard performed the first open-heart operation in the country during which a heart-lung machine had been used. A Cape Town newspaper published a report on this under the title: *Miracle operation on girl in city* (Logan, 2003).

In 1960 Barnard's pioneering spirit brought him in conflict with the local press. The year before, a Russian surgeon transplanted a second head onto a dog. Barnard heard about this and decided to perform a similar operation. The operation was done so well that the dog managed to lick milk with both heads 24 h after the operation. The media found out about the operation and reacted with fierce criticism. However, during this operation Barnard learnt important lessons about transplantation that contributed to the establishment of an experimental kidney transplantation and storage programme. This programme culminated in the first kidney transplant operation in South Africa in 1967.

Between 1962 and 1966, the years leading up to the heart transplant, Barnard visited several countries, including Australia, India, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, West Germany and the United States. Barnard was not the only South African who worked hard to keep up with the international trends and progress. He created similar opportunities for his colleagues. For example, in 1965 he arranged a 12-month position for his brother Marius, a member of his team, in Texas. Similarly, he assisted Doctor MC Botha to visit France and the Netherlands to study blood grouping and tissue typing. Gradually, these visits by Barnard and his colleagues facilitated their readiness to perform a heart transplant.

As early as 1963 Barnard announced that the future treatment of heart diseases would include heart transplants and possibly even heart-lung transplants. Barnard was aware of the progress made by specialists in the field of organ transplantation and he followed their progress intently. They included Doctors Roy Calne, Walton Lillehei, Denton Cooley, Richard Lower, Norman Shumway, John Kirklin (heart), David Hume (kidney) and Thomas Starzl (liver). Barnard did not merely want to improve his surgical competence. He was intent on transplanting hearts. In 1965 Barnard started with experimental heart transplants on dogs. A colleague, Doctor Bob Frater (1992) commented:

In 1967, Chris said he was getting very bored with cardiac surgery and was going to branch out into transplantation. In early '67, he was visiting the Medical College of Virginia where Carl Goosen was now working as a clinical perfusionist and in the research laboratories. Chris went into the laboratory where Carl was working, having just watched Richard Lower transplant a heart in the laboratory next door. He said to Carl, 'When I get back to Cape Town, I am going to start transplanting hearts'. (p. 166).

Throughout his career Barnard took special care to maintain working relationships with world leaders in cardiac surgical research. He carefully identified specialists who could help him to further his career and help him to learn critical competencies. Barnard closely followed the transplantation research, systematically refined his competence, and ensured that he stayed abreast of the latest surgical and research developments. Cooper (1992, p. 45) commented:

His own planning for the first human-to-human heart transplant was careful and methodical... Suffice it to say, the first heart-transplant – performed on December 3, 1967 – was no spur-of-the-moment, rush-of-blood-to-the-head event, as it subsequently appears to have been in several other centres.

22.8 South African Health Services

In the late 1950s when Barnard returned from the United States to South Africa, the local health context was much less developed than the context in Minnesota. In addition, the moral-legal regulations relating to organ transplantation were not as stringent as they were in countries with more sophisticated health contexts. Ironically, the conditions in South Africa facilitated, rather than restrained, his pioneering endeavours. Barnard was attached to UCT and two hospitals in Cape Town, namely the Groote Schuur Hospital and the Red Cross Children's Hospital. Upon his return from the United States he was promoted to Senior Specialist and Director of Surgical Research. This position gave him considerable influence. Furthermore, his colleagues welcomed him back with open arms and created space for him to implement his newly acquired expertise. Essentially, they offered him a blank cheque to offer direction and experiment with surgical techniques. It is unlikely that he would have had the same influence and free access to resources if he worked in a more sophisticated environment surrounded by a team of equally competent heart surgeons. In Cape Town Barnard was feted as the rising star of the Groote Schuur cardiac unit and this afforded him many opportunities privileges (Logan, 2003).

Barnard immediately established an open-heart surgical programme focusing on congenital heart diseases and a laboratory for surgical research. His focus was on establishing the infrastructure needed to continue with the ground-breaking work. This required theatre, laboratory, and intensive care facilities as well as surgical, nursing, and laboratory staff, as well as technicians that could form the core of the heart team. He established this team, helped to update their knowledge and expertise, and established international standards. The team immediately achieved success in the area of pacemakers and grew from strength to strength.

Barnard encouraged colleagues to travel and present papers all over the world. This helped the team to establish an international reputation. Barnard led the team competently and with much drive and initiative. His international reputation as an innovative and versatile surgeon benefitted the team. At the age of 39, six years before the heart transplant, Barnard had been appointed as Chief Specialist and Head of Cardiothoracic Surgery. He was now in charge of the resources and staff he required and had full authority to pursue his goals. Barnard utilised the resources well and spent the next years preparing the team for the first human heart transplant on 3rd December 1976.

22.9 Conclusion

Barnard qualified as a medical doctor in 1946. Thereafter, it took him another 21 years to prepare for the first transplant. The data suggests that he shifted his focus to organ transplantation around 1963, four years before the actual heart transplant. So, initially Barnard's preparation focused on improving heart surgery in Cape Town. Unintentionally though, Barnard's preparation was remarkably careful and methodical. It included studying for four post-graduate degrees (M.D., M. Med., M.Sc., Ph.D.), qualifying as both physician and surgeon, presenting numerous papers at international conferences, doing ground-breaking work in the design and replacement of heart valves as well as the use of heart pacemakers, performing more than 1000 open-heart operations, transplanting 48 dog hearts, carefully following the progress made by several international leaders, gaining considerable confidence in the use of immuno-suppressive substances, investigating the moral-legal implications of organ transplantation, as well as assembling and training a team to support his work.

Barnard was one of the front-ranking open-heart surgeons of the world. He possessed vast knowledge and had extensive surgical experience. Furthermore, he demonstrated an innovative, intuitive, almost instinctual approach to correcting heart conditions. His personality characteristics and style also played an important role. Barnard was bold, self-confident, and he trusted his instincts. These characteristics helped him to get the right set of circumstances for the first heart transplant.

22.10 Recommendations for Theory and Practice

Looking back on Barnard's career development, it is remarkable how obstacles and limitations contributed to his success in heart transplantation. It seems as if the unfortunate deaths of Barnard's siblings and the inferiority feelings he experienced as a child prepared the ground for his pioneering medical work. Similarly, his ambivalent personality and subsequent uncertainty about many aspects of his career, motivated him to find certainty by, for example, finding clear answers, improving procedures, and acquiring skills to solve complex problems. Also, the less sophisticated medical

context in which Barnard conducted his experimental work facilitated progress. Ultimately, it seems that it counted in Barnard's favour that he operated from a developing, rather than a developed country. The fascinating story of Barnard's career illustrate how some restraints have a paradoxical influence on development and progress. Although it may seem that some obstacles delay progress, in retrospect it becomes clear that they actually enabled development.

Many readers are fascinated by the lives of famous or successful people. They turn to popular magazines for news and information on the lives of people they admire. The authors of these articles are journalists with little or no background in psychology. Therefore, they employ implicit conceptualisations of human behaviour to describe and interpret experiences, behaviours and events. We believe that these readers are an important secondary market for psychobiographers. Psychobiographers are in an ideal position to help lay readers to not only understand what extraordinary individuals did and how they did it, but to also understand the background factors that had to be dealt with.

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Chapter 23

A Psychobiographical Portrait of Adam Small's Eriksonian Ego-Strengths or Virtues: Contextualized Within South Africa's Apartheid-Eras



Paul J. P. Fouché, Pravani Naidoo and Theo Botha

Abstract Few psychobiographies have been conducted on influential *Colored* South Africans. The dehumanizing nature of South Africa's historical institutionalized racism and discrimination during apartheid motivated an expansion on psychobiographical studies of oppressed persons of colour. This study aimed to uncover and reconstruct the Eriksonian psychosocial ego-strengths or virtues of the controversial and enigmatic poet, academic, political activist, philosopher and social worker, Professor Adam Small (1937–2016). Small was selected as subject via purposive sampling. Alexander's psychobiographical indicators of salience and a psychosocial-historical conceptualization were used to identify and analyze significant biographical evidence on Small's life. The findings indicate that Small developed hope, will, purpose and competency as ego-strengths or virtues throughout his first four Eriksonian stages. The apartheid regime's discrimination against Black ethnic groupings complicated not only the resolution of Small's identity crisis, but also the attainment of the ego-strength or virtue of a sense of self. Forced removal from his birth-home by the apartheid regime, which Small viewed as an attack on the attachment relationship with his mother, contributed to his mistrust of societal institutions. This challenged the resolution of his eventual establishment of the ego-strengths or virtues of love and wisdom, respectively. Accordingly, the use of Eriksonian theory seems to be apt for uncovering contextualized ego-strengths and virtues of significant persons within dehumanizing contexts.

Keywords Psychobiography · Adam Small · Erik Erikson · Ego-strengths · Apartheid · South Africa

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23.1 Introduction

This study aimed to uncover and reconstruct the psychosocial ego-strengths or virtues across the lifespan of Professor Adam Small (1936–2016), the influential *Colored* South African poet, academic, anti-apartheid activist, dramatist and social worker. The chapter specifically aims to provide an Eriksonian psychobiographical portrait of Small's psychosocial ego-strengths or virtues within the dehumanizing socio-historical context of apartheid.

23.2 Theoretical Background

23.2.1 *The Context: Apartheid*

Adam Small's life spanned three apartheid eras, namely: pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid. When Small was born in 1937, the Second World War was in progress, and the pre-apartheid era began to emerge. During this time, Afrikaner nationalism was on the rise (Devarenne, 2010; Lodge, 2012). Self-regarded superiority was ideologically rooting itself in the White Afrikaner nation (Mettler, 2016). Afrikaners, descendants of European immigrants who initially settled in the Cape Colony, were mainly Dutch, but also French and German. A separate culture and language (i.e., Afrikaans) emerged (Giliomee, 2003). Apartheid became a reality in 1948 when the National Party (NP) won the government election. Racism was subsequently institutionalized through several laws, which constituted human rights violations, detrimentally affecting the dignity and socio-economic statuses of non-White South Africans (Mettler, 2016). These racially divisive laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1948 that criminalized marriages between *Colored* and White individuals; the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, prohibiting sexual intercourse between races; and the Population Registration Act of 1950, which was designed to prevent non-White citizens from passing as White (Beukes, 2016; Unterhalter, 1975). The identity formation of many individuals was adversely affected by the problematic classification of categories such as *Colored*, the so-called 'grey area' between Black and White citizens (Mettler, 2016). The 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point in the apartheid era; non-White citizens tried to reclaim their identities by forming groups aimed at ideological, intellectual and political reformation, including the South African Student Organization (SASO) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which Small had been involved in (Kotzé, 1974; Magaziner, 2009; Unterhalter, 1975). Besides political protests, the work of liberal groupings of White South Africans promoted ideological reformation. Small, who initially wrote in Afrikaans, was canonized under one such group, the *Sestigers*. During the 1960s, this group of prominent, liberal and subversive Afrikaans intellectual poets, dramatists, and novelists generally disrupted Afrikaner nationalist norms in their writings and plays (Olivier, 2016). The period 1990–1994 marked a significant turning point

with the release of the imprisoned Nelson Mandela and the NP lifting the ban on the African National Congress (ANC) (Callinicos, 1996). During South Africa's first free democratic elections in April 1994, the apartheid regime officially fell, leading the ANC to victory (Callinicos, 1996; Lodge, 2012). However, apartheid's detrimental socio-economic and political effects lasted into post-apartheid South Africa and continued to negatively impact upon non-White citizens (Callinicos, 1996; Lehohla, 2017; Mettler, 2016).

23.2.2 Theoretical Lens: Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Erikson made significant contributions to the development of psychobiographies of extraordinary individuals as well as life-span studies in human development. In particular, Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) divided the life-span into eight psychosocial stages. According to the epigenetic principle, each stage is characterized by naturally unfolding crises arising due to the interactive influence of particular social contexts and biological processes (Erikson, 1968). During each successive stage, oppositional forces create psychological tension, which needs to be resolved. These polarized forces are required to be integrated successfully in order to resolve the crisis and develop the appropriate ego-strength or virtue (Kivnick & Wells, 2013). The theoretical underpinnings of each Eriksonian psychosocial stage are discussed in an integrative manner with the ego-strengths and virtues of Small in the *Findings and Discussion* section of the chapter, in order to prevent undue repetition of theory and to illustrate Eriksonian psychosocial developmental theory as applied to the life of Small.

23.2.3 Adam Small as Psychobiographical Subject

Outliers are typically chosen as psychobiographical subjects, as their uniqueness is an attracting factor in the study of their lives within socio-historical contexts (Ponterotto, 2013). Subjects are purposefully chosen by psychobiographers based on their personal interest in the life and works of the subject (Mayer & Maree, 2017). Small was purposively selected based on his contributions to South African society in terms of political activism, literature, philosophy and social work. He was an influential public intellectual and writer who voiced the plight of marginalized groups during the apartheid era (Gerwel, 2012; Willemse, 2016a).

23.3 Methodology

23.3.1 *The Psychobiographical Approach Within South Africa*

A single case psychobiography was used as method. Psychobiography is the longitudinal and psychological study of exceptional and/or contentious individuals within their socio-cultural context using historiographic methodologies (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Ponterotto, 2017). According to Kőváry (2011), contemporary psychobiography is constantly widening its focus: not only artists but scientists, politicians and significant historical figures are analyzed. Furthermore, academic psychobiographical research has the potential to refine and historically contextualize psychological theories for South Africa (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010). Between 1995 and 2004, South African psychobiographical research was primarily conducted on White males, with limited studies of non-White subjects (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010). This trend has continued (Fouché, 2015).

23.3.2 *Data Collection, Extraction and Analysis*

An increased awareness of psychobiography's ethical dilemmas, trustworthiness and rigour has come into the foreground of late (Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Ponterotto (2017) highlighted ethical awareness as integral to the practice of psychobiography. Furthermore, Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017) listed specific ethical considerations required in undertaking psychobiography.

Accordingly, only publicly available and accessible archival data on the life and work of Adam Small were collected and analyzed in the current study. Evidence was sourced through comprehensive data searches on EBSCOHost; the National Afrikaans Literary Museum and Research Centre (NALN); the worldwide web; and South African universities' institutional repositories. Primary sources included newspaper articles, interviews, and speeches by Small, as well as the autobiographical play, *The Orange Earth*. Secondary sources included biographical accounts, such as literary essays and critiques, journal articles, documentaries and chapters from the book, *Ons kom van ver* ['We come from afar'] (2016). The use of a comprehensive array of collected data ensured a degree of data-corroboration, enhancing the study's trustworthiness and rigour. Data were extracted utilizing Alexander's (1988, 1990) biographical data reduction strategies, and employing a chronological social-historical conceptualization of Small's life. Erikson's psychosocial theory guided the interpretation of evidence within six socio-historical periods over Small's lifespan, namely: (a) *Wellington*: Infancy (1936–1937); (b) *The orange earth*: Childhood and Identity (1937–1957); (c) *Verse van die liefde* ['Verses of love']: Young adulthood (1957–1975); (d) *Black, bronze, beautiful*: The productive years (1975–1997); (e) *Retirement* (1997–2012); and (f): *Klawerjas* [literal meaning: *Clover-jacket*] (2012–2016).

23.4 Findings and Discussion

This section utilized historical evidence in the psychosocial reconstruction of Small's life, via a psychobiographical portrait, by exploring the psychosocial crises that he experienced, and specifically the ego-strengths or virtues that he developed throughout his lifespan.

23.4.1 *Basic Trust Versus Mistrust (0–1 Years)*

The first psychosocial crisis concerns basic trust versus mistrust. If the conflict is appropriately resolved, the individual gains the ego-strength or virtue of trust and hope. The infant's primary caregivers are primarily responsible for the initial development of trust and hope (Erikson, 1950, 1968).

23.5 Infancy: Wellington (1936–1937)

Adam Small was born in Wellington on 21 December 1936 in Ferndale (Hendricks, 2012; Olivier, 2016), the birth-home of his father and sister, Mona. Small's Christian father, Jan Petrus Sampson Dampies (Dêrra), married his Muslim mother, Fatimah Suliman (Tiema) in 1936 (Cleophas, 2012; ESAT, 2016). Small's parents were his primary caregivers during infancy. No evidence from this period indicates parental neglect or a lack of attachment that could have resulted in Adam developing mistrust. Thus, Small most likely developed the ego-strength or virtue of trust and hope as proposed by Erikson (1968).

However, Small's later life provides an alternative explanation for his trust-hope resolution. Small hoped that apartheid could end if he appealed to the more intellectually inclined Afrikaners in power, and that love would change them (Cloete, 2012). In later years, Small developed mistrust in the world, which caused him to withdraw from the public eye for almost 20 years (Jansen, 2016; van Wyk, 2016). He searched for 'truth' throughout his life and became a skeptical philosopher struggling to establish a religious and ethnic identity in his later years (Abarder, 2015; Willemse, 2016b). Small had an apparent strong attachment to his mother throughout his life. He always kept a framed photo of her in his study (Small, 2016). Further evidence of attachment to his mother stems from his emotional reaction to the forceful sale of Ferndale by the apartheid government in 1960 after the area was declared a Whites-only area (Cleophas, 2012). He associated his birth-home with positive memories, and any 'attack' on it as a symbolic attack on his mother. In later life, Small displayed mistrust in several societal institutions due to the apartheid government. Although Small developed the ego-strength of hope during his infant years, he veered towards mistrust in later adult life.

23.5.1 *Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt (1–3 Years)*

During this stage, children experience conflict between autonomy and shame or doubt. If they learn to manage their environments successfully, by attempting new skills and abilities, they develop autonomy and the virtue of willpower (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Caregivers are responsible for allowing children to practice their new-found abilities within safe boundaries, without undue punishment (Erikson, 1968).

23.6 **Childhood and Identity: The Orange Earth (1937–1957)**

During 1937 the Small family relocated to Goree, an isolated missionary station outside of Robertson (Terblanche, 2016; van Wyk, 2007), a town inhabited by poor farm labourers (Cleophas, 2012; van Vuuren, 1996, 2012). Here, Small's father fulfilled the role of headmaster and only teacher at the Dutch Reformed Church's Coloured Huguenot Primary School (Terblanche, 2016; van Vuuren, 2012). He took care of the people, becoming the church scribe and lay preacher (Accone, 2016; van Wyk, 2007). In 1938, Adam was baptized in the Calvinistic Dutch Reformed Missionary Church in Robertson and his sister, Mona, followed suit (Cleophas, 2012). Their parents experienced Goree as an idyllic paradise. As Small's mother recalled, this period was "the most wonderful time of their lives" (Cleophas, 2012, p. 28). They frequently took strolls in the *veld* and Adam and Mona enjoyed riding on huge tortoises' backs (Cleophas, 2012). Although evidence of Small's life during this developmental stage is sparse, he was allowed to explore his environment within safe boundaries. The orange earth (named after the color of the soil) in the wide, open and lonely landscape of Goree (Cleophas, 2012) allowed for the development of Small's virtue of autonomy and willpower. To illustrate the future implication thereof, Small seemed to have overcome many of his future life challenges due to his willpower and independence. The development of the ego-strength of autonomy and willpower may be later expressed as assertiveness and the ability to follow one's own moral voice (Hamachek, 1988).

Evidence indicates that Small's autonomy was highlighted in the generativity versus self-stagnation stage, as he became an assertive individual who did not permit ideological differences with institutions to stand in his way. At the height of the apartheid era, after a political incident at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where Small was appointed as one of only seven non-White staff-members, he acted as a moral activist and spokesperson; He stood in solidarity with his students and resigned from the apartheid-led institution in protest (van Vuuren, 1996, 2012; Willemsse, 2016a, 2016b); He strongly believed that it was his intellectual and ethical responsibility to do so (Abarder, 2015; Kivedo, 2016). Small later took extreme pride in his non-White heritage and joined the BCM. When he was expected to deliver a lecture on "the crisis of the *Brown [Colored]* Sestiger" to a liberal White audience in

1973, he refused to speak under that title, exerting his willpower and moral integrity by opting for the title “the crisis of the *Black Sestiger*” (Louw, 1973).

23.6.1 Initiative Versus Guilt (3–6 Years)

Parents or caregivers play a critical role in children's development during this stage. Children particularly identify with their caregivers or parents and the resolution of this stage influences developments in other stages (Erikson, 1950, 1977). Further, children become more independent and engage in imaginary play activities of their own, although these activities might sometimes be punishable (Erikson, 1963). Thus, the child might gain initiative or feel guilty, due to the development of morality through identification with their parents. If children manage to resolve the crisis between these two poles, they gain purpose as an ego strength or virtue (Erikson, 1950, 1963).

23.7 Childhood and Identity: The Orange Earth (1937–1957) a Continuation

Small's parents were socially conscious and extremely active in the Goree community. His father was a teacher, who also wrote articles for *The Sun* newspaper and was concerned about the community's social problems (Cleophas, 2012). Small mentioned to van Vuuren (2012) that when the people of Goree died, his father buried them in the red-brown ground (i.e., orange earth) from which they came. Fatimah always stood by her husband, sharing his concern with the community's welfare (Cleophas, 2012).

Small's most significant memories come from this period (van Wyk, 2007). Goree was an isolated place, yet Adam embraced the loneliness. Adam and Mona started school at their father's old shed-house school at an early age (Cleophas, 2012). Adam later recalled that his father was his best teacher (Siyavula Uploaders, 2009). Initially, Adam had to recount stories told by his father (Cleophas, 2012). Thereafter, he was given a lead stylus and his father instructed him to start writing (Siyavula Uploaders, 2009). Fatimah enjoyed reading and telling stories to her children. She loved philosophy and cynically accepted the changing world. Adam later recalled that he inherited his love for philosophy from his mother (van Vuuren, 2012). His father also taught Sunday-school (La Vita, 2013). Here, Adam wrote his first plays, which were then performed (Cleophas, 2012; Terblanche, 2016). During this period, Adam already knew that he wanted to become a writer (Abarder, 2015). It is apparent that Small identified not only with his father, a teacher and versatile community leader, but also with his mother, a skeptical woman who loved philosophy and reading (van Vuuren, 2012). During the school holidays, Small visited his two extended

families, who lived in Goree and Wellington, respectively (Malherbe, 1994; van Vuuren, 2012). Growing up between the Calvinistic Dutch Reformed Missionary home of his paternal grandmother and the Muslim home of his maternal family (Terblanche, 2016), Small learnt religious and cultural tolerance (van Vuuren, 2012; Zululand Observer, 2016).

