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Joseph G. Ponterotto

*Editors*

# Beyond WEIRD: Psychobiography in Times of Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Perspectives

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*Editors*
Claude-Hélène Mayer 🆔
Department of Industrial Psychology and
People Management
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg, South Africa

Roelf van Niekerk 🆔
Department of Industrial and Organisational
Psychology
Nelson Mandela University
Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa

Paul J. P. Fouché 🆔
Department of Psychology
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

Joseph G. Ponterotto 🆔
Division of Psychological & Educational
Services, Graduate School of Education
Fordham University
New York, NY, USA

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# Foreword

Prof Claude-Hélène Mayer and colleagues provide, in this seminal book volume, the most richly diverse collection of psychobiographies to date, spanning five continents, applying innovative historiography approaches in ways not seen before. Of the many unique contributions is the book's comparative psychobiography highlighting the humanity of endeavors by people in their historical contexts and without stereotyping the individuals and/or their lived cultures. This book is a milestone in psychological studies aimed at placing the person in psychology for the authenticity of narratives about their contributions to humanity.

University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA

Elias Mpofu

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

# Acknowledgments

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# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

**Claude-Hélène Mayer**  is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

**Roelf van Niekerk**  (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial

Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa

**Paul J. P. Fouché** (DPhil) is a full-professor of Counselling Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, in South Africa. He serves on the Faculty Research Committee. Paul has published psychobiographical and psychohistorical articles in various journals. His interest is in the field of psychobiography and psychohistory and he acts as a research supervisor to post-graduate scholars undertaking life history research.

Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

**Joseph G. Ponterotto** (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and Coordinator of the School Counseling Program in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University's Lincoln Center (Manhattan) Campus. His primary teaching and research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling, psychobiography, career counseling, qualitative research methods, clinical assessment, and the history of psychology.

Division of Psychological and Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University – Lincoln Center Campus, New York, NY, USA

## Contributors

**Barbara Burnell** Independent Scholar and Clinical Practitioner, Bloemfontein, South Africa

**Carina Chen** Division of Psychological and Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University, New York, NY, USA

**Amadeusz Citlak** Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

**Paul H. Elovitz** Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, USA

**Grant Freedman**  Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa

**Nakia Hamlett**  Department of Psychology, Connecticut College, New London, CT, USA

**James L. Kelley**  Independent Scholar, Oklahoma City, OK, USA

**Wilhelmien Labuscagne**  Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

**Jennifer Lodi-Smith**  Canisius College, Buffalo, NY, USA

**Nicole T. Maleh**  Counseling Psychology Program, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, USA

**Simonleigh P. Miller**  Counseling Psychology Program, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, USA

**Lauren Mitchell**  Psychology Department, Emmanuel College, Kudappanamoodu, Kerala, India

**Carla Nel**  Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

**Nicky J. Newton**  Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada

**Pravani Naidoo**  Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

**Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi)**  University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA

**Dinesh Sharma**  Steam Works Studio, LLC, Plainsborof, NJ, USA

**Prim Siripipat**  Division of Psychological and Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University – Lincoln Center Campus, New York, NY, USA

**Jefferson A. Singer**  Department of Psychology, Connecticut College, New London, CT, USA

**Ulrich Sollmann**  Bochum, Germany

**Harry Tinashe**  Department of Psychology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Makhanda, South Africa

**Willie van Peer**  Faculty of Languages and Literatures, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany

**Shellae Versey**  Department of Psychology, Fordham University, Bronx, NY, USA

**Susan K. Whitbourne**  University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA

# Psychobiography Beyond WEIRD?

**Claude-Hélène Mayer, Roelf van Niekerk, Paul J. P. Fouché, and Joseph G. Ponterotto**

**Abstract** Psychobiography focuses on the lives of extraordinary individuals. In essence, psychobiographies are biographies that employ psychological theory to clarify and illuminate historically significant experiences, events, and contributions within an extraordinary person's life and in the relevant sociocultural contexts of that lived experience. This chapter is the introductory chapter to the book and provides insights into the discourse on psychobiography beyond WEIRD and the chapters in the book.

Psychobiographical research focuses on the lives of extraordinary individuals (Elms, 1994; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005, 2010). In essence, psychobiographies are biographies that employ psychological theory to clarify and illuminate historically significant experiences, events, and contributions within an extraordinary person's life and in the relevant sociocultural contexts of that lived experience (Runyan, 1988, 2005, 2013).

C.-H. Mayer (✉)
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

R. van Niekerk
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa
e-mail:
roelf.vanniekerk@mandela.ac.za; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roelf_Van_Niekerk

P. J. P. Fouché
Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa
e-mail: fouchejp@ufs.ac.za

J. G. Ponterotto
Division of Psychological & Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University – Lincoln Center Campus, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: ponterotto@fordham.edu

During the past four decades, psychobiographical research has developed into a vibrant and popular area of research and gained considerable international interest (e.g. Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Mayer et al., 2021a, b; Schultz, 2005). The study of individuals is an intriguing and instructive field in psychology that contributes to the holistic understanding of individual behaviour and experiences within sociocultural and historical contexts (Allport, 1961; Wiggins, 2003). The majority of psychobiographical studies have, in the past, focused on psychoanalytic theoretical approaches which were mainly anchored in in-depth qualitative research methodology and that focused on the entire life span of individuals (McAdams, 1988; Elms 1994, 2007).

Since the first psychobiographies, the science and art of psychobiography has developed further and new theories have been applied to the psychobiographical field and new methodologies have been explored (Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017; Mayer & Fouché, 2021). Various topics within the context of psychobiography also gained in relevance, such as ethics in psychobiography (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), the exploration of the relationship of the subject of research and the researcher (Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018), the integration of psychobiography in professional psychological training (Kőváry 2018, 2019; Ponterotto, 2017), and the examination of historic social change agents through psychobiography (Adler & Singer, 2022).

# 1 The Value of Psychobiography

Psychobiography holds much value as a form of case study research (Van Reenen, 2022), especially in beyond WEIRD contexts such as the African or Asian continents. Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) stated more than a decade ago that South African psychobiographies specifically could benefit from (a) the continued development of postgraduate academic psychobiographical research at universities throughout Africa, (b) an increase in psychobiography conducted on African personalities and particularly illustrious females, (c) the use of a wider range of psychological and transdisciplinary theories and models to uncover and reconstruct the lives of case study subjects, and (d) the undertaking of more future psychobiographies on celebrities so as to interest a younger generation.

Fouché (2015) further emphasised that the field of psychobiography in Africa would benefit from interdisciplinary collaborations, including departments such as religion, sport sciences, history, and politics. Psychobiography has extensive potential as a research tool and methodology (Fouché, 2015; Van Reenen, 2022). According to Elms (1994), psychobiography "tests the statistically significant against the personally significant" (p. 13). Psychobiography fills a void by integrating findings from across various academic sub-disciplines and assessing their relevance and applicability in the context of real life, thereby providing a very uniquely focused application (Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Moreover, psychobiography advances science by the intensive study of the lives of pioneering psychologists

and scientists, thereby aiding in the understanding of their theories and models (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2015; Van Reenen, 2022).