During this period, Small developed appropriate attachments to both parents, and modelled himself on them, thus exhibiting more initiative than guilt, as ego-strength. His ego-strength or virtue of purpose particularly helped him to overcome struggles experienced later in his life.

23.7.1 Industry Versus Inferiority (6–13 Years)

Since children typically start school during this stage, teachers, peers and society become the new focus of their mastery; in resolving this stage, they develop the ego-strength or virtue of competence. If they experience too many failures, they may develop inferiority (Erikson, 1968, 1977).

23.8 Childhood and Identity: The Orange Earth (1937–1957) a Continuation

During 1944, the Small family moved to a rental home in Retreat, on the Cape Flats, where Small's father started working as a teacher at the Blouville Dutch Reformed Church's Primary School (Jansen, 2016; van Vuuren, 2012). Retreat, home to a growing population of working class *Colored* and Black individuals, had been described as a slum, with levels of poverty that were higher than Adam had witnessed in Goree. The Small family was extremely unhappy, as they had to share their rental home with another family, who had an alcoholic father. Tiema was a liberal woman, and while she was not very religious, she disapproved of the abuse of alcohol. In 1947, the family moved to an iron-and-zinc house in Heathfield, Moria. Adam, being shy and reserved, quickly headed back to his books (Cleophas, 2012).

On 26 May 1948, the Reunified National Party, under the leadership of D. F. Malan, won the majority of the parliamentary seats in the election and began implementing Apartheid racial laws (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Wallis, 2000). Small attended St. Augustine's Roman Catholic School where he excelled academically under the guidance of Dominican nuns (van Vuuren, 2012). He developed industriously and gained the ego-strength of competence, specifically in his academia, including the arts. Small strove towards maintaining the virtue of industry and competency throughout his life.

23.8.1 *Identity Versus Role Confusion (13–20 Years)*

During adolescence, individuals gain fidelity as an ego-strength or virtue if they resolve the conflict between identity and role confusion. Adolescents explore who they want to be, including their future roles in society (Erikson, 1963, 1977).

23.9 **Childhood and Identity: The Orange Earth (1937–1957) a Continuation**

In 1951, J. C. Smuts' United Party and Malan's Reunited National Party merged to form the National Party (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). With a fear of non-White races passing as White, pass-books were introduced and made compulsory, while the government also created several racial categories (Beukes, 2016; Unterhalter, 1975). One of these categories—*Colored*—was assigned to any person not fitting the other categories: the 'grey area' between Black and White skin (Mettler, 2016).

Small remained at St. Augustine's Roman Catholic School for another year before completing Grade 9 at Immaculata School in Witteborne in 1952 (van Vuuren, 2012). Thereafter, Small attended the all-boys St. Columba Roman Catholic School in Crawford where he matriculated in 1953. He subsequently enrolled to study Medicine at the liberal, English-medium, University of Cape Town (UCT) (Abarder, 2015), since he was not allowed to study at an Afrikaans-medium university during the apartheid era (Abarder, 2015; Terblanche, 2016). Small's mother recalled that he had no aptitude for Medicine and returned home ill after seeing cadavers (Cleophas, 2012). In 1955, Small enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree majoring in philosophy and languages, and published his first poems and short stories during that year (Tafelberg, 2017; van Vuuren, 2012). He graduated with distinction in Ethics, and Logic-and-Metaphysics in 1956, and completed a B.A. Honours degree in philosophy in 1957 (Abarder, 2015; van Vuuren, 2012).

Despite initially struggling with Medicine and evidently choosing philosophy and languages as his fields of interest, Small seemed to have developed a sense of identity. His occupational identity was largely centered within these fields, and he continued to integrate these influences into his later life. The fact that he remained a skeptical philosopher indicates that at least one part of his identity was stable throughout his life. Although Small was loyal to his ideologies, the apartheid government's institutionalized, racially discriminatory laws impacted negatively upon his identity development. In particular, he grappled with his ethnic identity due to these divisive policies. In Small's first anthologies of poems, he described himself as an Afrikaner. Later, he became the Brown (i.e., *Colored*) *Sestiger*, before completely renouncing any reference to the Whiteness of his supposedly in-between skin. Small later fully identified as a Black individual, as the collective nature of the term was more conducive to the anti-apartheid struggle. He later mentioned that he had begun to question his cultural roots, particularly his relationship with Afrikaans, the

language within which the oppressive apartheid government functioned. Small also questioned his religious identity throughout his life. While he was raised by parents from different religious backgrounds, Small related to some extent to Christianity as he attended Christian schools. Small experimented with a range of ethnic, religious, linguistic and career identities and showed a sense of infidelity for a large period into the following stage. It is therefore speculated that Small attempted to resolve his fifth psychosocial crisis by maintaining a position of role-confusion as an adaptive mechanism in order to manage the socio-historical and political challenges he faced. Small seemed to have developed fidelity and a stronger identity later in life, albeit in an adaptive role-confusion *modus operandi*, as reflected in his continued refusal to label himself.

23.9.1 Intimacy Versus Isolation (20–35 Years)

Individuals navigate the crisis that arises between intimacy and isolation in their 20s and 30s (Erikson, 1968). If individuals are able to resolve the crisis, they develop love as an ego-strength. If not, the individual will probably have previous, unresolved, crises re-arise during this stage. The sixth stage is also characterized by commitment and compromise, as well as individuals' independence from their parents (Erikson, 1963, 1977).

23.10 Verse van die liefde (Verses of Love): Young Adulthood (1957–1975)

During this period, Small published his first Afrikaans poetry anthologies wherein he repeatedly proposed that love could solve all of society's problems, including the color-problem; His poetry became increasingly political and philosophical, as his searches for love and societal intimacy became overwhelmed by undertones of the apartheid government's dehumanizing practices (Kannemeyer, 1983; van Wyk, 2007). Small believed that while apartheid was inhumane, people were capable of love, and therefore able to overcome apartheid (Small, 1961; van Wyk, 2007).

Small later received a bursary to study at the London School of Economics (Abarder, 2015) where he studied Philosophy of Science, under Karl Popper and Joseph Agassi (van Vuuren, 2012).

Upon his return to South Africa, Small taught English, Afrikaans, and History in Wellington, before obtaining his first appointment as a lecturer at the historically Black-designated University College of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape (Terblanche, 2016; van Vuuren, 2012). However, after allegedly being antagonized by the rector, Small resigned from the university (Cleophas, 2012).

In December 1959, at age 22, Small married Julia Engelbrecht. While evidence about their marriage is sparse, literature revealed that they had two children, although their marriage ended in divorce after five years (Abarder, 2015; van Vuuren, 2012). In 1959, the UWC was established as a tertiary institution for *Colored* students, an expression of the apartheid regime's aim to further the national divide after political turmoil (Mettler, 2016; Willemse, 2016b). In 1960, Small joined UWC as a lecturer and Head of the Department of Philosophy (Jansen, 2016; Terblanche, 2016; van Wyk, 2007). Along with other non-White citizens, Small's family was forcibly removed from their birth-home after the Group Areas Act of 1950 was implemented and Retreat was declared a Whites-only zone (Cleophas, 2012). Small harshly criticized racial discrimination, using satire to highlight the hypocrisy of the false White Christians' lives around him (Devarenne, 2010; Zululand Observer, 2016).

During this period, Small completed a master's degree in Philosophy with distinction at UCT (Jansen, 2016; van Wyk, 2007). After receiving a British Council Scholarship for advanced studies in Moral Philosophy, Small studied at the University of Oxford in 1963 (Accone, 2016; van Vuuren, 2012; van Wyk, 2007). Upon his return to South Africa, Small, his wife, and his sister became Jehovah's Witnesses after he became deeply attracted to their in-depth study of "the bare text" of the Bible (Cleophas, 2012, p. 33). Small's subsequent dramatic works were written as social critique, dedicated to marginalized, underprivileged people (van Wyk, 2007). Accone (2016) highlighted that Small's relationship with Afrikaans as a language was a political endeavor:

Small wrote mainly in Afrikaans, which for him was far more than the language of the oppressor. His words- both supple and robust and always moving- showed that Afrikaans could be used by the oppressed just as affectingly, poignantly and pointedly as by the colonizer. (par. 5)

While at UWC, Small met Rosalie Daniels, one of his philosophy students (Abarder, 2015). Adam and Julia Small divorced in 1968. While Small felt drawn to Catholicism, the Church previously refused to enter a divorced man into a nuptial (Cleophas, 2012). Small subsequently married Daniels in the Methodist Church, Bellville-South on 22 December 1971 (Abarder, 2015; Cleophas, 2012). Rosalie was Adam's intellectual equal and they deeply loved each other and their two later born children (Abarder, 2015).

During this period, Small pursued postgraduate studies in South Africa and Britain, asserting his will to further his education. Small officially left his parental home and focussed primarily on obtaining a tertiary education. Against this background, the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation can be observed. Throughout the anti-apartheid struggle, Small retained the sentiment that love could overcome apartheid. He also extended his search for personal intimacy to a search for societal and religious intimacy, which clearly lacked at the time. However, due to the apartheid government's declaration of Wellington as a White area, and the subsequent loss of his birth-home, he struggled with his initial attempts at resolving this crisis.

It appears that Small struggled with both fidelity and the search for intimacy. In later years, when confronted with societal accusations of identity infidelity and labelling, Small withdrew from the public eye, effectively isolating himself from the harmful outside world. Yet, because Small had found love and formed close attachments to an intimate few, he withdrew from the public, but not from his personal relationships. After Small developed the virtue of love, he found himself in the crisis of generativity versus self-stagnation.

23.10.1 Generativity Versus Self-stagnation (35–65 Years)

Middle adulthood is characterized by the conflict between generativity and self-stagnation (Erikson, 1963). In this stage, adults “need to be needed” (Erikson, 1963, p. 258), which inherently drives them towards becoming productive in their family lives, workplaces, and society. Adults typically express their particular concern for future generations’ welfare through caring for, guiding and nurturing the next generation, or becoming involved in community or civic causes (Freiberg, 1987). If individuals resolve the crisis successfully, they manage to gain care as an ego-strength or virtue (Erikson, 1968, 1977).

23.11 Verse van die liefde (Verses of Love): Young Adulthood (1971–1975), a Continuation

Small’s writings became more satirical and cynical. He alienated the literary establishment by disrupting the established literary techniques, structures and themes, and his hatred of censorship, all characteristic efforts of the *Sestiger* movement (van Coller, 2016). In 1971, at the invitation of President Richard Nixon, Small attended the first White House Conference on Youth (Cloete, 2012; Terblanche, 2016). In 1972, he was nominated as a member of the Senate Council of the apartheid-governed UWC, but since he was not White, he was not allowed to serve on the council (Terblanche, 2016; Willemse, 2016b).

The apartheid government started demolishing District 6¹; displacing non-Whites from the area (Terblanche, 2016). Up until this point, Small mainly identified as an Afrikaans citizen, but this soon changed (Louw, 1973). He joined the BCM in the early 1970s and subsequently increasingly started identifying as Black (Evans, 2016; van Wyk, 2007). Small was attracted to the BCM, as its ideology of unity and its emphasis on morality and humanity was what he stood for (Gerwel, 2012). He refused to further identify as the *Colored* Afrikaner that the *Sestiger* movement had lauded him as, and insisted that he had not claimed to identify as an Afrikaner a decade

¹District 6: Area that was demolished by the Apartheid government, which led to the mass displacement of thousands of Colored families (Beyers, 2017).

earlier; this left several Afrikaner liberals in a state of discomfort (Louw, 1973). Both White liberals and conservative *Colored* individuals alike became more critical of Small (Braaf, 2016; Louw, 1973). Meanwhile, political instability at UWC led Small to resign from his position in solidarity with his students who were protesting as a result of the university's suspension of protesting students (Willemse, 2016a). Small and his family subsequently relocated to Johannesburg, where he was appointed as the Head of the University of the Witwatersrand's Student Body Services (Abarder, 2015; van Wyk, 2007).

23.12 Black, Bronze, Beautiful: The Productive Years (1975–1997)

In 1976, Small was involved in the defense of several accused at the South African Student Organization terrorist trials in the Pretoria High Court (Terblanche, 2016). He testified that *Colored* people were part of the larger Black majority and read some of his poems in court to illustrate what apartheid felt like (Lobban, 1990; Terblanche, 2016). Small became extremely concerned for the well-being and struggles of the marginalized poor (Cleophas, 2012).

He hated violence to the extent that he became a vegetarian, and advocated for rational, on-going dialogue between races (Cleophas, 2012; La Vita, 2013). Furthermore, Small's training as a skeptical philosopher and his search for sincere truth and dignity led him to consistently pursue dialogue over violence (Willemse, 2016b). In 1976, South Africa's struggle towards freedom from apartheid was reaching unseen peaks, with countrywide violent protests (Willemse, 2012). Forced to re-evaluate his strategies, Small wrote *The Orange Earth* (1978), a semi-autobiographical fictionalized English play and counter-discourse to the overarching intellectual strategies that he employed. Following humiliation, exclusion, and becoming a perennial outsider to his own literary movement, he was prompted to reconsider symbolic revolutionary violence against the state as a desperate cry for citizenship (Willemse, 2012). This created a narrative in which he had to reconsider a terrorist act as an option to ending the oppressor-inflicted social violence of the apartheid regime (Dunstan, 1979; Terblanche, 2016; Willemse, 2012).

After returning to the Western Cape and being appointed as the working director of Maskew Miller Publishers, Small wrote *Black, Bronze, Beautiful: Quatrains* (1975), which takes pride in Black culture and celebrates Black history (Abarder, 2015; van Vuuren, 2012).

At the age of 40, Small retrained as a professional social worker through the University of South Africa (UNISA) and became involved with child welfare work (Minnaar-McDonald, 2016; van Vuuren, 2012). In 1977, he became the head of the Western Cape Foundation for Community Work. Small graduated as a social worker in 1981 and later received an Honorary Doctorate in Literature from the University of Natal (Terblanche, 2016).

At the end of 1983, Jakes Gerwel,² a former student, convinced Small to return to the changed UWC (Abarder, 2015), a “vibrant, anti-apartheid space” which appointed a “cohort of young Black academics” (Willemse, 2016b, p. 182). The UWC also gained its first *Colored* rector, Prof Richard van der Ross (Willemse, 2016b). Small returned to UWC as the new Head of the Department of Social Work (Cloete, 2012; Evans, 2016). In 1985, he became a professor in Social Work (Willemse, 2016b). Small, however, considered these as some of his worst years (Abarder, 2015). To illustrate, Small’s eight-year-old son had been with him on campus one day while rubber bullets were shot and teargas was abundant during a student protest (Abarder, 2015). Cleophas (2012) noted that Small was a soft-hearted man, just like his father; However, unlike his father, Small realized that he was not keen on being part of the “big, deep-thinking religions” and never formally joined another religion again (p. 33).

Small contributed immensely to the UWC’s Social Work department by developing modules in the Philosophy of Care, a core interdisciplinary module that became compulsory for all students in the health sciences (Terblanche, 2016; Minnaar-McDonald, 2016). He also emphasized the need for community-based outreach programs and facilitated innovation in the department (Terblanche, 2016).

Small no longer wanted to be labelled as *Colored* (Jansen, 2016; Terblanche, 2016). Further, he developed a hatred for the words *Afrikaner* and *Colored* (Terblanche, 2016; Willemse, 2012). On 27 April 1994, a victory occurred in South Africa when Nelson Mandela became the country’s first freely elected, democratic President after the apartheid regime was overturned (Callinicos, 1996). Despite winning several awards since, Small went on early retirement in 1997 (Minnaar-McDonald, 2016; Zululand Observer, 2016).

Small used his ego-strengths or virtues of willpower, purpose, and competence to navigate the challenges that he faced during this period. He spoke out against the depravity and horrors that the apartheid regime caused. Small became an expert in early childhood development and was also actively involved in raising his own children. In terms of Erikson’s (1963, 1968) theory, Small’s major activities could be described as legacy activities. He did not self-stagnate, as he showed clear signs of generative behavior. During these productive years, Small developed care as a major ego-strength or virtue. It is speculated that although Small gained care as an ego-strength or virtue, he still did not fully develop fidelity until the following period, namely: integrity versus despair.

²Professor Jakes Gerwel later became the Vice-Chancellor of UWC, then Rector of Rhodes University. He also served as the Director-General of Nelson Mandela’s Presidency office (Le Cordeur, 2017).

23.12.1 *Integrity Versus Despair (65–79 Years)*

Erikson (1963) stated that individuals in their penultimate life-stage are faced with retirement and impending death. Late adults need to integrate their despair whilst avoiding unnecessary cynicism and hopelessness to be able to look back on their lives with integrity and, in the process, gain wisdom as a virtue (Erikson, 1968).

23.13 Retirement (1997–2012)

After his retirement, Small withdrew from the public eye, despite continuously writing for newspaper columns (Jansen, 2016). He continued receiving awards, prizes and honorary doctorates, but sent representatives to the ceremonies on his behalf (Terblanche, 2016). While Small's literary silence was agonizing to many, he later mentioned that he had not gone quiet as many said, but rather retreated into his home-life with his wife and grandchildren at his center. Reflecting on this, Small (2016) explained that behind closed doors, Adam had an amazing sense of humor, loved to tell stories and had immense respect for others. Small prepared coffee and tea in the mornings and made sandwiches for hungry visitors. He told his grandchildren stories and continued being a very loving husband (Small, 2016). Small enjoyed his privacy and even thanked the UWC for the respectful way in which his 75th honorary celebration was conducted (Terblanche, 2016).

23.14 *Klawerjas* [Literal Meaning: Clover-Jacket] (2012–2016)

During this period, Small wrote his new anthology, *Klawerjas* (2013). Much controversy arose when the Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns³ announced that the Hertzog Prize would be awarded for Small's drama-oeuvre (van der Elst, 2012). Small graciously accepted the acclaimed literary award in an e-mail; As Small was ill, Rosalie attended the event on 12 November 2012 and read his speech on his behalf (Small, 2012). A section of Small's speech declared:

This was probably, literally the most talked about award of the Hertzog-prize ever, and naturally, there is something racist about it... It is important for me to say that I just could not make sense of the conventional concept of the God of Christianity in my adult life. But also, I am not a so-called atheist. Nobody should label me. I just want to be my un-brandished self. (Small, 13 September 2012, par. 7)

On 14 September 2013, Small appeared in public for the first time in 20 years, conducting emotional readings of several poems from his new anthology, *Klawerjas*

³English: South African Academy for Science and the Arts.

(Afrikaans.com, 2016). Willemse (2016b) recounted that in Small's last days, he made frequent reference to his impending death. Small mentioned: "when a person ages, you live off memories and it is good" (Braaf, 2016, p. 189). Death became a reality in his life. It has been noted that Small developed much insight and wisdom during his last days (Breytenbach Sentrum, 21 November 2013). At the age of 79, Adam Small passed away peacefully at Kingsbury Hospital, Cape Town, due to complications in a vein bypass surgery to improve his blood-circulation in his left leg (IOL News, 2016; Willemse, 2016b).

Professor Small made a significant contribution to society during his younger years. After retirement, he continued caring for others, but confined himself to his immediate significant others, seemingly isolating himself from the public and refraining from making public declarations. Small carried his identity infidelity with him into this stage, although he made enormous strides toward achieving a stable individual identity. He withdrew from the public due to feeling rejected by its insistence on labelling him. The re-evaluation of his sense of basic trust in society, instead of mere skepticism, caused him to reject all labels outright.

Small, however, managed to obtain a stable individualistic identity during this period, and it is argued that he finally resolved this crisis during old age. He identified as an individual who did not want to be labelled as anything but an individual. He also stated that he was not an atheist, yet he had significant trouble with making sense of the conventional Christian God. Arguably, Small initially developed a sense of despair due to a loss of hope and his sense of severe mistrust. Then, upon the award of the Hertzog Prize,⁴ which he saw as a symbol of reconciliation, he regained a sense of hope.

During this period, Small engaged in life-narrative reflections and had a realistic sense of 'non-being' as an individualistic identity, which he seemed to have been comfortable with. Although he acknowledged that he would have wanted to write more, as a comeback from poetic silence, he was realistic about his impending demise. He passed away with an established ego-strength of integrity and the development of wisdom as virtue, which aided him through his last period of life.

23.15 Conclusions and Recommendations for Theory and Practice

The apartheid regime's discrimination against Black ethnic groups, including those labelled *Colored*, complicated the resolution of Small's identity crisis and the attainment of the ego-strength or virtue of a sense of self. Forced removal from his birth-home by the apartheid regime, which Small viewed as an attack on the attachment relationship with his mother, recycled his infantile crisis and contributed to a later mistrust in societal institutions. This challenged the eventual resolution of partic-

⁴The Hertzog Prize is one of the most acclaimed language prizes for Afrikaans Literature (Smit, 2015).

ularly his intimacy versus isolation, as well as his integrity versus despair crises, which challenged his eventual establishment of the ego-strengths or virtues of love and wisdom, respectively. Small was an extraordinary personality, worthy as subject of a South African academic psychobiography. Overall, the findings indicate that the use of Eriksonian theory seems to be apt for uncovering contextualized ego-strengths and virtues of significant persons within dehumanizing contexts. Eriksonian psychosocial theory can thus assist mental health care workers in understanding and reconstructing their clients' life portraits of ego-strengths and virtues, within the context of dehumanizing socio-historical periods they may have encountered during their lifespan.

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Chapter 24

The Psychosocial-Historical Turning Points in the Life of Sol Plaatje: Co-founder of the African National Congress



Crystal Welman, Paul J. P. Fouché and Roelf van Niekerk

Abstract The study forms part of an emerging trend in South African academic psychobiography in producing more research on exceptional Black persons. Therefore, this psychobiographical study aimed to identify the significant psychosocial-historical turning points in the life of Sol Plaatje (1876–1932), utilizing the lens of Erik Erikson’s theory of lifespan development. The South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later renamed the African National Congress (ANC), co-founded by Plaatje, was created against the backdrop of massive deprivation of Africans’ right to own land. As an enigmatic multilingual political activist and journalist, Plaatje encountered different cultures and demonstrated resilience under trying conditions. His legacy to South African history is widely recognised. In selecting Plaatje as subject via purposive sampling and by applying Alexander’s psychobiographical indicators of salience and a psychosocial-historical conceptualization, it was possible to identify significant biographical evidence that mainly shaped his development as human rights campaigner and novelist. The findings highlight significant psychosocial-historical events or turning points in the life of Plaatje, including: The influence of his missionary education on his linguistic skills; the lifelong pre-occupation with the preservation of the Setswana language; and his devotion to the liberation of African people that generated three of his most well-known books, titled: *Native Life in South Africa*, *The Boer War Diary: an African at Mafeking*, and *Mhudi*. These documents were the first of its kind produced in English by a Black South African. Erikson’s psychosocial theory proved valuable for identifying significant psychosocial-historical turning points in Plaatje’s life.

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Keywords Psychobiography · Sol Plaatje · Pre-apartheid · Psychosocial-historical · Turning points · South Africa

24.1 Introduction

The chapter aimed to identify the psychosocial-historical turning points across the lifespan of Sol Plaatje (1876–1932), the enigmatic and multilingual *Black* South African political activist, journalist and novelist. Applying Erik Erikson's theory of lifespan development via a psychobiography enabled interpretation of Plaatje's development within the socio-historical context of land dispossession and segregation. Psychobiography is typically conducted on historically significant individuals since the study of their lives within socio-historical contexts are of great interest (Ponterotto, 2013). Psychobiographers choose subjects based on their own personal interests (Mayer & Maree, 2017). Plaatje was purposively selected due to his uniqueness, particularly in the South African context where his legacy lives on in buildings such as the Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, as well as in the literary works produced about him. Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory recognized that personality develops over the individual's lifespan in a succession of eight interrelated stages which means that unresolved conflicts or crises in a particular stage can be revisited and rectified in subsequent stages (Erikson, 1963, 1997). Crises are catalysts that elicit an intensive questioning of one's current lifestyle, beliefs and understandings (Robinson, Demetre, & Litman, 2016), typically creating turning points in the individual's life (Erikson, 1997). The oppositional or polarized forces within each stage cause psychological tension, which requires the ego to find a healthy balance or synthesis between these forces in order to resolve the tension successfully. New ego strengths or virtues emerge each time the oppositional forces are effectively integrated (Newman & Newman, 2012).

24.2 The Context: Pre-apartheid

In the 1800s, British and European missionaries travelled throughout South Africa, spreading Western culture and the Christian faith (Willan, 2018). Afrikaners, descendants from Dutch, French and German immigrants, initially settling in the Cape Colony, developed their own culture and language, Afrikaans, despite the British proclaiming English as the only language within the colony (Ramoroka, 2008). The Afrikaners migrated into the present-day Free State region and established their own independent Boer Republics (white Afrikaner nation) of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. They further tried to invade Bechuanaland (known today as the independent Republic of Botswana), but the Barolong chiefs, the African leaders of Bechuanaland who were regarded as kings, declared it a British protectorate state and thus retained control over their area (Ramoroka, 2008). The royal Barolong tribe,

a Batswana name for its Setswana-speaking members, comprised a number of different clans. The Plaatje family traces its origins to the chiefdom of King Modiboa (Molema, 2012; Ramoroka, 2008). Rival attacks on the fragmented Barolong clans in the early 1900s left them outnumbered and forced many, including Plaatje's paternal great-grandfather, to the safety of the European mission stations (Molema, 2012).

The discovery of diamonds and gold on the Witwatersrand in the 1870s and 1880s and the self-regarded superiority amongst the Afrikaners led to land and labor disputes with the British, which culminated into the Anglo-Boer war in 1899 (Mettler, 2016). In 1902, the Boer Republics signed over their independence to the British via the Treaty of Vereeniging. Post-war peace negotiations between the British and the Afrikaners produced a unitary government that effectively became the Union of South Africa on 31 May 1910 (Willan, 1984). The new government institutionalized several segregation laws that violated the human rights and dignity of non-White South Africans (Mettler, 2016). These laws included the Native Land Act of 1913, forcing them off their land and confined them to 'Scheduled Native areas'; the Colour Bar Act of 1926 prohibiting Africans from entering skilled occupations, reducing their income for unskilled work; and the abolishment of the non-racial Cape franchise in 1929 abandoning their right to vote (Willan, 1984). The International Socialist League (which comprised of Africans, Coloreds and Indians), the first non-racial organization in South Africa, hoped to accomplish ideological-intellectual and political reformation (Kotzé, 1974), as did the SANNC, today's ruling party known as the ANC (Gerhart & Karis, 1977). The socio-economic and political laws of this era gave rise to apartheid, a racially discriminatory system that today still holds many negative effects for various groups in post-apartheid South Africa (Mettler, 2016).

24.3 Methodology

24.3.1 *Psychobiographical Research in South Africa*

The current study employed a psychobiography, grounded within case study, as the research method. In a psychobiography, psychology is incorporated into biography (Kőváry, 2011) to describe who the subject is and what makes him or her an exceptional individual within the socio-cultural and historical context, and also to provide insight into his or her inner life (Ponterotto, 2013, 2015). According to Fouché and van Niekerk (2010) the amplified number of psychobiographical studies completed and currently in progress in South Africa thus far, reveal a greater diversity amongst chosen subjects as compared to a previous tendency to primarily conduct research on White males. Furthermore, the authors stated that psychobiographical research encapsulates academic benefits for the theoretical development of South African psychology. In addition to the lives of literary, political, artistic, religious and sporting figures already been explored, Fouché, Nel, and van Niekerk (2014) recommended

a renewed focus on anti-apartheid activists, such as Plaatje, to be of great value in the current South African context and the process of constructing a narrative of the nation's troubled past.

24.3.2 Data Collection, Extraction and Analysis Procedures Guided by Ethics

More attention should be devoted to ethical sensitivity in psychobiography (Ponterotto, 2013, 2017). Since sparse ethical guidelines for psychologists conducting a psychobiography currently exists, psychobiographers such as du Plessis (2017), Ponterotto (2013, 2015, 2017) and Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017) proposed specific ethical guidelines and best-practices to be considered during psychobiographical research. In order to ensure ethical sensitivity in this study, the evidence collected on Plaatje was predominantly based on available materials accessible within the public domain. The comprehensive searches on the life of Plaatje were conducted via the library services of the University of the Free State (UFS), Bloemfontein, South Africa, to access databases such as EBSCOHost and ResearchGate, as well as the worldwide web. Unpublished archival information retained by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust and the Sol Plaatje Museum and Library, both based in Kimberley, Northern Cape Province, South Africa, was accessed and consulted with the relevant obtained consent. Both primary and secondary sources were included in the collection of biographical data. Primary sources included a wide range of newspaper articles, books, speeches and extracts from letters written by Plaatje himself. His 1916 classic, *Native life in South Africa*, and diary written during the Anglo-Boer war, provided valuable personal information about the subject. Secondary sources included written biographical accounts (e.g., Midgeley, 1997; Mokae, 2012; Molema, 2012; Pampalis, 1992; Rall, 2003; Willan, 1984, 2018), as well as audio-visual documentaries (e.g. Couzens, 2001; Couzens & Willan, 1979). The biographies written by Molema (2012) and Willan (1984, 2018) were of particular value as these were based on information sourced from individuals who had personal contact with Plaatje. Additional journal articles, literary essays, and critiques on Plaatje, ensured data triangulation that enriched the study's trustworthiness and rigor. Important biographical data was extracted via Alexander's (1988, 1990) nine indicators of salience, as well as the incorporation of a chronological social-historical conceptualization of Plaatje's life.

Erikson's psychosocial theory of development provided the structure to categorise and interpret the core data over Plaatje's lifespan within four main socio-historical periods, ultimately covering seven of Erikson's eight developmental stages. These periods included: (a) Baby Plaatje in Doornfontein (1876–1877); (b) Pniel (1877–1894): a continuation; (c) Kimberley, Mafeking and Activist (1894–1911); and (d) Tales of travels (1912–1932). Plaatje died at the age of 56 (Willan, 2018); negating an interpretation of the eighth and final stage of development.

24.4 Findings and Discussion

In this section, the use of historical evidence highlighted and explored the psychosocial development and psychosocial-historical turning points in Plaatje's life. A discussion on the findings encompasses overlapping or 'superimposing' of the psychosocial stages of development proposed by Erikson with the significant socio-historical periods over the lifespan of Plaatje.

24.4.1 *Basic Trust Versus Mistrust (0–1 Years)*

The first core crisis, namely the antithesis of basic trust and basic mistrust occurs in the first year of the infant's life. The infant's ability to resolve the crisis successfully and acquire the ego-strength or virtue of hope relies on the quality of the relationship between the mother or primary caregivers and the infant (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1997).

24.4.1.1 *Baby Plaatje at Doornfontein (1876–1877)*

Solomon (Sol) Plaatje was born on 9 October 1876 on a farm at Doornfontein in the Boshoff district, in the Free State, South Africa (Mokae, 2012; Molema, 2012; Willan, 1984, 2018). His parents, Johannes and Martha, committed Lutheran Christians, were Plaatje's primary caregivers during infancy. He was the seventh of their eight children (Molema, 2012; Willan, 2018). No evidence indicates parental neglect or a lack of attachment that could have resulted in Plaatje developing mistrust. Plaatje developed and maintained a sense of hope for an equal society throughout his life. He preserved a strong attachment to his mother; referring to her as his moral compass (Molema, 2012; Willan, 2018).

24.4.2 *Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt (1–3 Years)*

In this stage, toddlers have to resolve the crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt. They are tasked with developing a sense of themselves as independent persons who can exercise self-control and make their own decisions (Erikson, 1963) which, if carried out successfully, will lead to the development of the virtue, willpower. Willpower leaves a residue on identity formation via the child's courage to be independent and to choose and guide his own future (Chéze, 2009). Caregivers and the social environment should encourage children to exercise autonomy and help them to deal with failures within safe boundaries without being shamed, punished, or constantly criticized (Erikson, 1963, 1997).

24.4.2.1 Pniel (1877–1894): A Continuation

Shortly after his birth, Plaatje's parents moved to the mission station at Pniel, near Kimberley in the Northern Cape Province (Midgeley, 1997) to work for German missionaries in charge of the Berlin Mission Society based there. Pniel was a large fertile stretch of land where education, hard work and Christian traditions were fundamental (Willan, 2018). The residents' work ethic, diligence, impeccable behavior and dress code made them stand out from the neighboring villages (Molema, 2012). These qualities also caused Plaatje to stand out from his peers in later years. The self-confidence he exuded throughout his life may lay rooted in the encouragement and support received from his parents during his early years (Holz, 2014). Since no contradicting historical evidence exists, it can be assumed that Plaatje was able to successfully attain the virtue of willpower, which enabled him to navigate the challenges of the next developmental phase, namely *initiative versus guilt*.

24.4.3 Initiative Versus Guilt (3–6 Years)

Children explore the world more vigorously through their own initiative, but may experience guilt if they violate the social rules and trespass the boundaries introduced by caregivers (Erikson, 1963). Parents and caregivers remain crucial since they guide and discipline their children while encouraging curiosity and imagination (Hook, 2002). Excessively punishing children for taking initiative may result in them developing fear and a sense of guilt. Furthermore, children may identify with or idealize a certain parent, yet simultaneously fear that particular parent's power (Erikson, 1963). If children can balance taking initiative while respecting boundaries, it will foster the virtue of purpose, thus influencing whether they will pursue meaningful endeavors later on or become inhibited instead (Thimm, 2010). A sense of purpose contributes to the development of an ethical sense later in life and remains a driving force throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1997).

24.4.3.1 Pniel (1877–1894): A Continuation

Plaatje's childhood seemed to have been a happy one, as most of his significant memories come from this period. His family lived in a large house at the foot of a ridge on the estate that became known as Plaatje's Heights, and prospered from the sale of their livestock and vegetables (Couzens, 2001; Molema, 2012). Plaatje could read and write Setswana by the age of five, and mastered storytelling by the age of seven. When he was six years old, Plaatje started herding goats and cattle, a customary tradition amongst children of Batswanas (Molema, 2012) in the formation of their African identity which he later referred to as "the occupation most honored among the Bechuana" (Batswanas) (Plaatje, 1916a, p. 7). Plaatje took initiative and found paid employment as a herd boy for a Dutch farmer, learning about responsibility and

the importance of recording events in detail (Midgeley, 1997)—an insight that proved invaluable in the future. Religious worship and involvement guided the Plaatje family household. Plaatje's father was a deacon and his eldest brother, Simon, a church elder. Their leading roles as intermediaries between the missionaries and the residents of the mission, affected Plaatje's consciousness as he grew up (Willan, 2018).

Shortly after Plaatje started school, his father volunteered to manage a newly established mission station of the Berlin Mission Society called Majeakgoro, about 100 km away from Pniel (Mokae, 2012). The family split when Simon chose to take Plaatje under his care and remain at Pniel, resulting in the two brothers only seeing their parents and other siblings—who had relocated to Majeakgoro—at intervals of several months (Molema, 2012). Plaatje had to adjust to the absence of both primary caregivers, especially his mother with whom he had identified more, as well as to newly enforced 'parental' rules and boundaries set by Simon and his wife. Plaatje demonstrated more initiative than guilt during this period, and the subsequent virtue of purpose aided him in overcoming the struggles he experienced during his later life.

24.4.4 Industry Versus Inferiority (6–13 Years)

The school age is characterized by a continuous desire to develop competencies for independent living, avoiding feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (Erikson, 1997). Children interact with the broader environment as teachers and peers play a significant role in their development (Erikson, 1963; Ponterotto, 2017). Children may develop a sense of inferiority and lack the motivation to achieve in adulthood, if they do not experience recognition for their efforts or if ridiculed for poor performance at school (Erikson, 1963; Thimm, 2010). A healthy resolution to this crisis requires a positive balance of mostly industry with a hint of inferiority in order to ensure sensible humility and is reached through the virtue of competence, which is necessary for future collaboration in productive work and family life (Erikson, 1968, 1997).

24.4.4.1 Pniel (1877–1894): A Continuation

The Berlin mission school at Pniel offered Plaatje no more than an elementary education beyond the level of Standard 3, known today as Grade 5 (Midgeley, 1997). His ambition and talent for learning earned him additional private tuition from the German missionary, Reverend Ernst Westphal and his wife Marie, at their home. To Plaatje, Ernst Westphal was a strict disciplinarian and teacher at school, but also a father-like figure (Willan, 2018). Plaatje had a natural gift for languages, a keen appetite for reading and an exceptional memory, which he apparently inherited from his mother, Martha (Molema, 2012). Marie Westphal introduced him to the works of Shakespeare, taught him to read and write English and German, as well as how to play the piano and violin and trained his singing voice, a vice proving very useful

as a source of income in later years whilst traveling abroad (Midgeley, 1997). The violin held a certain status in European musical culture in those years, and could be indicative of Plaatje's wider potential (Willan, 2018). Hence, Plaatje developed industriously and strove to uphold the gained virtue of industry and competency throughout his life.

24.4.5 Identity Versus Role Confusion (13–20 Years)

The adolescent search for a stable sense of self is the focus of this stage (Erikson, 1968); usually seen as a socially sanctioned period of experimentation to facilitate the process of forming an identity (Fromme, 2010). Role confusion can occur if adolescents do not experience a moratorium and fail to experiment with new social roles (Carr & McNulty, 2006). A successful resolution to the identity crisis leads to the emergence of fidelity, a virtue characterized by a clear sense of individual identity and a positive self-description (Erikson, 1968; Ponterotto, 2017).

24.4.5.1 Pniel (1877–1894): A Continuation

At the age of 14, Plaatje worked as a student teacher for two years (Rall, 2003; Willan, 2018). He loved the financial independence (Leflaive, 2014), although ironically, this eluded him throughout his adult life. Formally accepted into the Lutheran faith in a confirmation ceremony on 6 June 1892 performed by Reverend Ernst Westphal, represented Plaatje's commitment to Christianity (Fromme, 2010). Plaatje also learnt a lot about his African heritage from his mother, two aunts and paternal grandmother; their Setswana stories was a collection of parables and proverbs that eventually contributed to a lifelong preoccupation with the linguistic preservation of the Setswana language (Willan, 2018).

Unfortunately, Plaatje could not formally pursue his studies any further, and was thus unable to continue his academic industriousness. He decided to move to Kimberley in 1894 where, at the age of 17, he found a job as a messenger in the town's Post Office, well known for employing mission educated Africans (Pampalis, 1992; Rall, 2003). Plaatje responded quickly to the demands of the job, and was soon promoted to special letter carrier, with a higher salary and more responsibility (Molema, 2012). During that time, Kimberley accommodated people from different nationalities due to the influx of foreigners and migrants after the discovery of diamonds and gold on the nearby mine (Molema, 2012; Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations, 2007). Plaatje stayed at a boarding house in the Malay¹ Camp, a racially mixed residential area with gambling rooms, bars, dance halls, mosques and Christian churches near the center of town. His upbringing in Pniel did not prepare him for this kind of life. Nonetheless, a strong moral sense enabled him to withstand city-life temptations (Midgeley, 1997).

¹A name given to inhabitants originally from Malaysia and Indonesia (Willan, 2018).

Plaatje soon formed a close bond with Isaiah Bud-M'belle, a mission-educated court interpreter whose friendship remained a lifelong source of inspiration and support (Willan, 2018).

Plaatje might not have experienced a period of psychosocial moratorium before he entered the world of work and essentially the next developmental phase, namely intimacy versus isolation, but he was able to avoid the complications of role confusion Erikson warned would typically occur if adolescents do not experience a period of moratorium (Carr & McNulty, 2006). No evidence in the literature present Plaatje as insecure about his identity or his role within society—he always acted according to his own beliefs and values. Furthermore, he exhibited a sense of fidelity but also developed an almost fanatic need to ensure equality across races, eventually dominating his family life and turning him into a workaholic (Willan, 2018).

24.4.6 Intimacy Versus Isolation (20–35 Years)

Productive affiliation with others in work, friendships, and love, is characteristic of this stage (Fromme, 2010; Ponterotto, 2017). If psychosocial development has been relatively smooth, young adults are more likely to form and sustain meaningful, long-term and intimate relationships with others (Batra, 2013; Erikson, 1968). The individual who is insecure in his or her own identity may fear becoming lost or become diffused in the other person's identity (Erikson, 1968). Thus, the individual may avoid such experiences completely, which in turn may cause feelings of isolation and loneliness. The attainment of love is the synthesis between the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, which will enable the individual to endure times of isolation (Erikson, 1963; Gross, 1987).

24.4.6.1 Kimberley, Mafeking, Activist (1894–1911)

Kimberley

At the age of 20, Plaatje was an integral part of an African mission-educated community in Kimberley. Its members were committed Christians and churchgoers from diverse backgrounds and keen supporters of the institutions of the Cape Colony, particularly the non-racial franchise² and its equal judicial system (Leflaive, 2014). Plaatje joined the South African Improvement Society, which helped Africans master the English language. The blend of humor and self-confidence often displayed at the society's meetings were qualities Plaatje later also made his own (Willan, 2018). Plaatje became fluent in English, along with Dutch, Xhosa, German and Sesotho. His involvement in other activities such as the Kimberley Eccentrics Cricket club, the Philharmonic Society and church fundraising campaigns, show him as a productive

²This non-racial Cape Colonial Constitution of 1883 provided equal voting rights to men of all races (Midgeley, 1997).

member of society (Willan, 1984). All the while, Plaatje preserved his identity as a Batswana, suggesting that he successfully resolved the psychosocial crisis of social intimacy versus isolation (Erikson, 1997).

Plaatje formed an alliance with white, South African born lawyer, Henry Burton, who regularly assisted Kimberley's African community in their legal fights against injustices (Willan, 2018). In September 1896, the same year the destructive Rinderpest epidemic (also called the cattle plague) swept across South Africa, Plaatje's father, Johannes, died. Plaatje and his brother, Simon hurried to Mafeking, but arrived too late for their father's funeral (Molema, 2012). According to Louw and Louw (2009), the death of a parent is commonly regarded as a potentially transformative event associated with some negative effects, yet, no evidence in the literature indicates how Plaatje's well-being was impacted by his father's death. Plaatje, however, assumed responsibility for finalising his father's estate and used the proceeds to send two of his younger brothers to school (Willan, 2018); a leading role usually expected from an eldest child in the family (Marks, Jun, & Song, 2007). Plaatje first encountered Shakespeare in December 1897, when he saw a performance of Hamlet. Struck by the playwright's ability to transcend different contexts (Willan, 2018), he in later years, possibly attempted to emulate this via his Setswana translations of Shakespeare's plays.

He married Elisabeth Bud-M'belle (sister of his close friend, Isaiah) on 25 January 1898, despite attempts from their respective families to keep them apart (Molema, 2012). It was an inter-tribal union inducing strong opposition since it was uncommon back then to marry someone from a different tribe as your own (Mokae, 2012). During their initial separation, Plaatje experienced the psychosocial crisis of personal intimacy versus isolation evidenced by the frequent letters he wrote to Elisabeth; a time he referred to in later years as "the long and awful nights in 1897 when my path to union...was so rocky" (Plaatje, 1973, p. 76). Yet, he remained hopeful that their love for each other would overcome anything. Their families eventually accepted it, but the debates surrounding their mixed marriage left such a transformative impact on Plaatje that he later evoked it in his historical novel *Mhudi* (Willan, 2018).

In mid-1898, Plaatje qualified to vote in the first general elections (Midgeley, 1997; Willan, 1984). He supported the Afrikaner Nationalists because Henry Burton campaigned as the main candidate against the British Imperialists (Willan, 1984, 2018). When the British emerged victorious, Plaatje believed the non-racial Cape franchise would continue its existence in the colony. Ernst Westphal had since become a British citizen and saw Plaatje's alliance with the Afrikaners as treasonous. Despite his unwavering respect for Westphal, Plaatje's clear sense of individual and social identity allowed him to stand firm in his decisions (Erikson, 1963; Willan, 2018). After four years at the Post Office, Plaatje saw no further prospects of advancement and moved to Mafeking in the North-West Province of South Africa, after securing a job as clerk and court interpreter (Molema, 2012).

Mafeking

African court interpreters were highly regarded due to the unmatched familiarity with their dialect during trials where Africans were involved (Willan, 1984). They

provided access to the judicial system that could realise the dream of equal treatment to all. His job, and ties to the prominent Barolong landowner, Silas Molema, afforded Plaatje the respect of the community. He cultivated good relationships with everyone, including leading white residents in the district (Willan, 2018). Although Plaatje worked in cramped and badly ventilated offices, he remained industrious. Years later, Plaatje reflected on his time as a court interpreter in Mafeking in a document called the *Essential Interpreter* (Willan, 2018). His first child, Frederick St York Leger, was born in November 1898, when Plaatje was 22 years old (Midgeley, 1997).