According to Schultz and Lawrence (2017), psychobiography is a likewise approach to the practice of client case conceptualisation utilised by many clinicians. They are of the opinion that clinicians could reach more valid conceptualisations about their clients and how to structure their treatment, if they have received academic training in psychobiography. If this is the case, enhanced support for academic psychobiography will be gained and the goal of integrating psychobiography into mainstream psychology might be more easily facilitated (Kasser, 2017; Van Reenen, 2022). According to Kőváry (2018), psychobiography, as case study research, can contribute to the development of psychology into a more rigorous science while also alleviating some of the academic discrepancies between training and clinical practice. In addition, psychological interventions aimed at enhancing peoples' quality of life and promoting human development and potential can be generated by studying what went wrong and what went right in individual lives (Kőváry 2011; Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Lastly, psychobiographies can be used to strengthen approaches to deal with life's problems and dilemmas, such as suffering and pain, as well as self-development and flourishing (Mayer, 2021; Van Reenen, 2022).

## 2   About WEIRD and Non-WEIRD in Psychobiography and Beyond It

Extraordinary individuals have been studied from multiple perspectives and in multiple contexts; however, most of the psychobiographies to date have been written about WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) samples conducting a life in WEIRD contexts (Mayer et al., 2021a, b). So far, research on non-WEIRD extraordinary individuals is limited. The same is true for the research on non-WEIRD individuals in specific non-WEIRD contexts. Often, psychobiographical studies focus more on the inner worlds of individuals than on their sociocultural surroundings and the influences of the contexts on their lifelong development (McAdams, 1994, 1999). Further, researchers have emphasised that there is a void in psychobiographical research focusing on cultural and transcultural aspects as well as on transdisciplinary theories (Mayer, 2017; Wegner, 2020, 2021) which might contribute to the WEIRD challenge.

During the past few years, researchers have highlighted the WEIRD challenge (Henrich, 2016; Henrich et al., 2010; Jones, 2010; Maia, 2021; Van Zyl et al., 2023) and have asked questions, such as "What do we do with the WEIRD problem?" (Kanazawa, 2020). It can be highlighted that many researchers in the past decade have responded to this question. Traditionally researchers in cultural and social anthropology and ethnology have focused on non-WEIRD samples, often as part of their core studies since, at least in the discipline of ethnology—the research area is

*per se* defined as the study of people outside of Europe and therefore aims at exclusively dealing with non-WEIRD contexts (at least aiming to overcome the *W*). Researchers from other disciplines, such as psychology, have also made an extended effort to research more non-WEIRD contexts and samples (e.g. Kanazawa, 2020; Thalmayer et al., 2020). However, it has been pointed out that psychological data still remain largely American (Rad et al., 2018). Further, Kanazawa (2020, p. 343) discusses that researchers should not ask "*how* WEIRD populations are different from non-WEIRD populations, but *why*."

In this book on *Psychobiography beyond WEIRD*, the contributors respond to the questions beyond *how* and *why* people and societies in the WEIRD and non-WEIRD classifications are different. Rather, editors and authors aim at presenting a more complex picture of individuals who can be described within the category of non-WEIRD and/or who live or lived within contexts which can be described as non-WEIRD. The research presented in the following chapters aims at going beyond the two-dimensional questions. It rather presents complex aspects of individual lives lived in non-WEIRD contexts and in non-WEIRD individuals. Thereby, researchers ask various questions, such as "How do individuals develop their careers being classified as non-WEIRD or living in non-WEIRD contexts" or "How can lives of women political activists be compared in WEIRD and non-WEIRD contexts?" Further, the aim is not to necessarily emphasise the differences of non-WEIRD and WEIRD individuals, populations, or contexts but also to highlight their potential similarities. Moving "beyond WEIRD" means, in these terms, to move beyond the exotification of "non-WEIRD individuals, populations and contexts" and the dissolution of potential stereotypical classifications of "the one" or "the other".

Through the lens of the eyes of the individual and individual lives, the editors foster a growing understanding that lives lived as WEIRD or non-WEIRD individual and in WEIRD or non-WEIRD contexts need to be understood in depth and in their development across the life span since individuals—especially in these globalised, hybrid, technologised, and interconnected times—may swop to a certain degree fluidly between WEIRD and non-WEIRD contexts.

## 3    Contribution and Aims of the Book

This book is a contribution to explore the themes, topics, thoughts, ideas, values, norms, behaviours, and emotions underlying the concept of WEIRD and non-WEIRD categories by providing diverse examples from non-WEIRD lives and contexts. This collective contribution demonstrates that psychobiography, as a sub-discipline of psychology, can strongly contribute to the WEIRD and non-WEIRD discourse on individual, intra-, and inter-personal research levels. This is an important aspect to notice within the WEIRD and non-WEIRD discourse, since many psychologists who claim this discourse focus on quantitative research mainly (e.g. Cemalcilar et al. 2021; Pelham et al., 2022). This book, therefore,

locates psychobiography into the WEIRD and non-WEIRD discourse and establishes it as a method to contribute to qualitative non-WEIRD studies.

Further, the editors aim to influence the focus of future psychobiographical studies. The contributors to this book are committed to making a difference in contemporary psychobiographical research by focusing on non-WEIRD samples and contexts, thereby expanding psychological research to transcultural and transdisciplinary research foci. The editors further seek to give researchers, scholars, and scientists from non-WEIRD backgrounds a voice to develop the theoretical and methodological stances of psychobiographical work with new perspectives, such as indigenous psychology, anthropology, or sociological perspectives. The voices to be heard present a differentiated view on non-WEIRD lives, addressing in particular the underlying themes and issues across the life span.

Broadened worldviews and theoretical and methodological approaches in transdisciplinary and transcultural perspectives will advance the status, scientific merit, and impact of psychobiography internationally. Psychobiographical investigations focusing in particular on non-WEIRD samples and contexts and taking into account particular cultural, transcultural, and transdisciplinary approaches have not yet been published in an edited volume on psychobiography. This book promotes a shift from the "usual or received perspective" to the "unusual or alternate perspective", thereby focusing on non-WEIRD while taking racial/ethnic and other minorities and marginalised extraordinary individuals into focus. The core topics relevant to this book investigate the role of non-WEIRD contexts in the life course of individuals. These topics elucidate how thoughts are formulated, emotions are experienced and expressed, actions are constructed, and ultimately, how lives are lived by non-WEIRD extraordinary individuals in a variety of contexts.

In summary, the purpose of this book is to present psychobiographical work in non-WEIRD contexts and samples, focusing on culture, transcultural, and transdisciplinary work. The editors further seek to give researchers, scholars, and scientists from non-WEIRD backgrounds a strong voice in developing theoretical and methodological stances in psychobiographical work that will markedly expand the field.