One of Plaatje's biggest frustrations centered around money and status; it infuriated him if he felt his skills and status went unrecognized (Willan, 2018). It is thus not surprising that he always protested against unjust treatment, especially when being personally affected. The Anglo-Boer war broke out on 11 October 1899, derailing his plans to write the Cape Civil service examinations³ (hoping for a higher salary and promotion), and Mafeking was besieged for eight months (De Villiers, 2000; Gerhart & Karis, 1977). Throughout the siege, he continued to work as court interpreter and supplemented his income by doing administrative tasks for war correspondents, writing articles for the local newspaper, and typed out the handwritten diaries of others (Midgeley, 1997). His linguistic skills earned him the job as liaison between the White British administration and the Black Barolong chiefs; it elevated him to a position of privilege among the African people and left him unaffected when the food rationing system was implemented (Leflaive, 2014). Throughout the war, Plaatje kept his own diary that was serendipitously discovered by an anthropologist in 1969. It was originally published in 1973 under the title, *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking*, and re-edited and published in 1989 as *Mafeking Diary: A Black Man's View of a White Man's War*. The daily entries were interrupted only when he was ill and confined to bed, which always seemed to flare up feelings of loneliness within him. He disregarded his frail health, a tendency typifying the rest of his life (Willan, 2018). Ironically, in later years, his wife commented that it was indeed only when Plaatje was ill that she got to spend time with him (Mokae, 2012; Midgeley, 1997).

After the war, Plaatje re-registered for and wrote the Cape Civil service examinations (Mokae, 2012). Plaatje was proud to discover he achieved top marks and headed the list of candidates, only to be disappointed a few months later when he was not acknowledged accordingly in the published government gazette (Midgeley, 1997). Not receiving public recognition for his achievement, especially after enquiring the discrepancy, further fueled his resentment and reminded him of the injustices that existed in an administration he had always been loyal to (Willan, 2018). The uncertainty of advancement in his chosen career path further hindered his intellectual development and left him feeling in-between (Arnett, 2004). Plaatje used his virtues of willpower, purpose and competence to navigate the challenges he faced during this period. His belief in equality before the law was rekindled when the Special Treason Court issued guilty verdicts with appropriate sentences to five white men who murdered different black men (Willan, 2018). For two more years, family and

³Entry examinations required for recruitment and admission to government service (Willan, 2018).

financial pressures forced him to continue working as a civil servant, before turning to journalism full-time (Midgeley, 1997; Rall, 2003).

Activist

In 1902, Plaatje (aged 26) became editor of the first Setswana-English weekly newspaper, *Koranta ea Becoana* (The Bechuana Gazette), and joined a select band of black pressmen in South Africa (Midgeley, 1997; Willan, 2018). Through his articles, Plaatje became known as a leading spokesperson for African opinion. Before long, he was exchanging articles with overseas newspapers, especially African-American publications, in an attempt to boost readership and subsequent income. The newspaper, burdened with financial difficulties from the start, kept Plaatje working long hours and incurring personal debt to ensure its survival (Midgeley, 1997). The newspaper's political creed was central to Plaatje's long-standing belief system of equality before the law for everyone, and pride in his African heritage (Willan, 2018).

Plaatje's political career started in 1903 when he joined a delegation of Barolong chiefs to the British government in Cape Town to claim compensations for the losses suffered by the African people during the war (Willan, 1984). Over the next few years, Plaatje became more critical of the British administration of the two previous Boer Republics and the pass laws that were introduced specifically to control the movements of black people (Cousins & Walker, 2015). He travelled around the country, observed unfair or wrongful situations and reported them in his newspaper. By 1906, his newspaper was shut down and Plaatje, covered in debt, was left without an income (Molema, 2012; Willan, 2018). Over time, his financial dilemma worsened until he found work as a labor recruiter for the mines for a few months in 1909. By April 1910, Plaatje's inability to settle his debts forced the bailiff to seize a few of the assets in his house (Willan, 2018). In May 1910, with the birth of the Union of South Africa (Odendaal, 2012) Plaatje and his family moved to Kimberley where he became editor of a new newspaper, *Tsala ea Becoana* (The Bechuana's Friend). To generate additional income, he wrote regular articles for the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, including the *Pretoria News* and the *Cape Argus*. He managed to gain access to several cabinet ministers in the newly formed Union Government to successfully appeal against specific cases of injustice in the Northern Cape (Midgeley, 1997). As always, there was a stark contrast between Plaatje's stature as a leader of the African people and his personal circumstances (Willan, 2018).

During the period 1901–1910, Plaatje fathered two more sons (Richard and Hally) and two daughters (Olive and Violet), but his long absences away from home essentially left Elisabeth on her own as their primary caregiver (Willan, 2018). In terms of Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory, Plaatje's acts of love, at the age of 34, extended more towards society at large, than to his wife. Plaatje may have prematurely entered the developmental stage of generativity versus stagnation and, therefore, struggled to strike a balance between his own children's upbringing and his need to contribute to society. His limited involvement with and care for his family suggested the virtue of care may have been overemphasized to society at great personal cost.

24.4.7 Generativity Versus Stagnation (35–65 Years)

In this stage, the individual must find synthesis between generativity and self-obsession or stagnation (Erikson, 1997). Generative personalities find fulfilment by participating in the next generation's development through guidance, productive work, procreation or childcare (Louw & Louw, 2009). They also have a stronger sense of coherence than adults who do not expand their ego-interests and stagnate by withdrawing or rejecting others during this time (Newman & Newman, 2012). A successful synthesis leads to the virtue of care, which implies a capacity to give without expectations of any return (Stevens, 2008). The attainment of the previous virtues (i.e., hope, will, purpose, fidelity and love) is essential to guide and promote these same virtues in the next generation (Erikson, 1997).

24.4.7.1 Tales of Travels (1912–1932)

By June 1912, financial difficulties forced Plaatje's second newspaper to shut down. That same year, the South African Natives National Congress (SANNC), later renamed the African National Congress (ANC), was founded in Bloemfontein in the Free State, South Africa, to defend the rights of the country's black population and to promote cooperation with the Afrikaner government, who were discussing the implementation of rigorous segregation pass laws (Willan, 2018). Plaatje was elected the SANNC's first secretary general (Midgeley, 1997) and managed to briefly revive his newspaper under a new name, *Tsala ea Batho* (The Friend of the People), that reflected the unity advocated by the SANNC (Midgeley, 1997). Plaatje approached the predominantly colored African Political Organisation (APO), to collaborate against the newly proposed legislation (Willan, 2018). However, the Native Land Act, implemented in 1913, deprived Africans the right to acquire land outside 'Scheduled Native Areas' (Odendaal, 2012), thus effectively segregating them from the whites who were prohibited from acquiring land within these areas. This legislation became a central event in Plaatje's life. He travelled around the country on a bicycle gathering evidence about the adverse consequences of the Land Act, and reported it in his newspaper (Rall, 2003). In 1914, Plaatje led a SANNC delegation to the British government in order to request repeal of the Act, but to no avail. He started writing *Native Life in South Africa* as part of the proposed campaign, and remained in England for three years to complete and publish it (Midgeley, 1997). He jointly authored two additional books, both dedicated to the preservation of Setswana proverbs (Jones & Plaatje, 1916), and contributed to a book commemorating Shakespeare's 300th anniversary, which was published in 1916 (Remmington, 2013). In the meantime, he established a variety of contacts within London's African and African-American community. His youngest son, Johannes (born in 1912) died at the age of two, shortly after Plaatje left for England in 1914; due to financial constraints he was unable to return for the funeral in time (Willan, 2018).

Upon his return to South Africa in 1917, the SANNC was in turmoil, and its president was obliged to resign. Despite being offered the presidency, Plaatje declined it and instead spent the rest of 1917 travelling around the country advocating against the horrors of the proposed Native Administration Bill as an extension of the injustices of the 1913 Native Land Act (Leflaive, 2014). During October 1918, Plaatje's entire household fell ill with influenza, forcing him to take care of them (Molema, 2012). The other family members recovered well, but Plaatje's eldest daughter, Olive, contracted rheumatic fever and passed away in 1921. Plaatje also fell ill and developed a heart condition that worsened when he overworked himself (Willan, 2018). Olive's death probably left a lasting impact on Plaatje, particularly because at the time, he was abroad again—similarly with the death of his son, Johannes—unable to return home. Although it appeared that Plaatje was able to recover from his grief and find meaning in life mainly through work, it could be that Plaatje's emotional ties to Olive were never fully severed, especially since he later dedicated *Mhudi* to “the memory of our beloved Olive” (Willan, 2018, p. 424).

In June 1919, Plaatje led another SANNC deputation to England to remind the British government of their continued mistreatment by the Union authorities, but without success (Willan, 1984). For the next few years, he travelled extensively towards this cause, touring England, Scotland, Canada and America while lecturing at public meetings, writing articles for newspapers and producing pamphlets on South African affairs. During this time he wrote the novel *Mhudi*; published in 1930 (Rall, 2003; Willan, 1984). Despite his declining health, Plaatje lived a busy and productive life. Before returning to South Africa in 1923, he recorded a number of Setswana and Xhosa hymns at a recording studio in London, and sang the first-ever recorded version of “Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika”—today South Africa's national anthem (Leflaive, 2014; Midgeley, 1997).

Back in Kimberley, Plaatje found his wife and children staying at her brother, Isaiah's house, since their family home had been sold (Molema, 2012). The SANNC (now the ANC) was a shadow of its former self, its position challenged by the mass African trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of South Africa, who believed in more direct methods such as strikes (Willan, 2018). Despite his public critique of the British administration, Plaatje never associated himself with activities that advocated armed conflict, and gradually withdrew from the ANC (Midgeley, 1997; Willan, 2018). The ANC's prestige had, as Plaatje's position as an independent African spokesman, lost its major effect. Furthermore, Plaatje was struck by the virtual demise of the African press and travelled around the country to act as a voice for the African people by writing hundreds of articles in various English-language newspapers of the day, often under the heading ‘Through Native Eyes’ (Leflaive, 2014). The passing of the Colour Bar Act in 1926 and the proposed abolishment of the Cape non-racial emerging, threatened Plaatje's most cherished principle: equality before the law. Throughout 1927 and 1928, he was involved in the Independent Order of True Templars (IOTT), an inter-racial organization, advocating sobriety (Rall, 2003). The IOTT offered paid employment and allowed him to travel under its auspices around the countryside. In 1929, as the next general elections approached, Plaatje actively rallied supporters against the abolishment of the Cape

franchise, but without success. However, the Kimberley community rewarded him that same year when they donated him the house he and his family were renting, as a gift for his ceaseless work on behalf of his people (Couzens, 2001). The gesture restored some of his hope for the future (Willan, 2018).

From 1930 onwards, Plaatje devoted himself to the research of Setswana linguistics and the preservation of vernacular languages. To him, revitalizing the African people's language would restore a sense of pride in their customs and traditions (Midgeley, 1997). It was also a response to his increasingly pessimistic observations of the effects of social and economic change upon the lives of his people—alcoholism, lawlessness, breakdown of parental control, disrespect for authority (Willan, 2018). His Setswana translation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* was published at the end of 1930, but *Julius Caesar* was only published in 1937, after pending disagreements between government and native experts on Setswana orthography (Leflaive, 2014; Rall, 2003). Meanwhile, Plaatje also worked on a new edition of his original collection of Setswana proverbs (Willan, 2018).

In 1931, he briefly edited a newspaper, the *Heritage*, published under the auspices of the IOTT, but ceased publication after just five issues. Plaatje also travelled to the Belgian Congo and Zimbabwe in 1931 in his capacity as journalist (Willan, 2018). Plaatje's generative behavior during his last years, put strain on his already weak heart. At the start of 1932, he travelled again, despite his ailing health, first to Cape Town then to Johannesburg on working visits (Leflaive, 2014; Midgeley, 1997). While in Johannesburg in June 1932, Plaatje fell ill but continued to work on his manuscripts while he recovered with family staying in town (Willan, 1984). On 17 June he braved the cold weather and attended to prior arranged appointments, but collapsed on a train platform on the way back home. Plaatje died of bronchitis on 18 June 1932 (Molema, 2012; Rall, 2003). His grave and house in Kimberley have been declared national monuments as tributes to his tireless efforts to educate and connect people across races (Willan, 2018). Plaatje constantly took initiative and remained productive and industriousness until the end. Career-wise, Plaatje never self-stagnated but seemed to have overcome many of his challenges due to his ability to follow his own moral voice, guided by his willpower, purpose, love and care.

24.5 Conclusions and Recommendations for Theory and Practice

Plaatje emerged as a South African literary pioneer despite the political, intellectual and socio-economic constraints imposed on non-White South Africans during the pre-apartheid era. His missionary upbringing initiated the attainment of hope and willpower, and a sense of purpose remained a driving force throughout his life. Plaatje's pride in his African heritage remained unwavering, as evidenced by a lifelong preoccupation with the preservation of the Setswana language, including attempts to introduce his people to the British playwright Shakespeare's work. He

developed an almost fanatic need to ensure equality across races that dominated his family life and turned him into a workaholic. The abolishment of the non-racial Cape franchise undermined his most cherished principle of equality for all, challenging his initial resolution of trust in societal institutions. His devotion to the liberation of African people is reflected in, amongst others: *Native Life in South Africa*; his *Boer War Diary*; and *Mhudi*. These documents were the first of its kind by a Black South African.

Plaatje's major activities could be described as legacy activities. In his career, he never self-stagnated but seemingly surmounted many challenges by following his own moral voice, guided by willpower, purpose, love and care. Plaatje was an extraordinary personality, worthy as subject of a South African academic psychobiography. Erikson's psychosocial theory proved valuable in identifying significant psychosocial and historical turning points that shaped Plaatje's development, and may further assist mental health care workers to understand and reconstruct their clients' processes in therapy accordingly. Erikson's theory proposes realistic developmental goals as a way of monitoring the individual's progress on their developmental path, as well as uncovering contextualized ego strengths or virtues that are needed to advance. It is regarded universally and culturally neutral, because it acknowledges that people's progression through the developmental stages manifests differently for different cultures. To date, many psychotherapists continue to consult Erikson's work, especially when supporting adolescents with making personal and occupational choices.

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Chapter 25

The Amazing Life of Charlize Theron



Tracey Prenter, Roelf van Niekerk and Paul J. P. Fouché

Abstract Charlize Theron is the first South African to win an Oscar for Best Actress. She was born in 1975 and grew up on a farm outside Benoni, South Africa. Despite the rural setting, Charlize's resourceful mother fostered her artistic leanings. Charlize showed an aptitude for dance and was trained as a classical ballet dancer. However, her parents had a conflictual relationship. Her father is reported to have struggled with alcoholism. When Charlize was 15 years old, her mother killed her father after he threatened their lives during a drunken rage. The act was legally adjudged to have been self-defence and no charges were brought against her mother. Shortly after her father's death, Charlize won the *International New Model Today* competition and moved to Italy. Two years later, she relocated to New York and joined the *Joffrey Ballet School*. Her dance career was curtailed by a severe knee injury and Charlize decided to pursue an acting career instead. After appearing in various films, Charlize won the Oscar for Best Actress in 2004. Film critics described her portrayal of serial killer Aileen Wuornos in *Monster* as one of the greatest performances in the history of the cinema. Her exceptional achievement was further acknowledged when she received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2005. Charlize has used her celebrity status to promote philanthropic pursuits. She was honoured by the United Nations in 2008, when she became the organisation's tenth *Messenger of Peace* with a special focus on eliminating violence against women. In 2013 Charlize was awarded the *World Economic Forum's Crystal Award* for her commitment to improving the lives of African youth with HIV and AIDS. She continues to promote women's rights and frequently acts as an unofficial, but effective ambassador for South Africa.

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25.1 Introduction

Although based on a formal, academic psychobiography (Master's dissertation) completed in 2015 by Tracey Prenter, this chapter represents an attempt to formulate a popular, non-academic psychobiography of Charlize Theron. In the academic psychobiography, Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development was employed as the theoretical framework to conceptualise the personality development of this exceptional individual. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Charlize's personality development, this chapter aims to focus attention on the course of development that culminated in the award of an Oscar to a South African raised in a home environment marred by conflict and violence.

25.2 The Parents

The Afrikaans-speaking Theron family lived on a smallholding outside Johannesburg, South Africa. Charlize Theron was born on 7 August 1975, the only child of Charles and Gerda Theron. She was a healthy baby who was welcomed into a household that was characterised by marital discord. Her father, Charles Theron, was reportedly a sociable individual who enjoyed company and frequently welcomed others into his home. On the contrary, her mother, Gerda Theron (née Maritz), was ostensibly a private person who appeared sullen and unfriendly towards uninvited guests. Although Charles initially abstained from alcohol after his marriage to Gerda in 1971, he allegedly became an abusive alcoholic who was unfaithful to his wife. Charlize has repeatedly described her mother as a victim of domestic abuse to members of the media.

However, there have been inconsistencies regarding the type of abuse that Gerda experienced during her marriage to Charles. In March 1999, an American newspaper quoted Charlize as saying that her father was an alcoholic who assaulted them when drunk, but in 2004 Charlize amended her statement while being interviewed by Diane Sawyer when she claimed that he was verbally abusive and had never assaulted her. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus regarding the extent of Charles's alcohol abuse. His sister, Elsa Malan, has publically disputed his alcoholism and claimed that he was a dedicated family man who adored his only daughter. In 2008, Elsa told a reporter from the Daily Mail that Charles drank alcohol but she insisted that she had never seen him intoxicated. Nevertheless, Elsa conceded that there was considerable tension between Charles and Gerda. The couple had numerous arguments, and when Charles arrived home late at night, Gerda would sometimes lock the doors so that he was forced to sleep outside in their caravan. In addition to the marital conflict, the years following their daughter's birth were difficult for the couple because they

worked long hours at their road construction business. Charlize was partially raised by the family nanny during her younger years, as her mother spent time away from home overseeing the family businesses.

25.3 Early Childhood

Young children tend to develop different types of relationships with their various caregivers depending on how that individual responds to the child during times of distress.

Little is known about the actual quality of Charlize's relationships with her mother, father or nanny during infancy. However, Charlize's close bond with her mother from childhood is evident in the majority of her interviews and she seldom misses an opportunity to praise the woman she refers to as her best friend and role model. In an interview in 1998, Charlize attempted to explain her relationship with her mother:

I look upon myself as a little duckling that follows the first thing they see and for me that was my mother ... Being around her made me feel protected. She became someone I wanted to mould myself after.

The quality of a child's relationships with his or her parents is a powerful predictor of later social and emotional development. It is important for infants to cultivate a sense that the world is a safe place and they learn this through their experiences with their primary caregivers. It is largely mothers who create a sense of trust in their babies by responding to their needs in a reliable and consistent manner. Responsive mothering also lays the foundation for the infant to have hope during times of hardship. Charlize appears to have developed a close and trusting bond with her mother, whose presence made her feel secure and protected. She has repeatedly told interviewers that her mother has made many sacrifices for her and tended to place her daughter's needs above her own. Moreover, her adventurous behaviour in adolescence and adulthood suggests that she views the external world as a relatively safe place to be explored.

Family members report that Charlize's father was proud of his baby daughter and behaved in an affectionate manner towards her. She was a hairless infant and her father often used to stroke her head with the palm of his hand. He gave her the Afrikaans nickname *Kieriekoppie* because her bald head reminded him of the smooth knob of a walking stick. Although he was demonstrative towards Charlize, it is possible that her father's alleged verbal abuse may have made it difficult for her to form a strong sense of trust in him. However, he attempted to remain sober during his early marriage and her parents' marital discord may thus have been less evident during her infancy than in later years.

Parents play a vital role in affirming certain accomplishments, and in modifying socially unacceptable behaviour during early childhood. Desirable behaviours are usually praised, while failures or undesirable behaviours are corrected. Primary caregivers therefore play an important role in teaching children right from wrong.

Charlize's parents seem to have adopted different disciplinary styles, with her father being a permissive parent who reportedly spoilt her during her early childhood. Her mother therefore accepted responsibility for discipline in the home and her correction often took the form of physical punishment, as is evident in Charlize's statement in a biography by Karsten (2009):

I got spanked hard on the butt ... She'd hit me with anything that was around: a hairbrush, a shoe – the shoe was a big one.

Yet, Charlize insists that she is grateful for her mother's discipline and maintains that she usually deserved the punishment she received. Although she has expressed gratitude for her mother's discipline in adulthood, she may have been afraid of the physical punishment as a toddler. Furthermore, Charlize may have been at greater risk of developing a sense of shame and doubt in her abilities as a result of the punishment she received. This is especially true if parents do not help their toddlers to deal with any failures in a sympathetic way to avoid feelings of inadequacy. It is not known how Charlize's failures were dealt with as a toddler, but she shows a lack of defensiveness and shame when she discusses her career failures in adulthood:

Some of the films that I've done have been rubbish. A lot of people expect you to disown your movies when they aren't successful ... but it is okay to admit that sometimes things didn't work out.

In addition to learning behaviours that are socially acceptable, toddlers face the challenge of developing a sense of themselves as independent persons who are capable of making their own decisions and exercising self-control. Charlize has an unusually close bond with her mother and the following extract from a biography by Karsten (2009) shows that she may have idealised her mother:

There was something about my mother that I wanted to be so badly. Everything from how she dressed, to how she got up in the morning and presented herself to the world and dealt with shit you cannot imagine. Everything, the way she brushed her teeth, put soap on her cloth, the clothes she wore, her perfume, the way she smoked her cigarettes, the way she drove her car. I was the biggest copycat. I was always so proud to say, "That's my mom" ... I was mama's girl... We were friends from way back. We had to be. We were the only ones there for each other.

Despite the possible idealisation of her mother, Charlize was able to separate from her and allow herself to be taken care of by the family nanny when her mother was working. This may have provided the opportunity for her to experience and develop a sense of herself, apart from her mother. In addition, her anecdotes of her later experiences at boarding school suggest that her mother encouraged her to be independent and accountable for her actions. Charlize and her school friends would get into trouble and her mother would be the only parent who did not make an appearance in the principal's office on Monday morning to defend her child. When Charlize phoned her to complain, her mother would simply tell her that she got herself into trouble and she would need to get herself out of it.

25.4 The Pre-school Years

Charlize was a happy, confident and spontaneous child, who could be stubborn at times. Pre-school children are more mobile, curious and resourceful than toddlers. They also have an active fantasy life and their imaginations guide their exploration of the social world through play. After Charlize moved to Hollywood in 1993, she often referred nostalgically to her childhood:

I grew up on a farm. Instead of Barbies and teddy bears, I had goats and sheep and ostriches and 20 dogs. You can't get any more natural than that ... I grew up with animals.

Charlize was an only child who lived on a spacious smallholding and learned early on to use fantasy to entertain herself. She may have missed the company of other children, as she has described herself as a girl who pretended to have friends and enjoyed wearing costumes while playing characters in stories. She also seemed to be able to move from persona to persona with ease. In an article by Rosen in the *Biography Magazine* in 2000, Charlize claimed that she would be Sheena queen of the jungle one moment and a princess the next. Charlize's imaginative abilities played an important role in stimulating her learning and creativity. According to a theorist, Thalia Goldstein (2009), the development of acting talent in childhood has been linked to imaginative play, good emotional regulation and high levels of empathy. These skills appear to have been activated during Charlize's early childhood.