The common "thread" weaving through the different chapters is the focus on non-WEIRD samples and/or non-WEIRD contexts and the topics of culture, transculture, and transdisciplinarity, as well as prioritising minority and marginalised extraordinary individuals and contexts in research and practice. This volume provides both a broad and in-depth insight into the topic of psychobiography beyond WEIRD contexts and provides new insights for researchers, lecturers, and practitioners (e.g. psychologists, psychobiographers, cultural scientists, industrial psychologists, gender researcher, counsellors, educators, social workers, therapists, managers, and leaders) on how to understand and use psychobiographies beyond WEIRD samples and contexts as a transformational (re-)source to foster transcultural and transdisciplinary work in the so far scarcely researched context of non-WEIRD psychobiographies.

## 4   Introducing the Chapters of the Book

In the following, the chapters of this book will briefly be introduced. The book is divided into six parts, reaching from African contexts, through European, Asian, and American contexts, and towards comparative and self-reflective perspectives. The book leads to final conclusions and potential future perspectives for psychobiography and the questions around WEIRD and non-WEIRD individuals and contexts including how to deal with them in psychobiography.

**Part 1: African and Asian Contexts**

The first part of the book takes individuals of African and Asian origin into focus and/or explores African philosophy and theories. The first chapter focuses on the first black female to qualify as a Chartered Accountant in South Africa, Nonkululeko Gobodo (born in 1960). The authors **Grant Freedman** and **Roelf van Niekerk** focus on her life and career as a pioneering woman in the accounting business but also on her authentic leadership and her struggle against race and gender inequalities in South Africa.

The following chapter "The career development of Albertina Sisulu" by **Roelf van Niekerk** and **Grant Freedman** describes Sisulu's career within the prevailing socio-historical and political context and interprets it according to the theoretical framework of Jeffrey Greenhaus, Gerard Callanan, and Veronica Godshalk. Albertina's involvement in the political struggle came with high personal cost. This chapter describes the prominent anti-Apartheid political activist and gives insight into her life and political struggle.

The chapter on "Zenzile Miriam Makeba: A Psychobiography of 'Mama Africa' from an Integrated African Psychology Perspective" by **Paul, J.P. Fouché, Wilhelmien Labuscagne**, **and Pravani Naidoo** focuses on African philosophy which emerged as a protest psychology, refuting the claims of European and American approaches to understanding the lives of Africans. Innovatively, this chapter integrates the work of various African theories, which share multiple characteristics and can be integrated into a single, holistic theory. This Integrated African Psychology Perspective (IAPP) understands personality through three main constructs, namely: (a) human nature; (b) cognitive functioning and the concept of time; and (c) optimal development and mental health while exploring the life of Zenzile Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), the inspirational South African female artist and singer. The chapter explores "Mama Africa's" humanitarianism and the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

The following chapter is by **Tinashe T. Harry and Roelf van Niekerk**, titled: *"Tragic Optimism: A psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai"*. Tsvangirai became the face of courage and hope in Zimbabwe during the time of political violence, physical abuse, brutality, emotional humiliation, unlawful detentions, and persecution. He challenged the ruling party in Zimbabwe and became the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (2009–2013). This chapter explores and describes Tsvangirai's life and interprets it in terms of Frankl's personality theory. The chapter

contributes to building psychobiographical research on African politicians in the context of overcoming colonial powers.

Two established South African researchers, **Carla Nel and Barbara Burnell**, explore the life of Albertina Sisulu, a female African feminist. While they study the "the Mother of the Nation", who was a prominent anti-Apartheid figure, from the viewpoint of Western and African morality perspectives, they also use and critique Kohlberg's theory of moral development for its androcentric, cultural, and ideological bias. They further integrate Gilligan's theoretical lens and take—as an African philosophical background—Ubuntu—into consideration to explore the life of Albertina Sisulu with special regard to her life within a WEIRD context.

The chapter of **Claude-Hélène Mayer** presents Graça Simbine Machel as a change-maker and global activist and thereby contributes to the psychobiographical literature on women political leaders in African contexts from a social activist and identity development theory perspective. Further, this chapter is a contribution to a multiple perspective psychobiographical view on a woman leader and shows how an individual can be studied from different theoretical and methodological perspectives—see Part 4, chapter "Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD" which deals with Angela Merkel and Graça Machel in a comparative perspective.

Part 1 finalises with the work of **Ulrich Sollmann** and his approach on how psychobiography can be applied in Chinese contexts. The author explores Chinese celebrities and their use of body language and non-verbal behaviour as culture-specific behaviour. The perspective he uses is transcultural and ethno-analytical. Methodologically, Sollmann uses the method of adult observation and applies it to virtual representations in relation to their personal life patterns of behaviour and the cultural and contextual background.

**Part 2: European Contexts**

Part 2 of this book focuses on WEIRD individuals conducting a life in European contexts during different points in time and history. First, **James L. Kelley** explores the life of Leni Riefenstahl within his chapter titled "'Impressionen unter Druck': A psychobiography of Leni Riefenstahl". To explore the life of this German filmmaker during the twentieth century, Kelley, a psycho-historian from the USA, applies object relations theory to understand her life's development and her desire to enter a career in the performing arts. Later, Adolf Hitler became her patron until the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945. The chapter shows how Leni, after the loss of her marriage and film career, and after being ostracised as a filmmaker due to her associations with Hitler, became a photographer of African tribes. Also, in her romantic life, she changed tacks. Compared with her late-in-life companion, Horst Kettner, Leni's early romances were relatively shallow because her counterpart was either too involved in promoting her career (Harry Sokal) or too far removed from her working life (Peter Jacob).

**Amadeusz Citlak** explores two figures of ancient Mediterranean cultures, Socrates and Jesus, through transdisciplinary research from anthropological, sociological, and psychological research traditions. The author focuses specifically on the honour-shame cultural code and the theory of striving for power which seem to complement

each other well and form a coherent picture of both masters of the ancient world as seen from both the social and individual levels.

In the following chapter, the author **Willie van Peer** takes the life of Shakespeare into consideration. He asks the question: can there be psychobiography if there is an absence of accurate and adequate knowledge about meaningful events in the life of an extraordinary individual. He demonstrates his social psychobiographical approach first with Shakespeare, and then with the more ancient lives and personalities of Sunjata in the fourteenth-century Mande epic, and Hatshepsut (fifteenth century BCE), one of the very few female pharaohs in ancient Egypt. The author also provides a constructive criticism of the construct of WEIRD in terms of its relevance to more ancient cultures.

A team of authors led by **Jennifer Lodi-Smith** emphasise in their chapter, "The Pedagogical Value of Psychobiography as Illustrated by an Examination of Eriksonian Psychosocial Development in the Life of Flora Tristan", modern psychological pedagogy in psychobiography, using the example of Flora Tristan, a nineteenth-century French/Peruvian feminist and social activist. The authors illustrate that Erikson's adult stages of identity development, intimacy formation, and generativity are not as independent and sequential constructs as traditionally presented in his model. The chapter's message includes ideas on how tools for psychobiographical exploration into non-WEIRD samples can be integrated into pedagogy.

**Part 3: US-American contexts**

In this part of the book, the authors write about Americans from WEIRD backgrounds who represent racial/ethnic or sexual-orientation minority backgrounds. **Claude-Hélène Mayer** contributes a study on "Oprah Gail Winfrey in psychobiographical perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy". She thereby explores her life from a meaning-orientated perspective through the lens of Western (Existential) and African (Existential) psychological and philosophical theoretical approaches. This chapter presents the life of Oprah Gail Winfrey, a female African-American talk-show host who comes from a partially non-WEIRD background. Thereby the chapter contributes to psychobiography, research on female non-WEIRD, African-American psychobiographies, and meaning in in-depth qualitative research.

The next study presents a careerography of James Baldwin (1924–1987), a prolific non-heterosexual African-American writer and activist. The authors **Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi), Nicole T. Maleh, and Simonleigh P. Miller** present a case study profile of James Baldwin applying work as a calling theory to conceptualise the work of Baldwin and explore the interplay between his intersectional identities and the trajectory of his work. This study considers Baldwin's fulfilment of his "calling" as a writer. Specifically, the authors address the overall purpose of his work, his contribution to the common good, and the internal and external factors that motivated him towards his work focused on race relations in the USA and his ensuing involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. It thereby contributes to promote research on non-heterosexual African Americans from a non-WEIRD perspective.

The chapter written by **Nakia Hamlett** *and* **Jefferson Singer** is spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement. It provides insights into the enduring problem of structural racism and how it manifests for both Black and White individuals. The authors profile the identity study of a 73-year-old Black man, Lonnie B., born to sharecroppers in Mississippi, who migrated North to work in the shipyards of New London, Connecticut, by employing McAdams's life story interview. The chapter provides insights into the narrator's resilience and how he addressed challenges throughout his lifetime.

### Part 4: Comparative Psychobiographical Perspectives

In the following chapters, the comparative element of psychobiographies is included. **Dinesh Sharma** presents a chapter on the founding fathers of America: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, with their Indian counterparts: Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and B. R. Ambedkar. The author explores and compares two founding fathers of two democratic societies. Sharma undertakes an Eriksonian psycho-historical and psychobiographical approach in his study of these men to demonstrate that WEIRD (i.e. Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) data assumptions apply not only to psychological sciences but to most of the Western social sciences. The chapter also provides insights into leadership studies within a global, interconnected world.

The following chapter focuses on two women in politics, Angela Merkel from Germany and Graça Machel from Mozambique. The author, **Claude-Hélène Mayer**, compares the two women's heroine journeys across the life spans and their political careers. The chapter contributes to promote research on women beyond WEIRD criteria in psychobiography and also highlight the comparison of extraordinary women's life across cultures.

**Prim Siripipat, Carina Chen,** and **Joseph G. Ponterotto** present a multiple case study, namely psychobiographical profiles of two women's tennis superstars and social activists: Billie Jean King (1943–present) and Naomi Osaka (1997–present). This study explores how the two women used their international sports career and global platform to promote social justice and equity across race, gender, and sexual orientation. The authors used multiple theoretical models, namely psychosocial/psychodynamic (Erikson and Adler), existential (Frankl and Merleau-Ponty), and race-culture-specific theories (Cross and Rockquemore & Laszloffy), as anchors in interpreting these exceptional and impactful lives.

### Part 5: Theoretical and Reflective Contemporary Perspectives and Future

Part 5 is the final part of the book which takes in particular reflective and contemporary perspectives into consideration. **Paul Elovitz**, who is a pioneer in psycho-historical studies and psychobiography, argues that the West is the WEIRDest society of all. However, he is further of the opinion that psychobiographical research is needed all over the world and that people need to know each other's psychology at micro and macro level. This chapter is very much a personal approach to the concept of WEIRDness.

The final chapter of this book is the epilogue, written by the editors, **Joseph G. Ponterotto, Paul J.P. Fouché, Claude-Hélène Mayer**, *and* **Roelf van Niekerk** which provides an outlook on the potential futures of psychobiography in the context of WEIRD and non-WEIRD.

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**Claude-Hélène Mayer** is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

**Roelf van Niekerk** (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

**Paul J.P. Fouché** (DPhil) is a full-professor of Counselling Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, in South Africa. He serves on the Faculty Research Committee. Paul has published psychobiographical and psychohistorical articles in various journals. His interest is in the field of psychobiography and psychohistory and he acts as a research supervisor to post-graduate scholars undertaking life history research.

**Joseph G. Ponterotto** (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and Coordinator of the School Counseling Program in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University's Lincoln Center (Manhattan) Campus. His primary teaching and research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling, psychobiography, career counseling, qualitative research methods, clinical assessment, and the history of psychology.

# Part I
# African and Asian Contexts

# Defying the Odds: A Psychobiographical Study of Nonkululeko Gobodo's Career Development

**Grant Freedman and Roelf van Niekerk**

**Abstract** Nonkululeko Gobodo (b.1960) was the first black female to qualify as a chartered accountant in South Africa. The profession is notoriously difficult to enter, and black females remain under-represented. At the start of her career, she was offered a position at one of the "Big Four" auditing firms but decided to start her own company, Gobodo Incorporated. Twenty-five years later, the two largest black-owned accounting firms in the country, one of which was Gobodo Incorporated, merged to create Sizwe Ntsaluba Gobodo, with Gobodo as Executive Chairperson. Now aged 62, she continues her pioneering ways as she transitions to focusing on individual and team coaching in the context of authentic leadership, women, and race inequality.

This psychobiographical case study explored, described, and interpreted Gobodo's occupational and organisational choices, and her early, middle, and late career stages in terms of the career development model of Jeffrey Greenhaus and colleagues. Publicly available primary and secondary data were integrated and Gobodo was interviewed to examine her career development and her lived experience. Gobodo's extraordinary achievements, ongoing career development, and pioneering transformation of a landscape traditionally dominated by WEIRD individuals provide valuable insights into career development. It illuminates the career of an individual who rose from doing the books for her father's panel-beating business to leading the fifth largest audit and advisory firm in Africa. The study is of interest to scholars, coaches, counsellors, and talent practitioners, as well as to individuals at all career stages, who are grappling with career development challenges and decisions.