She was a precocious young girl who displayed a desire to entertain others from an early age. Pottie Potgieter, a resident of her home town, claimed that Charlize's father adored her and was proud of his talented daughter. Her father would reportedly urge her to sing to visitors, and she happily obliged. Nevertheless, it appears that it was her mother that she drew close to and modelled herself on. She has frequently stated that she considers her mother to be a supportive parent who fostered her talent and accommodated her dreams:

I didn't grow up wealthy, but every dream I had, even if it was crazy, my mother took seriously ... If I said I wanted to be a guitar player, somehow I ended up getting guitar lessons. If I said, "Mom, I want to paint," she'd say, "Okay – art classes." When I wanted to perform, she'd pull all of the men out of a business meeting and make them sit in the living room where I'd lip-synch and dance in her outfits and shoes. That's how I grew up. Whenever people were around, it was: Entertain!

Charlize's creative abilities were well received and there was a notable absence of criticism or punishment in response to her impromptu performances in the home. A psychologist, Derek Hook (2002), proposes that children actively fantasise about who and what they might become as adults and this allows their childhood dreams to be attached to their adult goals. Charlize may well have been laying the foundation for her future acting career in this developmental period.

25.5 The Learner

In 1981, Charlize began her school career at a small rural school. Her first language was Afrikaans, though she would later learn English as well. A former school friend claimed that she was a talkative, energetic and hardworking student who had adopted her father's strong sense of determination. During an interview in February 1997, Charlize's mother described how she used to take her guitar to school to entertain her friends when she was in first grade. She would also often entertain staff members and the rest of the primary school during assembly. There were, however, times when these performances were not perfectly executed, but the unexpected failures did not overwhelm her. Charlize once stumbled and fell in front of the entire school during a ballet performance. She simply tugged at her dress, smiled and kept dancing as if nothing had happened. Sally Beal, her second-grade teacher, reported that she believed it was this quality of tenacity that might have helped her through the family's trauma in later years.

Charlize began private ballet lessons at the age of six, as she was already showing an aptitude for dance. According to biographer Matt Green, Charlize's mother attended most of her daughter's dance recitals and amateur theatre performances, despite her demanding work schedule. On Friday nights Charlize and her mother would go to the drive-in theatre, while her father preferred the company of his friends. She reportedly adored her mother, who continued to serve as her role model during this developmental period. In 2002, Charlize told a reporter that her mother placed her interests above her work commitments. She claimed that her mother made time to take her to museums, music lessons and ballet classes, despite working 18-hour days. In contrast, Charlize remembers her father being emotionally and physically absent and stated that he did not attend any of her performances.

Charlize enthusiastically participated in a variety of extracurricular activities. In addition to private ballet lessons, she took part in athletics and netball at school. She also enjoyed the outdoors and was an active girl who liked to swim, fish, ride on horseback and compete with boys. Charlize's cousin, Kobus Maritz, described her as a tomboy who did not mind getting dirty. She was an attractive child whose physical appearance was reportedly downplayed as her creative talents were valued over her beauty. In an interview with Winfrey in 2005, Charlize recalled that her mother never said

'Look how beautiful you are.' It was about, 'Did you milk the cow? I don't think my mom ever said, 'Isn't she a pretty girl?' She'd say, 'You should hear her sing. You should read this poem she wrote.'

The praise was always about what she did and not how she looked.

Parents, teachers and peers are influential social agents as children evaluate themselves in relation to the feedback they receive from others. Charlize used her ability to entertain others as a way to communicate and engage with her family, teachers and peer group. She received recognition and affirming feedback when she was elected as head girl of the primary school in her final year. In addition, her industriousness was

acknowledged and valued in her home environment. She received praise for completing household chores and for productive actions, rather than being complimented for her beauty. The value placed on her productivity and creative talents may have bolstered her confidence in her abilities and fostered a sense of competence, resilience and courage. For example, Charlize was badly injured when she was thrown from a horse at the age of eleven but chose to continue horseback riding rather than succumb to her fears. During an interview with van Meter in 2007, she explained:

I was unconscious for a few hours and I broke my collarbone. I went through a little period of fear. But I hated it, so I eventually got back on. You can't go through your life hanging onto those fears.

The following year, 12-year-old Charlize won several dance competitions in the East Rand and her photograph was published in the local community newspaper. Her ballet teacher at the time, Michele Pohl-Phillips, referred to her as an exceptional student and her Spanish dancing teacher, Gillian Bonegio, described her as a confident, humble and practical young girl who had a wonderful sense of humour.

However, at home, the relationship between Charlize's parents grew worse as she approached adolescence. Her father would allegedly abuse alcohol and frighten her mother with his fits of rage. He also reportedly grew increasingly distant towards Charlize as she grew older and their relationship was characterised by tension. Her mother therefore decided that it would be in her best interests to leave the family home. Consequently, Charlize was sent to boarding school at the age of 12 and began her high school studies at the National School of the Arts in Johannesburg. Here she studied classical ballet, flamenco, Greek and contemporary dance. Charlize's separation from her mother initially shook her confidence and she developed stomach ulcers during adolescence. Although she had difficulty adjusting to boarding school, it is likely that she benefitted from her diminished exposure to their household conflict. Charlize later admitted that her father was an alcoholic and it was good for her to be at boarding school so that she did not witness that. Furthermore, Charlize gradually grew in self-assurance as she increasingly applied herself to her craft and the development of her identity as a classical dancer.

25.6 Adolescence

Although dance was her main passion, the idea of performing through different types of media intrigued her and she began to experiment with acting and modelling. In 1991, 15-year-old Charlize, who had no previous modelling experience, entered the *Rooi Rose Model '91* competition. The winner would represent South Africa in the *New Model Today* competition in Italy. However, the excitement of new opportunities was marred by Charlize's father's sudden death, when she was 15; a traumatic and pivotal event during her adolescence. On Friday, 21 June 1991, her father was fatally wounded during a shooting incident involving her mother. Earlier that day, Charlize's mother took her to a studio in Johannesburg to have photographs taken for her

modelling portfolio. Her father did not accompany them; he spent the afternoon at his sister's house because his brother and sister-in-law were visiting. According to Charlize's aunt, Elsa, the siblings had a few drinks and socialised around the kitchen table. Later that evening, at approximately half past nine, Charlize and her mother arrived at Elsa's house to collect their house key from her father. Charlize walked through the kitchen to the bathroom, while her mother requested the key. Her father asked her mother to wait for a couple of minutes, so that they could drive home together. Her mother reportedly refused and said that she was taking their daughter home immediately. When Charlize returned from the bathroom, her father demanded to know why she had neglected to greet anybody on her way in. She did not reply and followed her mother outside. Thereafter, her father became angry and the atmosphere in the kitchen grew tense. According to Charlize's sworn statement to the police, a short while later he used Elsa's telephone to confront his daughter about her behaviour:

I picked up the phone then. It was my father. He began to argue with me again and asked why I had not greeted the people. I wanted to explain to him that I hadn't seen the other people. But he kept raising his voice. Then he asked where my mother was. He said: "Where's that bloody bitch?" I asked him to stop talking like that, please. He said: "Fuck you all!" He said it quite a few times and then he threw down the phone. I told my mother that I was afraid. She tried to keep me calm. At that point someone hammered on the kitchen door. I told my mother that it was my father and that I was afraid of him.

After the phone call, her father supposedly threatened to shoot the lock of the door if his wife locked him out again. He had a small .22 pistol with him and his sister, concerned that he might behave irrationally, invited him to sleep in her caravan. He declined the offer and asked his brother, Danie, to drive him home instead. Danie remained in the car while Charlize's father knocked on the door of their family home:

Then my father began to curse and swear. I had never heard him swear like that. My mother told him that he was scaring her and that she had never seen him like that. At that he shouted that if she did not open the door he was going to shoot her dead. I heard the door being slammed. Then a shot rang out. My mother ran down the passage ... The next moment she stormed into my bedroom. Another shot rang out. Then we heard my father hammer on the door [of Charlize's bedroom]. My mother pushed the door shut. He tried to push the door open. The next moment another shot rang out. It went right through my bedroom door and through my window. At that my father said he was going to shoot both of us dead with his shotgun. I heard him go to the main bedroom. My mother said she was scared he was going to kill us. Then she also left the room. The next minute I heard a lot of shots. I don't know how many, but it was a lot. Then I heard my mother scream. It was a hysterical scream. I came out of my room too. When I got to the passage, I saw my father's brother, Danie Theron, there. My mother sat in a corner of the bedroom. I ran to her and asked: "What happened?" My mother was crying and said: "Charlize, I shot them, I shot them." Then I saw my father's body lying on the floor next to the bed. There was blood too.

Charlize ran to their neighbour and called for help. She was sitting in the lounge, wrapped in a blanket and weeping, when the police and a doctor arrived at the family's plot. Her father, aged 43, was pronounced dead at approximately 22:00 that evening and the police registered a case of culpable homicide. Her paternal grandmother, Bettie, arrived the day after her son's death to conduct her own investigation of the

shooting and to give the police a statement. Bettie gave an account of her son's marriage that cast her daughter-in-law as the aggressor in the relationship. She stated that Charlize's mother was a bad-tempered and uncaring person who was often violent towards her son, whereas he was never aggressive towards her. She wanted to know why Charlize's mother had not divorced her husband if she hated him that much. Charlize's mother simply replied that she stayed with him for their daughter's sake. Furthermore, Bettie suggested that the fatality may not have happened if Charlize had greeted her father and his relatives earlier in the evening. Charlize and her mother refused to have any contact with Bettie and the rest of the Theron family after her father's funeral.

It is possible that several factors complicated Charlize's grieving process, including: the argument she had with her father shortly before his death, the violent way in which he died, her mother's involvement in his death, her grandmother's veiled accusation that she may have been partially responsible for the loss of her parent, and the abrupt ending of her relationships with her father's family after the funeral. More specifically, Charlize and her father had a heated argument shortly before he died and this may have caused her emotional distress and feelings of guilt. She had wanted a better relationship with him but did not have the opportunity to reconcile after the angry words they exchanged during their last conversation. In addition, she experienced her father's death as traumatic and reported being very afraid during the incident, especially when he threatened to shoot both Charlize and her mother. It may also have been very confusing for the adolescent that her mother, who she viewed as a nurturer and encourager, could be capable of such violence. To compound matters, Charlize's paternal grandmother, Bettie, adopted an adversarial stance in response to her son's violent passing. Bettie implied that Charlize was partly to blame for her father's death because she did not greet him or his siblings on the night he died. This may have exacerbated any feelings of guilt that she was experiencing at the time. Nonetheless, Charlize returned to boarding school a few days after the incident and was composed in the presence of her teachers and peers. Her high-school ballet teacher, Bernice Lloyd, recalled that Charlize displayed little visible emotion after her father's death and was struck by the way in which she was able to pick herself up and perform like a true artist. Charlize turned 16 on the 7th August 1991, three weeks after the fatal shooting. A few days earlier, she won the local *Rooi Rose Model '91* competition and the prize was participation in an international competition, *New Model Today*, in Milan. Although Charlize was one of the youngest models in the competition, Retha Snyman, the organiser, claimed that she demonstrated the confidence, determination and poise of someone much older than her 15 years. Furthermore, Snyman described her as tenacious young lady who showed a will to succeed in everything she tackled that almost bordered on obstinacy.

However, Snyman was concerned that Charlize might be vulnerable to exploitation or susceptible to the negative effects of competitive pressure, if she travelled abroad alone. Her mother responded to the concern by stating that she had faith in her daughter's ability to cope without her, and Charlize reassured Snyman by stating that she believed she could deal with any challenges she would face. When Snyman asked Charlize about her father's whereabouts, she simply stated that he had died in

an accident. When the actual circumstances of her father's death were reported by *National Enquirer* in 1999, Charlize revealed that she did not want to discuss the events surrounding her father's death in order to protect herself and her mother. She explained further in an interview with John Harlow in 2009, when she stated that she did not want to appear to be a victim and she was not comfortable talking about the incident because it involved other people; including her mother.

During an interview with Claire Hoffman in 2012, Charlize recalled being at a crossroads after her father's death. She had just experienced a traumatic event while simultaneously being presented with an opportunity to move to Europe to begin her new career. She expressed gratitude that her mother understood her role as a parent and helped Charlize to reach a place where she was emotionally strong enough to move forward and make important decisions about her future. In 1991 Charlize decided to leave school prematurely and compete in Italy. She was crowned *New Model Today*, and received a one-year modelling contract to feature in various advertising campaigns around the world. In later years, she reflected on her choices during this time and maintained that completing high school was not her best option under the circumstances; she viewed the modelling contract as a rare opportunity to be grasped. During adolescence, Charlize appears to have been given the freedom to search for her own identity and explore various social roles, including those of classical dancer, actress and model. Broadly speaking, her skills and competencies were being cultivated for her future occupation and she was establishing her identity as an entertainer. While her mother can be viewed as the driving force behind her daughter's success, it can be argued that she ultimately allowed Charlize to make important career decisions for herself. Furthermore, Charlize's independent spirit and adventurous nature do seem to have been tempered by a degree of sensible caution as she was careful not to allow modelling agents to exploit her and refused to pose topless or in the nude.

Back in South Africa, the Benoni magistrate's court held an inquest six months after her father's death and evidence was heard relating to the events of 21 June 1991. Charlize and her mother both declared under oath that Charles Theron had been intoxicated and intended to shoot them with a shotgun. A forensic analyst testified that Charlize's father's blood alcohol had been high (0.21 g per 100 ml) and a pathologist testified that he had been struck by four bullets, which had penetrated his left arm, left shoulder and chest. The act was legally adjudged to have been self-defence and no charges were brought against Gerda Theron.

Charlize seems to have justified her mother's actions to herself and this may have enabled her to integrate the death of her father in a meaningful way. She initially described him as an alcoholic who was violent when inebriated, but amended her statement in during an interview with Diane Sawyer in 2004, when she claimed that he was verbally abusive. Charlize has, however, categorised verbal abuse as the worst kind of abuse and described it to a form of rape—the rape of a person's dignity. She has consistently shown solidarity and publically defended her mother's actions on the evening of her father's death, stating that she would have taken the same course of action if she had been in her situation. In addition, Charlize's emotional distress after her father's death may have been mediated by her close relationship

with her mother. In an interview with Morgan in 2011, she described her mother as a supportive parent who understood her needs and helped her to work through her grief, shock and anger. Charlize also stated that, although she is saddened by her father's death, she has achieved a sense of peace and does not feel victimised by the incident. In addition to assisting her daughter to work through the emotional consequences of her husband's death, Charlize's mother appears to have provided adequate stability for her continued identity development during adolescence. She did not want to let unfortunate circumstances affect her daughter's future, so she allowed her to leave school and resume her life abroad. While Charlize may have been emotionally dependent on her mother, she nonetheless chose to separate from her and move abroad. This geographical distance afforded her the opportunity to psychologically separate from her mother and forge her own identity. From an extract in a biography by Karsten (2009), it appears that she emerged from adolescence with a fairly clear sense of who she is as a person:

I'm not my mother, and I'm not my father, I'm my own human being. To find that person, I had to go on my own adventure of discovery ... I really like me.

Charlize moved to Italy in 1991, which served as a base from which she travelled to other countries to participate in advertising campaigns. In addition to her sense of adventure, Charlize demonstrated resilience during difficult times. Shortly after she moved abroad to start her modelling career, she sustained serious injuries when she fell off a camel during a photo shoot in Morocco and resumed work immediately after her dislocated jaw had been re-aligned in hospital. She has an innate toughness which is revealed during challenging times. However, by February 1993 she was no longer satisfied with fulltime modelling as a career, despite the international acclaim she had achieved. She missed the discipline and artistic expression that ballet offered. Her modelling contract was coming to an end and she decided to study dance at the Joffrey Ballet School. She moved to New York in 1993 to resume a previous social role; Charlize redirected her energy and focus into becoming a ballerina.

Unfortunately, after only a few months at the Joffrey Ballet School, serious knee injuries prematurely ended her dance career. Charlize felt depressed and contacted her mother, who flew to New York to support her. Charlize reflected on this crossroad during an interview with Passero in 2002. She realised that she missed telling stories onstage through dance and her mother suggested that she find another way to fulfil this need:

My mom said, 'Either you figure out what to do next or you come home because you can sulk in South Africa.' She reminded me that I loved movies. She said, 'They make them in Hollywood'.

Charlize had to reconfigure her sense of identity once again and decided to replace the social role she had lost, namely that of a dancer, with a new but related one. She decided that she would redirect her passion for entertaining towards acting and purchased a one-way ticket to Hollywood, Los Angeles to pursue a career as an actress.

25.7 The Actress

When Charlize flew to Los Angeles in 1993, she had a single, tattered suitcase and \$500. Furthermore, she had no formal training as an actress and was competing against thousands of prospective actresses who annually move to Hollywood seeking fame. She was initially unable to secure the services of a reputable casting agent or manager and started to experience anxiety and self-doubt when she realised that it might be more difficult to become an actress than she had previously imagined. Moreover, she did not complete her secondary phase of school and could not envision a future for herself back in South Africa. Although Charlize was waitressing to cover her monthly rent, her mother occasionally augmented her daughter's income with cashier's cheques from South Africa. During an interview with Winfrey in 2005, Charlize described a chance encounter during an errand to a bank on Hollywood Boulevard led to her signing up with manager John Crosby.

The bank teller, who served Charlize, refused to cash the cheque she had received from her mother because it was issued from a foreign bank. Charlize, who was in urgent need of money, had an intense emotional response to the refusal. By all accounts, it seems that she vacillated between angry outbursts and pleading with the teller. More importantly, Charlize was inadvertently auditioning for her future manager who happened to be in the same queue at the bank. John Crosby, having assumed that she was an actress, offered to represent her and gave her his business card. Charlize seized the opportunity. She enrolled in acting classes and worked hard at eliminating her South African accent. Her efforts paid off and she appeared as an extra in her first film, *Children of the Corn III*, in 1995. The film was not particularly successful, but it gave Charlize much-needed exposure and she received some critical praise. She claimed that acting came naturally to her and the transition from dancer to actress was therefore fairly seamless.

In addition to her natural acting ability, Charlize was prudent in selecting casting agents and film directors who furthered her career interests. She fired Crosby towards the end of 1995, as he reportedly kept pressurising her into accepting roles in films that placed greater value on her looks than her acting talent. According to biographer, Matt Green, she believed that his approach would negatively impact her longevity in the film industry. Moreover, she insisted that femme fatale roles did not accurately represent who she was; a common and crude tomboy from a farm in Africa

The following year Charlize received critical acclaim for her first speaking role as Helga Svelgen in the film *2 Days in the Valley*. She continued to enjoy a close relationship with her mother, who moved to Los Angeles in 1999 to be near her daughter. However, the year 1999 was characterised by controversy for Charlize. *The National Enquirer* revealed that her father had not died in a car accident as she had claimed and the real circumstances of her father's death were made public knowledge. Later the same year, Charlize participated in the controversial Women Against Rape campaign in South Africa and sparked a public debate. The campaign was withdrawn a month after it was launched because the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) had received a letter signed by 28 individuals, who complained that

the advertisement portrayed all South African men as rapists. Charlize responded by stating that the advertisement had never intended to be discriminatory. Nevertheless, she argued that a hard-hitting campaign was needed to address the unacceptably high rape statistics in South Africa. An appeals committee of ASA lifted the ban on the advertisement shortly afterwards. This campaign may have been priming Charlize for her role as Aileen Wuornos four years later.

The year 2000 was particularly productive for Charlize, as she starred in four major films, namely, *Reindeer Games*, *The Yards*, *Men of Honour*, and *Legends of Baggage Vance*. She simultaneously established herself as a serious actress and demonstrated different aspects of her acting personality. In 2003, she agreed to play the role of Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*. This crime drama was based on a true story; that of Aileen Wuornos, who was abused as a child and, in the late '80 s, killed seven men in Florida, whom she claimed had raped or attempted to rape her while she was earning an income working as a prostitute. During her trial, Wuornos argued that the homicides were committed in self-defence but was convicted of seven murders and sentenced to death by lethal injection in 2002. Charlize had recently moved into film production by this stage and took a gamble when she suggested that her own company, Denver and Delilah Productions, should produce the film.

Charlize fully immersed herself in the role and spent five months devoting herself to becoming Aileen Wuornos; both psychologically and physically. She even had to alter her appearance and gained 14 kg to resemble Wuornos' more masculine build. *Monster* was well received and Charlize's masterful portrayal of Wuornos secured her nominations for all the major film awards in 2004. Among other accolades, she received the *Silver Bear*, *Golden Globe* and *Screen Actors Guild* awards for Best Actress, and on 28 February 2004, she became the first South African to win an *Academy Award* (Oscar) in a major acting category, namely Best Actress. The South African president at the time, Thabo Mbeki, issued an official statement:

Ms Theron, in her own personal life, represents a grand metaphor of South Africa's move from agony to achievement.

Charlize returned to South Africa one week after the Academy Award ceremony and was personally congratulated by both Thabo Mbeki and Nelson Mandela. The South African media portrayed her as a role model and symbol of the nation. Charlize was described as a citizen of the world; a citizen who reflected the fluidity of the new South African identity. She has publically attributed ninety percent of her success to her mother's unflinching support and therefore maintained that the Oscar was a victory for both their lives. In the weeks following the various film award ceremonies, Charlize was repeatedly asked about whether she emotionally identified with her character in *Monster*, Aileen Wuornos, as a result of the tragedy of her own youth. There was extensive media speculation about whether she chose that particular dramatic role because the screenplay contained elements that were close to her own childhood circumstances, namely her mother had killed a man who allegedly abused her. There was further speculation that Charlize might be using filmography as a therapeutic tool to come to terms with the tragedy in her own life.

In response, Charlize claimed that she selected roles that reflect real women with complicated issues and acknowledged that her work, in addition to providing a sense of purpose, can be therapeutic at times. She also admitted that she recognized certain similarities between herself and Wuornos, including the desire for love and hope, the need for acceptance, the urge to improve her life, and the ability to survive tragedy. However, in an interview with Mahler in 2012, she angrily denied the media speculation that her choice of acting roles (often portrayals of women in unhappy or violent circumstances) has been exclusively determined by her father's death:

Yes, it was tragic that my father died. But, my God, it was a long time ago ... To think that all my work is drawn from only this one well is a huge mistake.