**Keywords** Nonkululeko Gobodo · Psychobiography · Career development · Women Charted Accountants · South African pioneers

G. Freedman (✉) · R. van Niekerk
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa
e-mail: grant.freedman@mandela.ac.za;
roelf.vanniekerk@mandela.ac.za; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roelf_Van_Niekerk

# 1 Introduction

Nonkululeko Gobodo (b.1960) was the first black woman to qualify as a chartered accountant (CA) in South Africa. Whereas the first female CA in South Africa had qualified in 1917, it took another 70 years for the profession to have its first black female CA (Hanise, 2022). Gobodo achieved this distinction in 1987, 7 years before South Africa's first democratic elections. By 2011, Gobodo had traversed an illustrious career path and founded an audit and advisory services firm that competes successfully on the African continent with the "Big Four" audit and advisory firms. Today, she continues to pioneer black excellence and to contribute to the transformation of the accounting profession and it is illuminating and instructive to examine the development of her career over the course of her lifetime.

Efficient use of psychological theory to explore the subject's life (McAdams, 1988) is the study of historical figures in a socio-cultural frame of reference incorporating psychological and historiographic research methodology through a psychological theoretical lens (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Ponterotto, 2014). According to Ponterotto and Park-Taylor (2021), psychobiographers have shifted their focus by incorporating the impact career development and work experiences have on an individual's life course, trajectory, and vocational contributions. This psychobiographical study investigated Gobodo's career development through the lens of the stage-based career development model of Greenhaus et al. (2019). This aligns with a goal of psychobiography, which seeks to illuminate the lives of people who have achieved extraordinary feats by examining aspects of their lives through the lens of psychological theory (Burnell & Nel, 2021; Fouché et al., 2019; Schultz, 2005; Welman et al., 2019). Knight (2019) and Mayer (2017) point out that the life story reciprocally examines the theory. Anderson and Dunlop (2019) emphasise the importance of understanding the subject's life and not foisting theory upon them.

Today many people find making appropriate career decisions in the face of the rapidly changing nature of work, jobs, and careers anxiety-provoking and many people enter the workplace without the sense of purpose, insight, or knowledge to build a successful career (Greenhaus et al., 2019). Studying Gobodo's career and considering how she managed the developmental tasks associated with each stage of the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model illuminate how she created and developed an exceptional life and career. It tells the story of a black South African woman who defied the legacy of apartheid, broke through glass ceilings, changed the landscape of the accounting profession and who continues to advocate for black excellence, women in leadership, and non-discrimination in the workplace.

Greenhaus et al. (2019) regard work as a defining aspect of contemporary life and take cognizance of the interplay between a person's life and career to understand their career development. To appreciate the significance of Gobodo's career and how it developed, the extraordinary socio-political context in which she has lived and worked over the course of her career must be considered. A morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995) allows for the interpretation of Gobodo's career development in terms of the interplay between her own individual agency (e.g. making decisions

relating to key developmental tasks) and her career development within a specific set of social structures (e.g. norms, language communities, and power relationships). This approach also acknowledges that social structures change over time because of the actions of historically situated individuals, such as Gobodo herself.

## 2 Formative Years

In South Africa, the National Party came to power in 1948 and systematically enforced the ideology of apartheid and separate development of ethnic groups. By the 1960s, the oppression of black people had created a volatile socio-political climate (Ducksters, 2022). Pass laws, barring the access of black people to white neighbourhoods during certain hours, were enforced and there were forced removals from *white areas* to rural *locations* (South African History Online, 2022a; Tibane, 2019). Gobodo was born into this climate in Mthatha in 1960, the middle child of five children. That year, 69 anti-pass protestors were killed by security forces (South African History Online, 2022b). In 1961, following a whites-only referendum, South Africa was declared a republic and the African population was divided into ethnic *nations*, each with its own homeland and Mthatha was declared part of the Transkei homeland (South African History Online, 2022a). In 1964, the so-called Rivonia trialists, including Nelson Mandela, were sentenced to life imprisonment (Katwala, 2001).

Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, Gobodo stated that she was part of a "family of businesspeople" and that she learned about business and entrepreneurship at an early age. In addition to her mother being a nurse and her father a teacher, both parents ran businesses including a dress-making business, a general dealer, and a panel-beating shop (N. Gobodo, personal communication, October 10, 2021; Ryan, 2013). Having grown up in that environment, Gobodo described herself as a "born entrepreneur" who took on the responsibility of running the general dealer business on her own during school holidays.

Gobodo described herself as a child with "quiet and with low self-esteem" among her more outgoing siblings. Her parents played a strong guiding role in her life, and she did "whatever" her parents guided her to do. In grade 4, she met up with a teacher who took an interest in her development and her marks began to improve. Gobodo recalled that her father was elated at this performance, but her mother was not impressed, saying that she was not interested in people academically capable, but not wise in the ways of life. Gobodo, however experienced the taste of success and realised that she was "good at something".

When Gobodo was 14, her mother, who was "always very critical" of her, trusted the young Gobodo to run the general dealer business single-handedly. Her mother exposed her to business and the need to live a "disciplined life" early on. Initially Gobodo was resentful of these expectations and responsibilities being foisted on her, especially when her siblings were enjoying themselves on holiday. In a televised interview with Gobodo about her life and career, she described how she persevered,

driven on by her natural interest in business and the encouragement of her parents, who reminded her that "there is nothing you cannot do" (SABC, 2013).

Gobodo entered her teenage years in the 1970s, when a strong resurgence of resistance politics arose throughout the country and to which the state responded heavy-handedly (South African History Online, 2022c). Combined with the policy of separate development these circumstances meant that the so-called township schools were very poorly resourced, were far away, and were sometimes dangerous to travel to. This led to Gobodo having to change schools almost every year, seeking higher quality schooling and avoiding the dangers associated with the political climate in the country.

At that time, the community in Mthatha regarded the key to becoming successful was through studying and pursuing a career in the natural sciences. She described herself as an "average student" who regarded herself as not being "clever enough" to take on such a career. Nevertheless, Gobodo completed her schoolwork even though she "hated it" and preferred to spend her time reading and working in the family businesses.

Gobodo fell pregnant at age 17 and got married, she left school in 1977 (SABC, 2013). During this time, she accompanied her mother on a trip to provide nursing support for the underprivileged. She did not enjoy this, describing it as "literal torture" and so she decided that having a medical career was not for her and considered this visit a "saving grace" (Gobodo, 2021, Personal interview; Ryan, 2013).

## 3   Career Development

Greenhaus et al. (2019) view a career as either a sequence of positions in an occupation or organisation, or as a property of an individual irrespective of occupation or organisation. Career development is characterised as an ongoing process by which individuals progress through a series of stages, each of which is characterised by a relatively unique set of issues, themes, and developmental tasks.

The Greenhaus et al.'s (2019) stage-based model of career development describes the passage of a career in terms of four interrelated stages, each with a set of key developmental tasks.

### 3.1   Stage 1: Occupational and Organisational Choice (Initially Ages 18–30 but May Reoccur Later)

This stage requires consideration of, and insight into, personal attributes (including abilities, interests, and values), factors relating to alternative occupations (including requirements, opportunities, and rewards) and organisations (including specific

requirements and employment opportunities). This enables an individual to undertake the developmental tasks of developing their occupational self-image, assessing alternative occupations, developing an initial choice of occupation, pursuing the necessary education or training, and obtaining a job offer.

## 3.2  Stage 2: Early Career (Typically Ages 25–45)

In this stage, some of the predominant issues in the formative years of early adulthood are played out in positioning the person in the world of work and then working to succeed in it. Developmental tasks include learning the job, learning organisational rules and norms, fitting into the chosen occupation and organisation, increasing competence, and pursing career goals.

## 3.3  Stage 3: Mid-Career (Typically Ages 40–60)

Typically, during this stage, individuals begin to reappraise their lifestyle and factors that impacted on their initial career decisions. This may reaffirm or cause individuals to modify their career goals and choices accordingly as they move into the challenging middle adult years and seek to remain productive in work.

## 3.4  Stage 4: Late Career (Typically Ages 55 to Retirement)

In the late career stage, individuals seek to continue making a productive contribution and maintain their sense of self-worth, and to plan for an effective retirement.

Taking account of the complex and rapidly changing context of work and careers in the twenty-first century, Greenhaus et al. (2019) regard these stages as varying in duration and sometimes reoccurring throughout the contemporary career and thus the age ranges associated with the stages are regarded as broad guidelines. This aligns with a goal of psychobiography of not forcing people into neat categories but exploring their unique characteristics in terms of a particular theoretical model.

## 4  Methodology

The aim of the research was to explore, describe, and interpret Gobodo's career journey in terms of the career development model of Greenhaus et al. (2019). A single-case, morphogenetic psychobiographical design was employed.

The research questions to be answered were (1) How do Greenhaus et al. (2019) describe the stages and key developmental tasks associated with individual career development? (2) How does the data from primary and secondary sources describe Gobodo's life and progress through these career stages and developmental tasks? (3) How does the development of Gobodo's career correspond with what may be expected in terms of the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model?

The selection of the subject for the study was purposive. One of the researchers has personal experience of having worked directly with Gobodo and to mitigate the risk of subjectivity which may skew the results (Gómez et al., 2019) the second researcher, who has neither met nor spoken with Gobodo, independently analysed and interpreted the data. Since only Gobodo's career development was examined (as opposed to her complete life) the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model, aimed at examining a specific domain of functioning, rather than a grand theory, was employed as explained by Du Plessis (2017).

The research procedure was informed by the steps recommended by Bulut and Cissy Usman (2021). Since, in practice, these steps are sometimes taken in parallel, or in a slightly different order for pragmatic reasons, the order of some steps was changed from those recommended by those authors to accommodate the requirements of this research.

The procedure followed in this study is described below.

1. Gobodo was identified as the subject of the study, with the focus on her lifetime career development and approached to obtain her consent to the study.
2. The search for data commenced with Internet searches for the name *Nonkululeko Gobodo* in the publicly available electronic databases, websites, and social media.
3. Greenhaus et al.'s (2019) career for life theory and specifically the stages of career development were identified as suitable for illuminating Gobodo's career development from age 18 to the present.
4. A data processing and analysis matrix (see Table 1) was developed to support the initial organisation of the data. The career stage model of Greenhaus et al. (2019) was combined with a similar matrix used by van Niekerk (2007, 2015). This method of organising data as the precursor to analysis was recommended by Hiller (2011) and promotes efficient and trustworthy ordering, analysis, and interpretation.
5. The collected data were processed to optimise relevance and trustworthiness. Data from multiple sources were triangulated to organise it accurately in the Life and Career History section of Table 1. During the organising process, notes were made of any inconsistencies in the data and of any gaps relating to Gobodo's career development and with the developmental tasks associated with each stage of the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model. Care was taken to look not only for confirming, but also for disconfirming evidence, as cautioned by Ponterotto (2014).

**Table 1** Data processing and analysis matrix

|  | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Stage 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Career stage | Occupational and organisational choice | Early career: Establishment and achievement | Middle career | Late career |
| Age (years) | Initially 18–30, then variable | 25–45 | 40–60 | 55 to retirement |
| Developmental tasks | Develop occupational self-image Assess alternative occupations Pursue necessary education Obtain job offers from desired organisation | Learn job Learn organisational rules and norms Fit into chosen occupation and organisation Increase competence Pursue career goals | Reappraise early career and early adulthood Reaffirm or modify career goals Make choices appropriate to middle adult years Remain productive in work | Remain productive in work Maintain self-esteem Prepare for effective retirement financially and mentally |
| Life and career history data | Populated from the data collected | Populated from the data collected | Populated from the data collected | Populated from the data collected |
| Interpretation | Interpretations based on analysis of the data | Interpretations based on analysis of the data | Interpretations based on analysis of the data | Interpretations based on analysis of the data |

Adapted from van Niekerk (2007) as well as van Niekerk et al. (2015)

6. Since Gobodo had agreed to be interviewed, the opportunity to obtain valuable primary data from the subject was taken. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore Gobodo's life and career history and to clarify inconsistencies or gaps that had been found in the data already organised. Gobodo was interviewed via the online Zoom platform for 90 min on 21 October 2021. With her permission, this session was recorded and transcribed. This additional data were integrated into the Life and Career History Data cells of Table 1.

Once the data processing and analysis matrix was populated from the literature review and the interview, the data were coded in terms of the developmental tasks in the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model stages. Two major strategies are employed (a) letting the data set reveal itself and (b) asking the data a question (Alexander, 1988). In this way, further analysis was conducted by deconstructing the data as recommended by Du Plessis (2017) to allow the evidence to prevail.

To monitor possible biases (e.g. countertransference) as a result of the relationship of the researchers with the subject, the data, biographical and career data, and preliminary interpretations were independently reviewed, as suggested by Ponterotto and Moncayo (2018). The interpretation process was then finalised to answer the research questions and the draft psychobiography was written. Finally, Gobodo reviewed this draft to confirm the veracity of the data.

## 5    Findings

The findings of the study of Gobodo's career are presented in terms of Greenhaus et al.'s (2019) career stages and the key developmental tasks for each stage (see Table 1).

### 5.1    Stage 1: Occupational and Organisational Choice

Following on from Gobodo's comment that she had no particular vision for her life in her early teens and that she had discarded the idea of becoming a doctor or working in the natural sciences at around age 17, Gobodo was still "undecided what to do" a year later, so she decided to take a gap year and her father reluctantly agreed, although he did encourage her to seek and follow her passion (Gobodo, 2021, Personal interview; Mutizwa, 2013a). Gobodo felt that this was a critical life and career decision for her. Her father suggested that she work as a bookkeeper in his panel-beating shop while she was "figuring herself out" (Shelembe, 2017). Although Gobodo had not taken Accounting as a subject at school (SABC, 2013) she stated that this exposure to bookkeeping was the first time that she realised that she was "smart and strong" and that she had been "floating around until then".