Charlize sees herself as a multifaceted person whose life is not defined by a single trauma. She has continued to receive critical acclaim for her commitment to portraying a diverse range of authentic women, while raising important social and political issues.

Charlize's role as Aileen Wuornos in *Monster* established her as an A-list actress. She continued to apply herself to her craft and her ongoing collaboration with work colleagues resulted in many prestigious awards from the film industry. In 2005, she received further *Golden Globe* and *Emmy* nominations for her role of Britt Ekland in the *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* and multiple nominations for her outstanding performance in the sexual harassment-themed drama *North Country*. In short, she received two *Oscar* nominations in three years and established herself as one of Hollywood's most elite talents. Her exceptional achievements were further acknowledged when she received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on 29 September 2005. After *North Country*, Charlize decided to take an eighteen-month sabbatical from acting in May 2005, so that she could focus on film production and raising important socio-political issues off-screen.

She has used her celebrity status to promote many humanitarian projects. For example, she created *The Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project* (CTAOP) in 2007. This project is committed to supporting African youth in the fight against HIV/AIDS and to assist community organisations that address the underlying causes of the disease. In addition, on 14 November 2008, Theron was designated a United Nations Messenger of Peace by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon as part of a worldwide campaign to combat violence against women. In his citation, Ban Ki-Moon stated that Charlize had consistently dedicated herself to improving the lives of women and children in South Africa. She has continued to be a visible and hardworking ambassador for her country and was awarded the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award in January 2013 for her commitment to improving the lives of African youth with HIV and AIDS.

25.8 Conclusion

Thousands of young girls with similar qualities and dreams as Charlize arrive in Hollywood every year, and few of them succeed. When she arrived in Los Angeles in 1994, Charlize had a single suitcase and a very big dream—to succeed in the movie industry. Just ten years later, she confidently walked across a stage to accept the coveted Academy Award for Best Actress. As the only South African who has won an Oscar, she is an exceptional individual who demonstrates tenacity and a will to succeed despite significant traumatic events in her childhood.

Charlize was a vivacious young girl who displayed a desire to entertain others from an early age. Despite the rural setting of her childhood, her resourceful mother fostered her natural talents and raised Charlize to be an independent thinker who formulated her own conclusions. She was encouraged to be her own person and to discover the world through her own eyes. The development of acting talent in childhood has been linked to imaginative play, good emotional regulation and high levels of empathy. These skills were activated in childhood, enhanced during adolescence, and honed in adulthood for Charlize to become an award-winning actress. In addition, the value placed on her productivity and creative talents bolstered her confidence in her abilities and fostered a sense of competence, courage and resilience.

Charlize was given substantial freedom to search for her own identity and explore various social roles during her teen years. She showed a remarkable ability to reinvent herself and adapt to changing contexts—first as a model, then a dancer, and finally an actress and humanitarian. She seems to have emerged from adolescence with a fairly clear sense of herself as a person, despite being exposed to conflict, violence and many life changes. Who is Charlize Theron? From all accounts she is a confident, hardworking, self-disciplined, tenacious, determined, resilient, highly motivated, ambitious and talented individual who is not defensive and shows a willingness to learn and grow. Charlize's outlook on life gives the impression that she has hope in the face of adversity, and this has equipped her to deal with stressful situations. Moreover, it seems that difficult and challenging times bring out an innate toughness in her; there is a steel masked by charm.

She is also an intelligent woman who has been strategic about choosing dramatic roles and not allowing herself to be exploited or stereotyped as an actress. The pain she has experienced growing up in an abusive household and witnessing the violent death of her father at the hands of her mother may have primed her for her award-winning role as Aileen Wuornos. The empathy and depth of anguish that Charlize brought to the role may have been possible partly because of the overlap in their life stories. Wuornos killed several men whom she claimed abused her and Charlize's mother killed her abusive father. She may have been able to immerse herself in Wuornos' psyche and go emotional distances that other actresses are unable to because of their shared trauma.

One of the most interesting aspects of Charlize's life story is the unusually close relationship that she continues to share with her mother. She has created a partnership with her mother, an individual whom she loves and trusts, that is characterised by a mutual dependence. It is possible that the potentially harmful effects of her parents' marital discord and her father's violent death may have been mitigated to some degree by their close bond. A bond that acted as a 'shock absorber' and provided sufficient safety and security for her to courageously forge ahead and pursue her goals. In summary, the combination of her unique personality traits, natural creative talents, exposure to adversity which she managed to overcome, and the close relationship with her mother have contributed to her remarkable success in her career regardless of staggering odds.

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Chapter 26

Psychobiography as an Effective Research Methodology for the Advocacy of Abused and Neglected Youth in South Africa



Sharon Johnson

Abstract This study examines the life of Tlali (a pseudonym), an 18-year old African Sotho from the Eastern Cape, South Africa, utilizing psychobiography as research methodology for the advocacy of abused and neglected youth. The African self as a synoptic aggregate has eight complementary dimensions: embodied; generative; communal; narratological; melioristic; structural; liminal; and spiritual (Nwoye in *Dialect Anthropol* 30:119–146, 2006). These blend together like an invisible mesh, resulting in a cohesive holistic fabric of the self. Tlali described his transformation, after only eight months at a state youth care and education center (YCEC) on the violent Cape Flats in Cape Town, as a sudden “boom”. This paper sets out to examine, from an African psychological perspective, the nature of institutional trauma healing in communities suffering from the effects of historical injustices such as colonialism, slavery, apartheid and social inequalities. Utilising his thank-you letter to the centre and a personal interview as data, psychobiography offered an in-depth understanding of his life, with African perspectives providing an indigenous application of psychological personality theories. The findings suggest that Tlali’s self-belief emerged at a critical stage of adolescent development as a result of the loving care and respect he received at YCEC. The synoptic mapping of the African self offers effective dimensions in psychobiographical understanding of trauma healing for youth in contexts of violence and gangsterism. Holistic, indigenous approaches should be considered in psychological interpretations of life histories to broaden understanding of trauma healing and transformation. Psychobiography can be an effective research methodology for maltreated youth.

Keywords Maltreated youth · Trauma · State care · Psychobiography · South Africa

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26.1 Introduction

Tlali is not rich or famous like most subjects of psychobiography (Schultz, 2005)—in fact, few people have heard of him, even in his native South Africa (SA). He has not lived a long or public life—he is an 18 year old African Sotho from a rural village in the Eastern Cape, plucked from obscurity by his remarkable transformation at a state youth centre in Ottery, on the Cape Flats, Cape Town, for abused and neglected adolescents. He came into the centre a “lost” and “broken hearted” youth with a criminal record, abusing substances and exposed to gangsterism, with his life in danger. He left metaphorically reborn, after only eight months. He reflected:

Nothing worked except Ottery. It was like a boom (clapping his hands). I never saw I had it.

This psychobiography follows on from traditional life history case studies of extraordinary personalities (Roberts, 2002), but Tlali is not defined by name and has no biographical or historical references. Even though lack of public evidence and fame may mean that some questions cannot be answered and biographical reconstruction may be “risky” (Runyan, 1988, p. 223), his inclusion invites the broadening of psychobiography’s study of inner lives and psychological development (International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, 2005) to include wider categories of people studied and new multicultural conceptual theoretical models to deepen understanding of what it means to be human. Major societal changes at cultural, structural and social levels are considered (Roberts, 2002).

By exploring the nature of Tlali’s “boom” and what “it” is that he came to realise that he “had”, psychobiography can, for example, be a powerful tool for the advocacy of restorative care for vulnerable youth in marginalised communities. Ethical considerations of working with vulnerable youth led to the decision to utilize a pseudonym to protect Tlali’s identity, but details of the centre are revealed due to its significance in the SA history of care for ‘indigent, coloured’ youth since its inception in 1948. Key factors are considered in Tlali’s transformation at this developmental stage, when he was able to change his perceptions of his life in such a short time after suffering years of abuse and neglect. In the words of Briere, cited by Franco (2017):

If we could somehow end child abuse and neglect, the 800 pages of the ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’ (and the need for the easier explanations such as ‘DSM-IV Made Easy: The Clinician’s Guide to Diagnosis’) would be shrunk to a pamphlet in two generations.

Like a great writer who is defined by his work, Tlali gives valuable insights into his YCEC care experiences in a letter to the manager, thanking him for this time at the center. The courts sent him there for protection. His letter—an expression of remarkable achievement—serves as a basis for this paper, together with his own narrative interview. All this takes place within a broader context of care and education of children in post-apartheid democratic SA. The center manager instinctively accepted Tlali into the care facility, housing 70–80 boys between 11 and 18 years, although they had a policy of not admitting anyone with a criminal record. He has a copy of Tlali’s letter hanging on his office wall, a proud testament to the achievements of everyone who worked with him there (Fig. 26.1).

spiritual (Nwoye, 2006). These blend together like an invisible mesh, resulting in a cohesive holistic fabric of the self. In applying African personality theory to Tlali, the contribution of each dimension will be considered in his transformative processes at the YCEC.

26.2.1 Holistic Fabric of Self

The embodied self emphasizes the importance of the body in psychological wellbeing. In the West, this became recognised in the 20th Century with Weber, Darwin and Wundt (Mckinley, 1995). The generative aspect of the African self could be interpreted in Western systems as a preoccupation with achievement and personal betterment, similar to Adler's individual psychology (Gladys, 1961). However, in Africa, this compelling motivation is contextually linked to community distinctions of worth and social emblems of the perceived 'good life'. Farming is important in Nigeria, while Kenya emphasizes a big house and many children (Nwoye, 2006). The influence of post-colonialism, globalization and modernization in the realignment of goals needs to be acknowledged.

Contrary to the individualistic focus of Western psychology, the communal dimension of the African self is closely linked to the generative self and is the most researched—and arguably the most controversial—aspect. Emphasis is placed on social solidarity or mutual dependence of selves, including the ancestors. It also reflects the African principle of complementary duality (Ngwaba cited in Nwoye, 2006) in successful living. In Uganda, for example, the word for poverty also means no relatives, and people mean wealth (Whyte, cited by Nwoye, 2006).

The melioristic self deals with challenges in life and takes a philosophical view of difficulties, similar to Frankl (1984). Another element is related to time—the past present, the present present and the future present in synoptic time consciousness (Nwoye, 2006). The narratological self reflects the cultural memory on the imagination. In SA, urbanization and modernization have changed the traditional oral storytelling of past generations and older generations are often no longer in touch with modern youth. However, grandparents still play an important role in the lives of many children as primary caregivers due to the breakdown of family structures from factors such as unemployment, low income and death of parents from HIV/Aids (Mokone, 2006).

The structural self relates to the African's thinking, emotions and will, the "seats of life forces" (Nwoye, 2006, p. 137)—the psychological counterpart of the embodied self. The head is seen as the thinking organ; the heart holds sentiments and the liver or stomach, the seat of will. This can be positive, symbolising strength of character or representative of disorderly conduct, cowardice and irresponsibility. This is the only structural part of the self which aligns with Western psychology, implying that a person's inner components are the source of principal actions, such as thinking and feelings.

The liminal self is the transitional state of no longer or not yet, putting the person at risk of shame for not overcoming previous failures. This could be interpreted in Western psychology in terms of Erikson's (1968) stages of development. The final fabric of the self refers to the religiosity of Africans. God is conceived as a powerful source of all good things (Nwoye, 2006), similar to Western beliefs. In addition, through ancestors and spiritual beings, nature is infused with mystical potency.

26.3 Methodology

Unlike most psychobiographies, I interviewed Tlali, but I did not utilize his words as primary data in narrative case study analysis (Johnson, in review). Instead, his life story is a backdrop, providing essential information unavailable in the public domain. As Schultz (2005) points out, a willingness to be interviewed does not enhance validity. Tlali's thank-you letter to the manager on leaving the YCEC was considered a main form of personal, creative data.

26.3.1 *Tlali's Thank-You Letter*

21 Tuesday

November 2017

The Truth I didn't see this life coming for me.

I came in ottery. I was lost broken hearted but I was fixed in ottery by all of the members of the school. The teachers and the boys of the school. They gave me love the most weapon I did need in my life. And it is wereby I so life is serious situation in ottery.

The was challenges from the teachers at the school. Also by the care workers. But there was this man he was like my father. They call him Mr I. He used to tell me when they make me angry, I must be the one hu must ask for giveness all the time to show the I am the man.

The boys where good somethimes they werk up angry. And the was also truble mrkers the small ones

I really did enjoy my life in ottery. When we used to go to outings and N1 city and beach and surfing. I will really miss does days.

What started to happen in my life

My anger began to be low – lower

My respect beggin to be larg

I started to see life serious

I stoped smoking drugs

My father started to forgive me

I beggin to have my self again

I started to see myself as a humanbe

I started to see the boy hu was born by two parents again when I was in Ottery that ottery really changed my life only in 8 months. To be onest I can even stand in court with one leg for what they have than for me

I SAY THANKY OTTERY FOR WHAT YOU HAVE THAT FOR ME
 GOD BLESS YOUR OTTERY

26.3.2 *Psychobiographic Markers*

Science and creativity are not easy bedfellows, but there are guidelines to achievement, such as Schultz's (2005) good psychobiographic markers. In this study, primary indicators of psychological saliency are: frequency or repetition; primacy; emphasis; isolation; uniqueness; incompleteness; error; and negation (Alexander, cited by Schultz, 2005). A third category of scientific psychological research—that of historical interpretivity in psychobiography—can be considered in addition to Cronbach (1957)'s correlational and experimental disciplines (Schultz, 2005). He describes the study of the personality encompassing biological, psychological, social and cultural factors, although he points out that the history of the personality is not the same as life history, which is a larger unit of analysis.

Indeed, Tlali's personality emerges from a life history embedded in the social and cultural reality of his experiences. As an African in post-apartheid SA, he was at an institution initially earmarked for 'colored' children. The YCEC was established in Ottery as it was appropriately close to 'colored' communities and the homes of residential boys. It was initially a base for trade training for ex-volunteer military 'colored' service men, which influenced the nature of the industrial school. In conjunction with the Cape Technical College, several trades were offered to service men included carpentry, motor vehicle repairs and catering. These manual trades were "bound up in notions of 'work discipline', 'work appreciation' and 'social rehabilitation'—earmarked to be the domain of the colored working class for much of the 20th Century," (Badroodien, 2001, p. 82). Today the multiracial, multicultural centre has mostly colored and African youths from all over the continent. The focus is now on trauma healing, positively reintegrating young adults back into society as enabled young men, nurturing community ties.

As researcher, my years of academic writing have brought me to this point of psychobiography, defined as "to cogently know another person and to know ourselves" (Schultz, 2005, p. 4). I was initially urged to choose quantitative research methodology by my Psychology Honours professor, measuring perceived social support of street adolescents at a skills centre. My research focus shifted to care of the caregiver, when I later chose mixed-methods in my Masters and Ph.D. research on the efficacy of interventions for the stress and burnout of teachers in high-risk schools (Johnson, 2010, 2013), with several publications (Johnson, 2011, 2015; Johnson & Naidoo, 2013, 2016, 2017). Throughout I was encouraged by academics to include statistical analysis.

In my post-doctoral studies of creating a trauma sensitive environment for teachers and carers at the YCEC in participatory action research, I became a committed community-orientated psychology academic. I was driven to discover the strengths

and choices of teachers and carers in self-care and the impact on youth, rather than design programmes of preplanned interventions. I facilitated initially weekly and then bi-monthly open care groups over two years for 10–25 staff and teachers at YCEC, with cycles of observation, reflection, planning and action.

Group practices included counselling, with physical relaxation and silence, meditation and journal writing. Psychoanalytic psychoeducation, transpersonal healing techniques and somatic trauma release exercises were adapted by participants to be contextually appropriate, with much laughter and fun amidst coping with multiple stressors. Outcome-based themes, such as psychoeducation, life skills training and community capacity building, were considered with principles of practice. An example of community capacity building was a caregiver at the center opening a halfway house, where many of the exiting youth found a safe place to stay while reintegrating into society.

A book chapter on narrative practices of children and adolescents (Johnson, 2019) exposed me to the challenges of narrative case studies. Since international child studies are increasingly interested in hearing the voices of youth (MacNamee, 2016) I turned my attention directly on the youth in one-on-one interviews. I utilised photoelicitation alongside narrative case studies in my own book (Johnson, in press). Narrative case studies on finding safety in trauma recovery were explored in a chapter on new ideas for clinical and community psychology for Brighton University (Johnson, in review). The transition from narrative case studies to psychobiography has been likened to moving from personal myth, which has psychological truth for the subject, to objective biography (Schultz, 2005). In terms of narrative identity, MacAdams (1993) described late adolescence as the most critical phase of the life history, when the story starts to take shape.

Psychobiography was a new approach for me when I decided to meet the challenge. Described as a guest of the narrative guest coming to a party (Schultz, 2005), it introduced me to a whole new world of revealed identities, multiple data sources and detective-like explorations of famous people's lives, through the lens of psychological theories of personality. Despite being a lecturer in Theories of Personality at the non-profit community college where I work in Cape Town, this in-depth requirement of psychological insights and biographical writing presented many challenges. As a community-orientated advocate for the restorative healing of abused and neglected children in state care, I wondered if I was being over presumptuous to adapt a clearly defined methodology for my own research focus, despite the nobility of the goal.

Another important consideration as researcher and writer is my background and suitability to be in a multiracial, multicultural environment of male youth from the Cape Flats gangland, being mature, female and middle-class. I was born and raised in Africa. Although studying social anthropology and political science in my undergraduate degree, I felt grounded in Western views, inadequately exposed in colonial education to indigenous customs and thinking processes.

My work and research in high-risk educational institutions in the Cape, however, have given me years of experience and insight in this context. Coming from a privileged background, I was mindful of what I could represent at the center in the context of intergenerational and historic trauma. I was continuously aware of and sensitive

to dynamics of power and knowledge in my academic role, trying to model humility and compassion in all my actions. Having completed post-doctoral studies in Psychology at Stellenbosch University, I was invited by the YCEC to be a consultant and volunteer group facilitator in their therapeutic hostel, and it is in this role as participant researcher that I continue my involvement. In advocating for vulnerable youth, I am inspired by Peterson (2017). He urges mankind to “find out what good you can do in the world – it may be more than you think”. He suggests this goal be carried out in a “forthright, articulate, eyes-wide-open, emodied manner” in order to achieve limitless possibilities.

26.4 Findings

Firstly, the narrative case study interview conducted with Tlali will be considered. His thank-you letter then provides data for interpretation into his trauma healing and transformation from care he received at the YCEC.

26.4.1 *Narrative Case Study Interview*

26.4.1.1 **Social and Cultural History**

In collaborative narrative research, Tlali gave insights into his life story and the difficulties he had to overcome. He described himself as Sotho, coming from the Eastern Cape. Historically, Sothos hunted, cultivated crops and were iron smelters. Traditionally, they gave allegiance to a paramount chief and were controlled by a hereditary district chief, assisted by community headmen (South African History Online, 2017). According to historical records, the Sotho language, *seSotho*, is a Bantu language, which is close to *seTswana*, utilizing click consonants in some words. It is spoken in Lesotho and SA, concentrated in Gauteng, Free State, and Eastern Cape Provinces, with small groups in Zambia and Namibia. Sotho is one of the 11 official languages recognized by the Constitution and 7.9% of 57 million South Africans use it as their home language. It is rich in proverbs and idioms, and special forms of address are reserved for elders and in-laws. Sotho was one of the first African languages to be written, and therefore its literature is extensive.

26.4.1.2 **Early Life**

Tlali initially lived a typical rural existence in an African village, with his parents and younger brother. However, after his parents separated when he was seven, his mother received no support from his father and struggled against poverty. Tlali said that he always was able to eat before going to sleep, which was considered a privilege.

According to Stats SA, a quarter of South Africans live below the poverty line, many in rural areas (Collins, 2017). Tlali attended school in the village and described himself as clever at mathematics. When he was 10 and his brother six, Tlali's father took them to the city, and his mother agreed, believing it would give her sons the best chance in life.

Tlali then lived in a poor township in the Strand, adjacent to Cape Town, one of many informal settlements in urban settings originally designated for non-whites during apartheid. Conditions include extreme poverty with 57% unemployment, poor infrastructure for sanitation, electricity and shelter, with some of the highest rates of violence in the world. Dire social and economic conditions have created an environment in which multiple risk factors, such as alcohol abuse, for HIV infection are also prevalent (Eaton et al., 2014).

Tlali became one of 31.1% of African children living with a single father (SA Institute of Race Relations, 2012). He considered himself fortunate because his father had a house donated by members of the community, while others lived in *hoekies* (shacks), built in the backyards of premises. Over the next few years, three stepmothers moved in with his father, shattering Tlali's sense of parental security.

26.4.1.3 Family Difficulties

Tlali described his first stepmother as drinking too much with his father. One day his drunk father found her talking to another man, whom he beat up. He was sent to jail and the stepmother left. The second stepmother came to live with them in 2011, with her own son and daughter, and was kind to Tlali. He described her as not judging her children and allowing them freedom, taking them to the beach. He reflects that this was a good time, with school going well, although he admitted to stealing books and selling them to older students. His stepmother tried to guide him to not get into trouble, but after a year she left.

Aged 12, Tlali felt confused about his stepmothers, saying the first changed the rules, while the second just gave love. His third stepmother had two children of her own in the Eastern Cape, and moved into his father's house from a rented *hoekie*. Tlali thought she was clever, manipulating herself into their home and changing their lives for the worse.

She felt the boys were old enough to do their own household chores and she constantly urged their father to punish them for doing wrong saying, for example, that Tlali did not deserve outings at school because of misbehaviour. He was not used to her authoritarian parenting, being punished constantly and described himself as "going crazy". Family treats—like fish and chips on a Friday—changed to a formal meat meal, which Tlali resented. His father, who used to laugh and be kind, became punitive, constantly hitting them with a belt. He appealed to his grandfather and uncle to modify his father's behaviour, but said that his father did not get along with them and would not listen to their advice on parenting.

When Tlali was 13, life improved somewhat as his aunt came to live with them, but she started to collude with the stepmother about his bad behavior and his beatings

from his father became more frequent. He was offered a scholarship to study mathematics, but his stepmother did not trust the bursary scheme and convinced his father not to sign the papers. When his aunt left, he started to sniff glue and smoked ganga (marijuana) and dropped out of school. He felt frustrated, disliking his stepmother and being regularly beaten by his father.

26.4.1.4 Crime and Substance Abuse

Tlali turned more and more to drugs, adding mandrax to ganga. His parents were concerned and sought out sangomas (traditional healers) in case he had been bewitched, but he said they found nothing. They attempted to send him to boarding school and correctional juvenile facilities, but he ran away, preferring to live on the streets. He lived outside his house, breaking in and taking clothes and food. His father reported him to the police, but he managed to run away from the police station. He was caught stealing a cellphone and was beaten up at the taxi rank by vigilante community members. These self-appointed groups take on policing and justice functions, using violence to mete out punishment and illicit confessions. They are considered opposition to the criminal justice system and threaten the rule of law (Sekonyane & Louw, 2000). Tlali lifted up his shirt to show me permanent welts on his body resulting from this beating.

He was sent to a juvenile lock-up facility, where he mixed with violent boys who abused drugs and had committed serious crimes like murder—one young inmate had killed five people. He said he became a gangster to survive in the system, but was released by the magistrate who commented that he was ready for life outside as he had fattened up and was clearly not on drugs.

Tlali (15) returned to his village in the Eastern Cape and found it difficult to adapt to rural life. He lived in a separate room near his grandmother, fetching wood and tending cattle. He had not been circumcised like other boys and struggled with acceptance and respect, not wanting to follow tribal traditions. In SA male circumcision initiation is a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood (Mbuyiselo & Nyembezi, 2015). Every year there are reported deaths of circumcision initiates due to complications such as dehydration, sepsis and gangrene. Between 2006 and 2013, 5035 circumcision initiates were admitted to hospital, with 453 deaths and 214 penile amputations (Mbuyiselo & Nyembezi, 2015).

Tlali started smoking ganga again and drinking excessively. After being caught stealing, he was taken back to his father, whom he tried to stab when he was being beaten. His father returned him to his mother, and he was sent to work picking fruit on the farms, where he continued to drink heavily. This type of farm labour in the Cape dates back to the early 18th century, when grain and wine farmers owned large groups of slaves. During British colonial occupation, wealthy landlords, who were principal slave owners of the colony, amassed large estates (Slavery at the Cape, 2017). Tlali was aware of this history of exploitation: “What I saw outside, they use people to get something – like back in the days of slaves, they use you to get something”.

He ended up living on Cape Town streets, abusing substances and committing crimes like house breaking. He was offered help by a pastor, who realised his life was in danger on the streets, as vigilante groups threatened him for his criminal activities. He was helped by a social worker, who approached the YCEC for shelter and protection.

26.4.2 *Psychobiographical Insights*

The following could be considered relevant to Tlali's psychobiography as identifying pointers: primacy: repetition, emphasis, isolation, uniqueness and negation. In primacy, the first fact that Tlali gives us after his cultural affiliation and place of birth is the separation of his parents in 2006, when he was seven years old. This had a profound impact on his life as he was continually moved from one parent to the other.

Repetition has a potential for growth. Tlali gives detailed accounts of the influential people in his life—his mother and stepmothers, grandmother and aunt—and he focuses on his punitive father, uncle and grandfather, and then positive mentors at the centre. This suggests the importance of these individuals on his personality development. He emphasized the multiple crimes he committed and numerous incidents of substance abuse, as well as the effects of domestic and community violence—from his father's beatings to vigilante attacks at the taxi rank. A series of ongoing violent scenes is formed from the prototypical incident of his father hitting him with a belt, dramatized by the revelation of welts on his body.

Schultz (2005) asks if prototypical scenes can be out-grown and if each life transition requires its own prototype event. He wonders whether prior versions of oneself can be destroyed, rendering the former prototypical scenes insignificant? The prototypical scene per se is not as important as insights into the feelings and responses generated by these incidents (Schultz, 2005).

Nuclear stories, with themes such as redemption or failure, exist alongside prototypical events as major life-shaping incidences in a person's history (McAdams, 1993). Tlali's nuclear stories comprise his many experiences in different homes and institutions, and their failure to have a positive impact, instigated by the interview focus of what worked for him at YCEC. For McAdams (1993), narrative identity is story, a created myth which is continually revised. For Schultz (2005), the story exists to reveal greater, deeper truths to be found beneath the myth. Indeed, in psychobiography the myth is first uncovered, followed by attempted sense making.

An isolated jarring incident is his description of standing on one leg in court to affirm his experiences at YCEC. Also, the uniqueness of change happening like "a boom" (clap of his hands) dramatically simplified his transformation. Negation comes from his description of life in a juvenile detention centre, where he said he learnt nothing, but then admitted to having given up drugs (although this was temporary). He said nothing worked but YCEC, without acknowledged the impact of others on his life, such as the pastor at the street shelter.

26.4.3 *African Perspective*

26.4.3.1 **Tlali's Embodied Self**

Nwoye (2006)'s focus on the body could be seen as part of indigenous perspectives of the scientific investigation of human psychological development, taking into account cultural and social contexts. However, Chakkarath (2012) warns against romanticising these theories, discounting power, justice and discriminatory practices embedded in them; or condemning prescientific concepts as invalid.

With the abuse of substances and physically harmful behaviours, well-endowed people can be damaged by their physical assets, rather than learn to gain from their endowment (Nwoye, 2006). Tlali's recklessness in youth and defiant behaviour could be interpreted as isolating outliers in the community, blamed on excessive pride and social arrogance. His parents even feared bewitchment, seeking traditional healers to understand his behaviour. Being tall, handsome and strongly built, Tlali could be blamed for failing to take adequate care of his enviable embodiment, seemingly starting life with promise, but ending in recklessness.

The challenge for Western psychology to deal with the embodied self is to help the average African believe in him/herself, and develop self-acceptance in such a way as to foster pride instead of inferiority (Nwoye, 2006). In Tlali's case, the body features throughout his life story narrative. He talks about his mother managing to feed him every night, despite extreme poverty in the rural village. Living in the township, the familial and social influence of his father, stepmothers and community policing, centre around nurturing, domestic and vigilante violence.

His abuse of substances, starting at the emotionally vulnerable age of 13 up until entering the YCEC, represents a continuous onslaught on his mind and body. This resulted in his failure to thrive in mathematics, which was an early special skill recognised in school. His body's strong appearance got him out of juvenile prison as the judge interpreted his physique as indicating that he was no longer on drugs. His description of his prison experience is likened to his body being considered a broken mechanical tool—"I was told to finish the programmes and get out by the social worker—but they had not fixed anything". His difficulty in adapting to prison—"There you see a leaf outside but you don't touch it—you live in a cement prison" and rural village life afterwards, was related to the body. His unwillingness to follow traditional circumcision rituals, for example, led to issues of disrespect amongst his peers.

In his letter he feels reborn physically, not only from a cleansed body point of view: "I stoped smoking drugs", but also holistically: "I beggin to have my self again, I started to see myself as a humanbe." He is literally starting his life anew:

I started to see the boy hu was born by two parents again when I was in Ottery that ottery really changed my life only in 8 months. To be onest I can even stand in court with one leg for what they have than for me.

Such is the power of his positive perceptions of his new self, that he describes even standing on one leg in court to demonstrate what they have done for him. This one leg metaphor ironically symbolises him standing firmly on his own two feet.

26.4.3.2 Tlali's Generative Self

Tlali's social circumstances of dire poverty led to a focus on material objects of betterment, resulting in a life of crime. He sold stolen books to older students in primary school and stole cellphones several times, leading to violent punishment and imprisonment. The only positive early guidance he mentioned was from his second stepmother, who tried to dissuade him from committing crimes. Later he received counsel in a juvenile detention facility and from pastors and social agencies working with street children.

What became important to him at the YCEC was exposure to new significant frames of reference for self-appraisal and the formation of a positive attitude. He gained self-respect in achieving personal betterment and positive relational dynamics, such as forgiveness from his father: "My respect beggin to be larg, I started to see life serious... My father started to forgive me." This reference to another orientation takes some stress off the desire to attain an abundance of distinctions of worth, which Nwoye (2006) believes affects the life and mental health of many Africans in different countries.

26.4.3.3 Tlali's Communal Self

Tlali was realistic about the seriousness of the work he needed to do on himself at YCEC: "I started to see life serious"; and the challenges faced by teachers and carers to manage disruptive behaviour:

And it is wereby I so life is serious situation in ottery. The was (There were) challenges from the teachers at the school. Also by the care workers.

He described the younger boys as both good and angry:

The boys where (were) good somethimes they werk up (woke up) angry. And the was (there were) also truble mrkers (makers) the small ones.

Support through community gives people strength, and it is in this context of mutuality that he finds healing at YCEC. In relationships with teachers and boys, he found love.

I came in ottery. I was lost broken hearted but I was fixed in ottery by all of the members of the school. The teachers and the boys of the school. They gave me love the most weapon I did need in my life.

His choice of words of love being a weapon, suggests that it is a powerful force to protect him. In his narrative interview, he talks again about the importance of love, saying he found it everywhere:

Here you connect to everyone. You connect to people in the kitchen, in the garden... You get love everywhere. Even those people not working in the school, there by the gate, as part of security, they love you too!

Closely aligned to love is respect, received not only from his mentor and counsellor, but from the entire school:

Respect is a most important quality for helping boys. This is what I have experienced here, and what I saw in myself – I respect you because I want you to respect me. I respect you first. The way everyone treats you – not just the counsellor.

This theme of respect comes up throughout his life history—he feels lack of respect by boys in the village; he feels labelled as “vrot” (rotten) in juvenile prison; he alludes to respect in his letter to the manager: “My anger began to be low – lower; My respect beggin to be larg”. In terms of respect, he learnt that he needed to model it first in order to gain it from others, rather than feeling inferior and responding inappropriately. While lacking the individual focus of the West, the African self looks within as well as without, determining his own fate and identity. However, individual achievement is not gained at the expense of the community.

26.4.3.4 Tlali’s Melioristic Self

Tlali is profoundly affected by his encounters with people at YCEC. He describes his visit to the center’s psychologist as: “He touched my heart and I started to change”. He finds the strength, of which he was unaware, to cope with difficulties. He is also deeply affected by the center manager’s support: “Mr M used to look at me and say: ‘Tlali, don’t worry about what happened in your life’.”

The hostel manager, Mr. I, also had a profound influence on him, being the positive father figure he felt he needed:

But there was this man, he was like my father. They call him Mr I. He used to tell me when they make me angry, I must be the one hu must ask for giveness all the time to show the I am the man.

These role models and mentors gave Tlali the insights he needed to understand how to overcome difficult relationships and modify his behaviour. In terms of time, he had the potential to achieve good mental health by keeping a balanced awareness of what has gone before, the lessons of his life, his current state of wellbeing, and the possibilities ahead.

26.4.3.5 Tlali’s Narratological Self

Tlali tried to draw on shared meaning of older generations to refer to and respond to his life. When he struggled with his father’s authoritarian control and violence, he sought counsel about parenting from his uncle and grandfather, but was unable to improve his situation because of the breakdown of communication within his

family. His grandmother and elders in the village, where he returned after prison, did not provide him with the support he needed to adapt to traditional life and he reverted to substance abuse and crime. The wisdom of authority figures like teachers and managers at YCEC enabled him to draw on psychological wisdom and positive attitudes, such as the humanistic, person-centred approach of Rogers (1980).

26.4.3.6 Tlali's Structural Self

If we follow the thread of Tlali's feelings in prototypical scenes at different developmental stages, anger and powerlessness result from misunderstanding, authoritarian control and violence. He seeks solutions from positive role models, like his kind second stepmother, his uncle and grandfather, but it is not until he is at the YCEC that he gains deeper understandings of his behaviour and responses. He refers often to the heart—in his discussions about key mentors—and he describes the centre filling his heart with love, removing what he describes as the negative part that was in him: “They steal a person’s heart - they can take out the thing that is in me. They did that.” He also gains confidence in his thinking, believing he has the tools to start a new life beyond the centre: “...with this mind I can be anywhere”.

26.4.3.7 Tlali's Liminal Self

Being a youth, not yet responsible or financially independent, Tlali is navigating this liminal space of his life. Rituals and traditions, such as circumcision, have become problematised, causing him anguish. His stay in Ottery could also be interpreted as a temporal interface between states, with his transition from a youthful period of drugs and crime to a young adult ready to take responsibility for his life. The short transformational period—“a boom”—of eight months suggests that late adolescence is a highly influential time to learn values and prepare for adulthood. In terms of Erikson's (1968) stages of development, young adulthood moves from confusion and isolation to identity and intimacy.

The centre is helping me. To be honest, what I want in life is to prove for myself and family that I have really changed. I don't want to go back to where I lived. I saw what happened in the Strand, in Eastern Cape, at my mother's home, in prison, being in the streets – nothing worked except Ottery.

His ambition in life is to be a responsible parent, indicating the values he has acquired: “My dream... is to be a good father”. He also aspires to be a security guard. He wants to forge ahead, shaping his own life with confidence in his skills, not going back to live with his father and stepmother: “I want to take care of my own self and I know with these two hands I can survive anywhere...” These positive goals suggest imagined new prototypical scenes of hope despite traumatic childhood memories.

26.4.3.8 Tlali's Transcendental/Spiritual Self

Tlali's alienation in prison emphasised how cut off he felt from this powerful force:

There you see a leaf outside but you don't touch it – you live in a cement prison and you may connect to one or two people. Here you connect to everyone. You connect to people in the kitchen, in the garden...

The grounds of YCEC are vast and uncultivated, with acres of trees and grasslands. In describing the garden, Tlali alluded to cultivated areas around the hostels, where boys are encouraged to grow their own plants as part of rehabilitation. Gardening is one of many activities for the boys, connecting to mystical nature in animal therapy, hobbies and sport:

I really did enjoy my life in ottery. When we used to go to outings and N1 city and beach and surfing. I will really miss does days.

While Tlali does not refer much to religion in his letter and interview, his connection to God is evident in the way he expressed important aspects of his life. For example, he describing the love he felt at the centre as heavenly: "I can say you are in heaven". At the end, he thanked God in his letter for the centre – words he placed in capital letters for special emphasis:

I SAY THANKY OTTERY FOR WHAT YOU HAVE THAT FOR ME - GOD BLESS YOUR OTTERY.

In his interview, he described the permanent connection he felt he had with the centre, which has a spiritual quality: "I will always be connected to Ottery – it is like a spirit in the air".

26.5 Conclusion

This psychobiography describes Tlali's sudden transformation at YCEC as a "boom", developing the belief that he had "it", the ability to leave the centre with confidence. There are plans for the YCEC to continue to operate as a high-intensive care facility focused on the inclusive reintegration of youth into communities as positive role models.

YCEC does not work with youth alone. There are legal, religious, social, government and non-government organisations also ensuring that those who need care and protection receive assistance. Despite a traumatic past, with punitive practices still "in the DNA of those teaching at the centre", (educational psychologist), the focus on self-care and peer support allows teachers, staff and carers to try to be a positive influence in traumatic contexts of care. The synoptic fabric of the African self is made up of fine supportive threads of love and respect, resulting in a tapestry of holistic wellbeing.

Through psychobiography with an African perspective, Tlali's personality emerges at a critical stage of personality development in a broader life story. It is an indigenous, community-orientated understanding, which does not follow the Western views of personality theories. Psychological theory is supposed to make confusing lives more understandable, with psychobiographers formulating interpretations of well-defined themes (Schultz, 2005). While insightful threads of Western psychology are weaved amongst the African perspective, it is hoped that new pathways of understanding and analysis can be forged from multicultural perspectives, enriching our knowledge and connection across the globe. In this way the vision of the DSM V being reduced to a pamphlet can perhaps start to be realised with the optimum care of children. In commenting on this chapter, Tlali turned to the centre manager and said: "That lady is going to make me famous." Perhaps there is fame after all in this psychobiography of hidden identities.

26.6 Recommendations for Theory and Practice

The following recommendations could be considered for future research:

- An inclusion of indigenous, community-orientated theories of personality in psychological interpretations of psychobiographies.
- More studies of marginalised groups, such as vulnerable children, feminists and the disadvantaged in advocacy-orientated psychobiography.
- Broaden the model of psychobiography to include 'ordinary' people whose anonymity is assured if ethically appropriate.
- Utilise psychobiographies in challenging contexts, such as state institutions dealing with multiple traumas, to gain better contextual understandings of appropriate care.
- Focus on the differences and similarities of being 'African', refining theories of personality.
- Consider the different worldviews of individualism and collectivism and how cross-cultural psychology can offer additional insights into what it means to be human.

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Part IV
Reflections of Contemporary
Psychobiographers

Chapter 27

Jim Anderson in Interview with Claude-Hélène Mayer; September 26, 2018



James William Anderson

Abstract The goal of psychobiography is gaining access to the inner world of the person we are writing about. Hence psychoanalysis, which is the discourse that recognizes the complexity of the mind, unconscious and conscious, is indispensable to psychobiography. It follows that psychobiography is more an art than a science. The scientific method provides a paucity of tools for learning what goes on within a person's mind. Instead we need the artist's tools, such as intuition, interpretation, and empathy. Psychobiography of this kind rests on material that provides a portal into the subject's inner world, such as the subject's dreams, fantasies, delusions, humor, and imaginative writing, along with writings not meant for the public, such as letters and diaries.

**What role does psychoanalytic theory play in psychobiography?
Do you think of psychobiography as being more an art or a science?
What core theory, methodology or approach in contemporary psychobiographical research do you prefer and why?**

My answers to these three questions are intertwined and are based on my vision of what people are like psychologically. I begin with a slight but telling incident that Freud (1966, p. 34) related. When it was time to open a session of the Lower House of the Austrian Parliament, the President announced, "Gentlemen, I take notice that a full quorum of members is present and herewith declare the sitting closed." Austrian politics were tumultuous at the time, and Freud surmised that the President wished that the session were ending, not beginning. When politicians make a decision, whether minor, such as the President's decision to proclaim the session closed, or major, they are acting out of sources, partially unconscious, within them. And indeed all behavior and thinking is a product of the individual's mind;

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it is ultimately an expression of the mixture of the wishes and desires, fears and aspirations, and preoccupations and conflicts that boil away within a person.

An example of an infinitely more consequential decision is Abraham Lincoln's choosing to take steps to free the slaves. Indeed he was influenced by political and economic forces, the particular circumstances at play at the time, and the persuasions of others, such as the anti-slavery Senator Charles Sumner and the African-American leader Frederick Douglass. But his decision ultimately stemmed from his personality and his experiences in life. From early on, Lincoln was empathic toward the weak and the powerless, not just people but also animals. There is an anecdote (Basler, 1953, vol. IV, p. 62) from his childhood. At the age of seven he shot a turkey. He felt so remorseful afterward that he swore never again to shoot any of the larger game, even though he lived on the frontier in southern Indiana where game was a staple of the diet. He departed from the majority of his fellow citizens by regarding African-American slaves as people who were fully human and who were ruthlessly taken advantage of by their owners. In 1855 he wrote to a friend about seeing slaves shackled together, "That sight was a continued torment to me" (Basler, vol. 2, p. 320). His sense of exploitation at the hand of his father sensitized him to the condition of slaves. He had a time before he reached the age of 21 when his father hired him out to do hard, physical work and then received Lincoln's wages, as the law allowed at that time. Recalling this period, Lincoln once reportedly said, "I used to be a slave" (Burlingame, 2008, vol. I, p. 145). In stating his opposition to slavery, he described the essence of slavery as the master saying, "You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it" (Angle, 1958, p. 393). His imagining what it would be like to be a slave also comes through in his reply to those who argued that these seemingly suffering people were well off being enslaved. "[A]lthough volume upon volume is written to prove slavery a very good thing, we never hear of the man who wishes to take the good of it, by being a slave himself" (Basler, vol. II, p. 222).

As with politicians and historical figures, so with everyone. When authors write novels, philosophers propound propositions, artists paint pictures, and psychologists create theories, they are creating on the basis of the conflicts, preferences, ambitions, desires, vanities, preoccupations, and concerns within themselves.

Given this conviction of mine, I see the goal of psychobiography as getting access to the inner world of the person we are writing about. There are other legitimate kinds of psychobiography, but what matters most, in my opinion, is to delve into the factors, often unconscious, that generate the behavior and thinking that we want to know about.

Hence I see psychoanalysis as being indispensable to psychobiography. Psychoanalysis at heart is the discourse that recognizes the complexity of the mind, conscious and unconscious. It attempts to describe the forces that interplay within the mind. It provides concepts that can draw our attention to these forces. There is the danger, of course, that a psychobiographer might misuse psychoanalytic concepts by foisting them onto the subject. A psychobiographer must employ the concepts deftly to become able to see what might otherwise be missed and to open up lines of inquiry, not to provide simplistic answers.

It follows that I see psychobiography as being more an art than a science. The scientific method provides a paucity of tools for learning what goes on within a person's mind. Instead we need the artist's tools, such as intuition, interpretation, and empathy.

My favored methodology would take more than a few words to describe. In fact, with my co-author Will Dunlop, I spelled it out at some length in a chapter in this volume (see Anderson & Dunlop, 2019). But here I can underline one aspect of it.

In my approach I rely on phenomena that provide a portal into the subject's inner world. A person shows others an exterior that tends to conceal what is inside. How do we know what goes on behind that façade? Freud's anecdote about the parliamentary President who declared the session closed illustrates how a slip of the tongue can give us a glimpse of the interior. Other such phenomena are the subject's dreams, fantasies, delusions, humor, and imaginative writing. We also favor writings that were not intended for the wider public, such as diaries, random notes, and letters to intimates.

I close with a final example, in this case, a sample of Lincoln's humor. In 1832 Lincoln and other citizens volunteered to form a militia for a temporary period. The company chose Lincoln as its captain. Lincoln, who had no military training to speak of, was drilling the soldiers. They were marching with a front that was about 20-men wide. They came to a fence with a gate, and he had to direct them to go through the gate. As Lincoln reportedly told the story years later (Zall, 2007, p. 72), "I could not for the life of me remember the proper word of command for getting my company endwise as we came near the gate. I shouted, 'This company is dismissed for two minutes, when it will fall in again on the other side of the gate!'"

I find the story to be revealing in the following way. Lincoln liked to portray himself as folksy and a bit bumbling, and at first the story seems to make fun of his lack of military knowledge. But Lincoln was brilliant and knew it, and the story actually conveys, under the guise of his apparent humility, how intelligent he was.

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Chapter 28

William McKinley Runyan in Interview with Claude-Hélène Mayer; September 27, 2018



William McKinley Runyan

Abstract This interview follows my autobiographical chapter in this volume, “Adventures in Psychobiography and the Study of Lives: A Personal Journey”. In earlier work, I had explored “Alternatives to Psychobiography” and “Reconceptualizing the Relationships Between History and Psychology” (Runyan, 1988a, b). Interview responses draw on recent reading on interesting developments in psychobiography. Examples include Irvin Yalom, psychiatrist at Stanford, publishing on psychotherapy, historical novels about eminent philosophers, and most recently a memoir. A second fascinating life is that of Kay Redfield Jamison, researcher on manic depression, and autobiographer of her own struggles with manic depression. A third example is Eric R. Kandel, trained in both psychoanalysis and neuroscience, striving to integrate the two throughout his Nobel Prize-winning career.