Whilst working at the panel-beaters, a seminal event took place for Gobodo when she met the now Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu who was the first black person to become a registered CA in South Africa (Ryan, 2013). Nkuhlu's firm were the auditors of the panel-beating shop's books and Gobodo states that "he inspired me in that direction" (Gobodo, 2021, Personal interview; Mutizwa, 2013a). Although the roots of the task of developing the occupational self-image (Greenhaus et al., 2019) can be seen in her earlier years, the initial formation of a compatible occupational self-image as a CA occurred during her exposure to the bookkeeping function during the gap year.

The initial choice of occupation was thus preceded by a period where Gobodo first became surer of occupations she did not wish to pursue. Her search to find her passion, combined with the themes of business, entrepreneurship, and a strong work ethic from her earlier years, found fertile ground during her bookkeeping work at the panel-beating shop and her initial choice of career emerged. With the support of her parents and a highly respected mentor (Manis, 2012), she crystallised her initial occupational choice to be a CA at around 18.

Since the pathway to becoming a CA is well defined, she commenced with the key developmental task of pursuing the necessary education at age 21 at the University of Transkei and completed her 3-year degree in the minimum time (Mutizwa, 2013a). During vacation time, Gobodo worked at Nkuhlu's auditing firm. During her third year the Accounting Department began to look for top accounting students to supplement their lecturing staff and they approached Gobodo, and she agreed to take this up. At 24, armed with a Bachelor of Commerce degree,

she accepted a junior lecturing position at the University. This further served to crystallise her occupational self-image. Although she "enjoyed teaching immensely", Gobodo never envisaged herself remaining in academia. This further crystallised her occupational self-image, as she realised that she did not want an academic career and that she "never let go of the dream" of becoming a CA.

Upon graduation at age 24, Gobodo had a second child and completed her Certificate in the Theory of Accounting (CTA) on a part-time basis, whilst doing articles with Aiken & Carter now KPMG in Mthatha. Here, she was exposed to black CA's and candidates completing their articles. She described the working environment as "inspirational" and considers it to have been a wonderful time to be in Mthatha in a bustling and vibrant little town with successful black businesspeople and academics". She completed the key task of obtaining the educational requirements at age 25. This signalled the beginning of her transition into the early career stage.

## 5.2   Stage 2: Early Career

At age 26, Gobodo secured a position as an articled clerk at KPMG in Mthatha (Shelembe, 2017), Since, as Professor of Accounting Science, Amanda Singleton points out (Singleton, personal communication, April 12, 2022), the articleship to become a CA is "a real job where the articled clerks are evaluated on the development of professional values, attitudes and competencies" and "they would have learnt their technical competencies in academic programmes at university", this may be regarded as the point of transition to Stage 2, the early career.

Gobodo thus took on the developmental task of learning the job and the organisational rules and norms highlighted in the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model. Gobodo took on the difficult challenges she faced by "not waiting for people to open opportunities" for her. In a televised interview with Mutizwa (2013b), she commented that "It was a question of once you get in, are you going to make sure that you get the best opportunities or are you going to allow the system to dictate how far you progress and develop within the organisation". She made sure she took advantage of learning opportunities and recalls that she was "not waiting for people to open opportunities" for her and would "go to the white guys who had the best portfolios and ask to help them and end up taking over their portfolios" (Mutizwa, 2013b).

In this way, Gobodo drove her own learning and career prospects, which corresponds to the developmental tasks of fitting into the chosen occupation and increasing competence. This approach bore fruit as she was promoted to manager preparing her for partnership at KPMG (aged 29) but being in this role for a little over a month left Gobodo feeling bored. "When I was doing articles, I created challenges for myself. Black women were always given small jobs, but I worked my way into bigger jobs, where I could meet bigger challenges and . . . manouever . . .". Gobodo demonstrated that, not only was she able to learn the rules and norms of the

organisation but to use them to her advantage. Weer and Greenhaus (2020) found that the attitudes and behaviours displayed by employees (strong extra-role performance and enhanced work engagement) positively impacted on managers perceptions of employees' affective commitment to their careers and the organisation and Gobodo's career flourished.

When, after having passed the Board Examination to qualify as a CA in 1987, the 27-year-old Gobodo received telephone calls to congratulate her on being the first black South African woman to qualify as a CA, she was surprised (Gobodo, 2021, Personal interview; Ryan, 2013; Zama, 2021). Up until then, she had been unaware that there were no black female CA's in the country (Gobodo, 2021, Personal interview; Ryan, 2013) and she was inundated with accolades and congratulations which propelled her firmly into the global spotlight (SABC, 2013). This caused her to realise that she was a pioneer, breaking new ground and that she was an international role model. During this time, she further refined her occupational self-image by deciding that technical auditing was not for her. Once she had processed this achievement, Gobodo realised that "it is not about me" and that "being first was a burden because if you have to lead first, you have to do it well" (SABC, 2013).

According to Gobodo, she had soon become bored with the auditing function during her articles, but that she could still create excitement and challenges for herself. Once she was appointed to management, however, she found her new role to be boring and operational, with excessive focus on technical aspects. This was a chief reason for her realisation that "I didn't want a partnership anyway, I wanted to have my own practice where I could prove I could establish a business of my own". As she continued formulating and crystallising the goals for her career, the intention of starting her own business in the vibrant local environment of Mthatha began to grow stronger.

On completion of her articleship at age 29, KPMG immediately offered Gobodo a partnership. She felt honoured by the opportunity but declined the offer as she did not see a way forward for her there (Shelembe, 2017). Gobodo moved to Johannesburg and took up an internal auditing position for a major mining company, whilst her husband sought a position to complete his articleship as a lawyer. However, the family returned to Mthatha a few months later.

As there was no longer a path for her to progress within KPMG, she (then aged 29 years) joined the Transkei Development Corporation where she was employed as Manager Internal Audit. It was initially exciting for Gobodo to "rectify shambles found there" but she soon became bored in the role. She was then appointed to the role of Chief Financial Officer (Mutizwa, 2013a), stating that "I was grateful to have gotten out of audit". Realising that she preferred not being too hands-on with the technical auditing and rather being more involved with business leadership.

In 1992, at age 32, the perceived lack of challenges and her rapidly developing vision of starting her own firm compelled Gobodo to resign from the TDC and, wishing to avoid only audit jobs, she started an accounting consulting firm (Mutizwa, 2013b; Shelembe, 2017). Whereas her studies and articleship were minimum requirements to qualify as a CA, this step signalled the advent of Gobodo

actively aligning her passion and pursuing her true career goals. She stated that "it was my vision to have my own firm" and "I wanted to prove that as a black person, I could do it. Even today, my passion is to promote black excellence" (Manis, 2012).