Psychobiography can be differentiated from biography in at least three ways.

First, psychobiography can focus more on psychological events and processes than general biography. Second, psychobiography can make explicit use of psychological theory and research in interpreting phenomena. Third, psychobiography may draw on awareness of personal subjective experience and psychological processes by the author.

An example of self-awareness which I find engaging in a recent book is in the memoirs of psychiatrist at Stanford University, Irvin Yalom. He was born in 1931 and writes touchingly of his experience growing up in a poor Jewish family, living over his parent’s store. He also has much to say about the personal sides of his education, career, marriage and ongoing clinical work. Yalom wrote an influential text on *The Theory and Practice of Group Therapy* (1970 and later editions). Yalom also wrote books about his clinical work, such as *Love’s Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy* (2012). He also wrote a number of novels about philosophers, combining historical research with psychological interpretation. One example is

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The Schopenhauer Cure: A Novel (2005). The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was profoundly unhappy and pessimistic. Could he have been helped by psychotherapy? Yalom handles this in a novel, by creating a patient, who models himself on Schopenhauer’s personality and beliefs, treated in group therapy by a therapist, Julius, who Yalom says is the kind of therapist he would like to be. His autobiography is appealing *Becoming Myself: A Psychiatrist’s Memoir* (2017).

How does psychobiography relate to contemporary psychology?

As I understand it, psychology has at least four different objectives.

- (1) Developing general theories about human nature and about psychological structures and processes, such as vision, hearing, and learning.
- (2) Understanding differences between individuals, and between groups by gender, class, race, culture, or historical period.
- (3) Analyzing particular classes of behavior or experience, such as dreams, anxiety, frustration, aggression, sexual behavior, creativity, phobias, or suicide.
- (4) Understanding individual persons or lives. This may be autobiographical understanding by authors or theorists such as Freud, Jung, Rogers or Skinner; clinical patients such as Freud’s Little Hans, Rat Man or Wolf Man; or biographical subjects such as Leonardo da Vinci, Young Man Luther, Gandhi, Melville, Emily Dickinson, Van Gogh, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hitler, Stalin, Donald Trump and others.

Trying to understand individual lives can be both a starting point for psychology, and one of its ultimate objectives.

What role does psychoanalysis play in psychobiography?

Psychobiography is often conceived as starting with Freud’s Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood (1910). Freud’s immediate followers such as Karl Abraham and Ernest Jones also did early psychoanalytic studies. Erik Erikson with Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (1958) and Gandhi’s Truth (1969). Much more detail on the history of psychobiography and of psychohistory is in “A Historical and Conceptual Background to Psychohistory” (1988). Psychobiographical work has developed in at least 5 or 6 different disciplines, including academic psychology, psychiatry, political science, literature and history. “Reconceptualizing the Relationships Between History and Psychology” in *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (Runyan, 1988a, b) sketches the relationships of psychohistory to work in sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, demography and linguistics. These chapters are both available on my personal website www.williamrunyan.com.

In academic psychology, many object to psychoanalysis, or do not consider it sufficiently “scientific”. Psychoanalysis may well have limitations, as well as major contributions. However, what are the “Alternatives to Psychoanalytic Psychobiography”? In this survey in 1988, the alternative contributions from behaviorism or from humanistic psychology to psychobiography were surprisingly limited.

I would like to briefly note several recent contributions to psychobiography which were not primarily psychoanalytic. One is the work of Kay Redfield Jamison. She received a B.A. in 1971 and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from UCLA in 1975. She co-authored a major text on Manic-Depressive Illness in 1990; 2007 2nd ed. She reviewed the prevalence of manic-depressive illness in a number of fields in *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993). She writes about her personal experience with manic-depressive illness in “An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness” (1995), and in several later books.

One of her students at UCLA was Stephen P. Hinshaw. He was born in 1952, received his Ph.D. from UCLA and later became chair of the Psychology Department at UC Berkeley. A powerful book about mental illness in his family is *The Years of Silence Are Past: My Father’s Life with Bipolar Disorder* (2002). More on his personal experience is *Another kind of madness: A journey through the stigma and hope of mental illness* (2017). He has written and edited many other books about shame and mental illness, about developmental psychopathology and other topics.

Another major line of work expanding psychobiography is in the life and career of Eric R. Kandel. He received The Nobel Prize in 2000 in physiology or medicine for his research on the physiological base of memory storage in neurons.

He had first been trained in psychoanalysis, and in later books wrote about drawing on both psychoanalysis and neuroscience in advancing psychiatry. He grew up in Vienna and his house was invaded by Nazi policemen shortly after his 9th birthday. The family was forced to leave and they were able to settle in Brooklyn. Kandel wrote a personal and intellectual autobiography *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (2006). Kandel and his wife Denise later made a documentary film about returning to the places they grew up and survived under the Nazi invasion.

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William McKinley Runyan nicknamed “Mac”, has been a professor at the School of Social Welfare and research psychologist at the Institute of Personality and Social Research, University of California, Berkeley from 1979 to 2010. He received a B.A. in sociology and psychology from Oberlin College in 1969, and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice from Harvard University in 1975. Books include *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982), *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (1988), and *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* (Vol. 9, 2007), co-edited with Gardner Lindzey. “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives” in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005) outlines his understanding of the history of the field. A current project with the San Francisco Bay Area Psychobiography Group is *Examining Lives: Self-Reflections in Psychobiography*, Oxford U. Press, forthcoming.

So much more remains to be figured out. Progress in the social and human sciences can be measured not only by more rigorous experimental, statistical and neuroscientific research, but also by advances in our understanding of individual lives.

A website with a photo and selected publications is www.williamrunyan.com.

Chapter 29

Joseph G. Ponterotto in Interview with Claude-Hélène Mayer; September 21, 2018



Joseph G. Ponterotto

Abstract North American psychobiographer, Joseph G. Ponterotto, is interviewed by fellow psychobiographer Claude-Hélène Mayer. Ponterotto reflects on the history and current status of psychobiography as a research enterprise. The value of psychobiography to the broader psychology field is highlighted, and some pioneering scholars in psychobiography are acknowledged.

29.1 Do You Think of Psychobiography as Being More an Art or a Science?

I view psychobiography as a delicate yet beautiful balance of science and art. Strong and convincing psychobiography is anchored in rigorous psychobiographical research methods (the science) that have evolved from Freud (1910) to Erikson (1958, 1968) to modern psychobiographers (e.g., Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982, 2013; Schultz, 2005). Secondly, psychobiography is an interpretive and subjective process that taps the creativity and originality of art. Importantly, the science and art aspects of conducting and writing psychobiography often follow an iterative, interactive path of research → interpretation/meaning/questions → more research → more interpretation/exploration → more research, and so forth until reasonable explanations and interpretations emerge.

Dr. Mayer and Springer Publishers have my permission to associate my name with any comments below.

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29.2 Name Psychobiographers Whom You Especially Admire and Describe What Makes those Authors Special

Well certainly Freud (1910) for introducing the psychoanalytic psychobiography as a form of “applied psychoanalysis”. He demonstrated the thoughtful application of a specific theory to a deep psychological understanding of a historic figure. He also showed how psychobiography can be used (as a case study model) to further develop theory, as his work on Leonardo da Vinci helped him further develop and refine his theories of infantile sexuality and homosexuality. Of course, Erikson (1958, 1969) for expanding on Freud’s model and using psychosocial identity to study Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi.

The Harvard University influence of mid-20th century was also a landmark historical moment for psychobiography with Murray (1967) and Allport’s (1942) work and subsequently their proteges and students. Particularly influential for me is the work of modern psychobiographers Elms (1994, 2007), Runyan (1982, 2019), Anderson (1981a, 1981b, 2019), Schultz (2005), and McAdams (2011). Their research is rigorous, and their writing is accessible to broad audiences and effectively talks the reader through the process, steps, and challenges of conducting psychobiography. Scholars in psychohistory, such as Elvitz (2016), Editor of *Clio’s Psyche*, have also been strong influences on my development as a psychobiographer. All of the individuals I mention here have also been very helpful and encouraging of me personally and professionally through conversations and emails ... they are mentors and active role models for me. All of these distinguished scholars have taken time to help and guide my learning in the field.

I should also note that my career has been significantly shaped by mentors in biography particularly, Professor Frank Brady; and investigative journalists, particularly Clea Benson and Peter Nicholas. Psychobiography is an interdisciplinary endeavor and history/biography and investigative journalism are intellectual disciplines critical to the training of psychobiographers.

29.3 What Are the Core Changes in Psychobiography from the Beginning to Contemporary Psychobiographical Research?

Well, a few of the core changes are the following:

- Moving from an emphasis in psychoanalysis as the anchoring interpretive theory to a wide range of theories.
- Moving from a focus on one theoretical anchor to incorporating multiple theories to more fully capture the “*erlebnis*” (lived experience) of the historic figure.

- Initial reliance on constructivist (emergent) qualitative methods to a broad integration of methodologies such as various quantitative designs (see the work of Simonton, 1998) and mixed method approaches.
- From a focus on white male historic figures to a broadening to female and culturally diverse historic figures.
- From a state of being ostracized in mainstream psychology to being integrated as a core component of the psychology field (this is still in progress).

29.4 How Is Psychobiography Different from Biography?

This is actually a complex question. Generally, traditional biography focuses on the observed life of the historic figure: their behaviors, achievements, failures, joys, and pains. By contrast, psychobiography focuses on the inner psychology, drives, motives, and emotions that led to this observed behavior. Picture an iceberg: the biographer is focused on the ice above the water—what is immediately observable. The psychobiographer focuses on the portion of the ice that is deeply submerged, not seen by people, and perhaps not even seen the historic subject herself or himself in terms of their own awareness.

Keep in mind that some biographies written by historians and journalists are “psychologically infomed” as many historians and journalists have studied psychology to some degree. But psychobiographers generally tend to more fully anchor their interpretation in psychological theory on a comprehensive and deep level. Also, biographers focus more on historiography research methods (documents/interviews) while psychobiographers use these tools but also incorporate psychological research methods and assessments (e.g., applying retrospective personality scales).

29.5 What Role Does Psychoanalytic Theory Play in Psychobiography?

As noted by pioneering psychobiographer James W. Anderson, psychoanalytic theory is an ideal anchoring theory for psychobiography because its core transcends time and culture and can be applied in any historical context. Anderson’s (1981a, 1981b, 2003) influential writing on this topic is recommended for all psychobiographers regardless of their theoretical inclinations. Having said that, psychoanalytic and psychodynamic models, as do all theories, have some limitations, thus other theories should also be applied in psychobiography.

29.6 Do You Think that Conditions in the 21st Century Make Psychobiography an Especially Valuable Form of Research, and if so Why?

Of course, but the key is not the temporal space or having arrived in the 21st century, the key is “What constitutes strong, rigorous, impactful, and audience accessible psychobiography?” Good psychobiography is of great value in any decade or century. Studying individual cases of leadership, evil, influence, greatness, suffering, etc. is valuable in advancing the field of psychology and in promoting public awareness and knowledge. Theory, research methods, and applied practice can all be markedly enhanced by rigorously conducted and clearly written psychobiography.

29.7 What Is the Main Contribution of Psychobiography to Contemporary Psychology?

Psychobiography can advance theory development, promote innovative research methods, and inform clinical and applied practice. It enhances psychologists’ skill development as it requires interdisciplinary knowledge and learning. Psychobiography is a longstanding core area of psychology dating back to late 19th century, so this topic area connects psychology students to their intellectual history and professional identity. Good psychobiography, because it is read by such large audiences, can educate the public about the field of psychology and psychohistory.

29.8 Why Has Academic Psychology Been so Inhospitable to Psychobiography?

History of disciplines always involve paradigm shifts. At one point the center of the psychology field moved away from case study methods, and psychoanalysis (which had been associated with psychobiography from roughly 1900 through 1930s), to more quantitative, representative models of research. Also, there was a movement toward separation of intellectual disciplines into distinct departments of study, and so, as an *interdisciplinary endeavor*, psychobiography had trouble finding a home on the university campus. But now there is a movement back to interdisciplinary learning and research, see below.

29.9 Where Do You See the Future of Psychobiography?

We are in the midst of a new paradigm shift, as Kőváry (2011) exclaimed, a “renaissance in psychobiography” is in progress. As quality psychobiography studies and position papers get published in the fields’s best (and diverse) journals, which is now happening internationally with more frequency, it will take on stronger hold and influence in academic psychology, in curriculum, and in both students’ and seasoned researchers’ research programs.

29.10 What Core Theory, Methodology or Approach in Contemporary Psychobiographical Research Do You Prefer and Why?

Personally, a multi-theoretical approach has been most comfortable with me. I have worked from psychoanalytic, Eriksonian, Levinsonian, Attachment theory, and newer models such as Arnett’s emerging adulthood, and positive psychology’s character strengths. Usually I incorporate two or three of these models in each study, but not always. In my most recent psychobiography of John F. Kennedy, Jr. (Ponterotto, 2019), I also incorporated theory and research on fame and negotiating fame from the new interdisciplinary field of Celebrity Studies. Methodologically, I hail most from a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm which is an emergent, discovery oriented approach (research → interpretation → research → interpretation/writing). However, I also incorporate quantitative approaches hailing from linguistics, as well as standardized personality assessments from retrospective designs.

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Joseph G. Ponterotto, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Counseling Psychology Program at Fordham University, New York City, USA. His research interest are in multicultural psychology, qualitative and quantitative research methods, and psychobiography. He is the author of *A Psychobiography of Bobby Fischer: Understanding the Genius, Mystery, and Psychological Decline of a World Chess Champion* (2012, Charles C Thomas, Publisher), as well as a number of articles on methodology and ethics in psychobiography. He recently published a psychobiography of John F. Kennedy, Jr. He maintains a small psychotherapy private practice in New York City.

Chapter 30

Dan P. McAdams in Interview with Claude-Hélène Mayer; September 19, 2018



Dan P. McAdams

Abstract The author of *George W. Bush and the Redemptive Dream*, Dan P. McAdams describes his own perspective on psychological biography. McAdams argues that psychological biography is an artful enterprise, but he urges psychological biographers to draw upon evidence-based science for interpreting the individual life. One useful theoretical frame for applying scientific concepts to biography is McAdams's three-layered model of personality development over the life course, which conceives of the person as a social *actor* endowed with dispositional traits, a motivated *agent* guided by goals and values, and an autobiographical *author* who aims to create an integrative narrative to make sense of life.

30.1 Do You Think of Psychobiography as Being More an Art or a Science?

I think of it as an artful application of science to a single life. Probably more art than science in that the resultant form of the psychobiography resembles a piece of art or literature more than it resembles a scientific study. For me, however, it is essential that I draw from scientifically credible concepts and studies in my effort to shed psychological light on a given life. Therefore, the psychobiography can be inspired by science, and it can illustrate scientific ideas. Still, it is not quite science in the sense that science tends to seek general knowledge, or generalizable knowledge, and a psychobiography must traffic in the specifics if it is to be successful.

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30.2 What Are the Core Changes in Psychobiography from the Beginning to Contemporary Psychobiographical Research?

Well, I am assuming you mean historical changes here. In the beginning, psychobiography was the exclusive province of psychoanalysis, with the first recognized psychobiography being Freud's Leonardo. In recent years, psychological biographies have drawn from theoretical traditions outside of psychoanalysis. My own psychobiography of George W. Bush—and the shorter piece I did on Donald Trump for *The Atlantic*—drew upon contemporary ideas in personality and developmental psychology, such as dispositional personality traits (the Big Five), authoritarianism, and the theory of narrative identity.

30.3 How Is Psychobiography Different from Biography?

It draws more explicitly and specifically from psychological theory. I actually don't like the term psychobiography, to be truthful. Too tied up with psychoanalysis in its connotations. I prefer to call it *psychological biography*.

30.4 What Role Does Psychoanalytic Theory Play in Psychobiography?

It continues to play a large role, but I think the role should be diminished. Although I was initially drawn to psychology by my reading of Freud, I no longer believe that psychoanalysis has the validity and credibility to serve as a go-to theory for understanding the individual life. This is not to say that psychoanalytic ideas are not useful sometimes; they can be very helpful for certain sorts of issues and problems. But in my view, the most exciting, cutting-edge ideas in psychology today fall outside the psychoanalytic orbit.

30.5 Do You Think that Conditions in the 21st Century Make Psychobiography an Especially Valuable Form of Research, and if so Why?

I think it should be an especially valuable form of scholarship in the 21st century. In the modern and postmodern contexts of contemporary life, there is more and more emphasis placed on how human beings make personal meaning in the world.

Modernism valorizes the subjectivity of the individual self, which should make it incumbent upon psychologists to understand individual lives in their full complexity. This is what psychological biography is supposed to do!

30.6 What Is the Main Contribution of Psychobiography to Contemporary Psychology?

Mainly, psychobiography can serve to illustrate how scientific theories and concepts come alive in the individual case. Psychobiography can also raise new ideas that may be subjected to subsequent scientific scrutiny. Therefore, the two functions are exemplification and discovery.

30.7 Why Has Academic Psychology Been so Inhospitable to Psychobiography?

Academic psychology has struggled hard to establish itself as a legitimate science. For reasons I describe above, psychobiography is not fundamentally a scientific enterprise, though it can and should draw on science. I also think that academic psychology recoils at what has often been characterized, sometimes fairly and sometimes not, as the wild speculation of psychoanalysis.

30.8 What Core Theory, Methodology or Approach in Contemporary Psychobiographical Research Do You Prefer and Why?

Here I am very biased. I have found that my own actor/agent/author (AAA) approach to conceptualizing personality development proves to be especially useful for understanding the individual case. Many personality scientists today adopt the AAA perspective to make sense of the field of personality psychology. The basic idea of AAA is this: The self develops along three different lines over the life course. First, with respect to the social actor, you can track the move from infant temperament dimensions to full-fledged dispositional traits (e.g., the Big Five) in adulthood. Traits describe how social actors tend to perform emotion and behavior as they strive to get along and get ahead in complex human groups. Second, with respect to the motivated agent, you can track the move from early intentionality and preschool theory of mind to the articulation of an encompassing and guiding motivational agenda in adult life, complete with life goals and personal values. Third, with respect to the autobiographical author, you can trace the development from the emergence of

autobiographical memory to the construction of self-defining life stories, or narrative identities, in the adolescence and adult years. In essence, personality is a person's unique variation on the overall evolutionarily-grounded design for human nature, manifest as a constellation of traits, goals/values, and stories, situated in culture and history.

Chapter 31

Jefferson A. Singer in Interview with Claude-Hélène Mayer; September 22, 2018



Jefferson A. Singer

Abstract The following interview with Jefferson A. Singer highlights the differences between biography and psychobiography. It points to the limits that psychobiography may place on describing the comprehensive life, but the expansiveness it embraces in connecting aspects of that life to more general theories of personality and identity. The interview also identifies past problems associated with psychobiography and the promise that personality science presents for the future of psychobiographical studies.

31.1 The Future of Psychobiography

The future of psychobiography looks very promising in that the burgeoning field of personality science can bring many lenses to the study of lives. Psychobiographers in recent years have conducted “Big Five” trait analyses; assessed motives of power, achievement, affiliation, and intimacy; and employed interpretative explorations of recurrent themes in memories and life stories. All of these approaches are grounded in extensive research literatures, which means that while psychobiography will always be subject to the inherent limitations of a single case study, the methods employed to understand that individual are increasingly based in reliable and valid science. Even more, recent psychobiographers have shown an ecumenical willingness to integrate these different dimensions of personality analyses, demonstrating how disposition, motivation, and narrative can combine to account for key episodes and decisions in an individual’s life.

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31.2 The Difference Between Psychobiography and Biography

Psychobiography differs from biography in scope and intention. Biographers seek to tell the comprehensive story of an individual's life, giving historical and sociocultural context to the subject's familial roots, relationships, and vocation. This review is typically chronological, detail-oriented, and, if well-done, told with literary flair. The biographer's goal is to give insight into what has made the person who she or he is, and what dominant themes and conflicts have shaped the subject's life. The psychobiographer's point of departure is much less expansive than the biographer's in scope, but equally ambitious in intention. The psychobiographer does not attempt to capture the full trajectory of the subject's life, resulting in an analysis that is often limited to an episode or set of episodes. In this sense, the psychobiography is more modest in scope. On the other hand, the psychobiographer seeks to understand a particular question of theoretical interest about the individual that will not only give insight about that person's life, but also speak to more general concerns within the field of personality science. Psychobiography is by design more "thin" in the full account of the subject, but more "thick" in the theoretical understanding of the specific psychological dynamics that characterize key moments in the individual's life (and by extension, individuals' lives in general). In concert with biography, good psychobiography is told well and with an eye to the passion and singularity that characterize any individual life.

31.3 Why Academic Psychology Has Been Hostile to Psychobiography

Academic psychology has been hostile to psychobiography for good reason. When psychobiography engages in reductive and simplistic explanations of individual lives, it opens itself up to justifiable ridicule. To take the complexity of presidential decisions or works of artistic genius and trace them to a disruption in infantile sexuality or a single traumatic event occurring in childhood makes our young science vulnerable to charges of magical thinking and tendentious reasoning. These kinds of excesses in the 20th century heyday of psychoanalysis created the negative reputation for psychobiography that can sometimes surface in academic psychology. However, the decades of work by Runyan, Elms, Anderson, Ponterotto, Schultz, and McAdams have done much to correct this misunderstanding of the value and importance of psychobiography.

Jefferson A. Singer, is the Dean of the College and Faulk Foundation professor of psychology at Connecticut College. He has authored six books: *The Proper Pirate: Robert Louis Stevenson's Quest for Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press); *Positive Couple Therapy: Using We-*

Stories to Enhance Resilience (with Karen Skerrett; NY: Routledge); *Personality and Psychotherapy*; *Treating the Whole Person* (NY: Guilford Press); *Memories that Matter* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger); *Message in a Bottle* (NY: The Free Press); and *The Remembered Self: Emotion and Memory in Personality* (with Peter Salovey, NY: The Free Press), and co-edited a seventh, *At Play in the Fields of Consciousness: Essays in Honor of Jerome L. Singer* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum; again with Peter Salovey). He is the author of over 100 articles and chapters in the fields of memory, personality, and clinical psychology. He received the 2010 Henry A. Murray Award for the Study of Lives from the Society for Personality and Social Psychology of the American Psychology Association. Dean Singer is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and past recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award to support research in the United Kingdom.