Gobodo knew this was a risky move and the decision was met with apprehension from those close to her and many tried to discourage her (Manis, 2012). At the time, General Holomisa had staged a coup in the Transkei and the military were in control (South African History Online, 2022d) and Gobodo revealed that, "My father was so fearful that I was turning down such a prestigious job". People advised her to take up an academic post as a backup (Shelembe, 2017). Gobodo recalled that "I saw fear in people's eyes, but I realised that this was their fear, not mine". However, Gobodo chose to focus on being an entrepreneur in her new business, believing that "if you want to be an academic be an academic, if you want to run a practice, run a practice" and "give all your energy to that" (SABC, 2013). She believed that one must establish a business, make it successful and then take on other challenges.

Gobodo always knew she would quickly outgrow the small business. This committed focus was apparent as, whilst many opportunities for black accounting firms were opening and prestigious positions on company boards were offered, she turned them down and only took up such positions almost 20 years later. In 1994, at age 34, Gobodo's business had expanded to the point that she had two partners, two offices, and 30 employees.

Following decades of historical barriers imposed by governments of the day, the first democratically elected government of the country had begun putting in place policies to encourage broad-based black economic empowerment and this opened doors for Gobodo Incorporated to do business with the State (SABC, 2013). Gobodo realised that "there were even more opportunities for us, so we had to seize the moment as black accountants and fight for our space" (Shelembe (2017).

Seeking to further expand her business, Gobodo then persuaded her colleagues who were managers in the big four accounting firms in Johannesburg to join her in establishing a medium size black firm. It took some persuading, but Gobodo Incorporated opened its doors in 1996 (Shelembe, 2017). On reflection, Gobodo realised that she was "good at vision and business development but needed a partner who could develop the pipeline of talent, processes and delivery" (Moneyweb, 2016).

The 36-year-old Gobodo and her partners grew the business to a medium size black firm with 10 partners and 200 staff as well as offices in Umtata, Bisho, Durban, and Cape Town (Shelembe, 2017). During this time (between the ages of 37 and 49) she firmly established herself in terms of her identity as a successful entrepreneur and business leader. At this stage, Gobodo had proved her competence and her fledgling business was successful. This could be said to signal the end of Stage 2, her early career.

## 5.3   Stage 3: Mid-Career

Leading up to 2010, with Gobodo approaching 50, her early career and early adulthood goals of becoming a CA and running a successful business had been met. Gobodo herself regarded her progress and beyond her expectations (SABC, 2013). However, she had the drive and vision to achieve yet greater things, and this may have been the advent of her transition into Stage 3, the mid-career.

Whilst Gobodo Incorporated was very successful, she realised that her firm was losing ground in the marketplace as the Big Four firms had become more compliant with the provisions of black economic empowerment legislation and were being assigned the major public sector audit contracts. Gobodo Incorporated was increasingly being regulated to the role of participation by subcontracting to the Big Four. Gobodo believed that "if we didn't respond, we would have fizzled into oblivion". This caused her to take the next steps in the realisation of her continuously developing vision.

In 2010 then aged 50, Gobodo formally initiated merger discussions with suitable partners. In 2011, Gobodo Incorporated merged with accounting firm Sizwe Ntsaluba VSP to form Sizwe Ntsaluba Gobodo (SNG), then the fifth largest (and black-owned) audit and advisory firm in Africa (Ryan, 2013). With 55 partners, more than 1000 staff, and Gobodo as Executive Chairperson, SNG had the critical mass to take on the Big Four for major audit contracts and they were rewarded by being appointed as the sole auditors of Transnet, one of South Africa's largest State-Owned Enterprises (Mutizwa, 2013b; Ryan, 2013; Shelembe, 2017). With this, Gobodo had effectively managed to transform the landscape of the accounting profession in South Africa (Shelembe, 2017).

In the role of Executive Chairperson, Gobodo guided SNG through the merger integration process and the onboarding of major contracts. Success in the complex space of auditing State-Owned Enterprises in a transforming South Africa was not easily achieved. Gobodo found that she had to change her leadership style to one of providing vision and empowering people: "I was good at vision and business development but needed people who could develop the pipeline of talent, processes, and delivery" (Moneyweb, 2016).

According to Moneyweb (2016), Gobodo regarded issues of "leading either from the back or the front irrelevant, as the only style of leadership appropriate to the modern world, and especially among fellow professionals, is a collaborative style" and stated that she was happy to slow down and adopt a more inclusive leadership style. As leader, I had to "grow up" to lead better, build the business, and enable and empower staff to step up to the expectations. She consciously gave very challenging assignments to our managers and was amazed to see how they developed and implemented their ideas in the business. Gobodo stated that "they felt so challenged. . .they came up with innovative ideas and enough for you as a manager to go before EXCO present the project and it is approved and it is implemented you can just imagine those were these sorts of ideas that we came up with besides the normal training courses to bring them up to speed" (Moneyweb, 2016). With her at

the helm, the new entity flourished, in great part due to Gobodo's leadership ability. She had learned to empower her managers and to create a learning organisation and she remained active and productive.

Reflecting on her career, Gobodo stated that "It seemed I was expected to play role model to other aspiring young black females, when all I'd really set out to achieve was personal fulfilment. It is something I have come to cherish, as I came to understand what my accomplishment meant for other women" (Ryan, 2013). In this way, Gobodo successfully led the organisation through the turbulence of a tremendously difficult merger of two organisational cultures and managing the increased profile and workload demanded of the fifth largest audit and advisory services firm in the country. She received national awards for the Most Influential Woman in 2012 and Business Woman Of The Year in 2014 (Moneyweb, 2016). After 4 years in the role, Gobodo stepped down as Chair of SNG in 2014, aged 54 (Ndzamela, 2014).

Harnessing her drive to succeed, entrepreneurial spirit, strong work ethic, and intellectual ability, Gobodo had dealt soundly with the main developmental tasks and navigated her way exceedingly well through the Stages 1, 2, and 3 of her career. This enabled her to realise lifelong personal aspirations and to continuously develop her career.

## 5.4   Stage 4: Late Career

At age 55, Gobodo retired from the organisation she had founded with her partners (Ndzamela (2014). She felt that what she had achieved with SNG was beyond anything she thought was possible and it was time to move on (Moneyweb, 2016). This may be interpreted as her entry into Stage 4, the late career stage. Her formal retirement from SNG only meant that Gobodo had time to pursue other interests, using her charismatic (yet humble) style, credibility, and experience. At age 56, she established Nkululeko Leadership Consulting with several partners in 2016 with the mission of nurturing the development of female and black leaders across the board and not only in the accounting profession, in which black females remain underrepresented at 16% of registered CA's (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2021). She accepted roles on the boards of various major organisations.

At age 60, Gobodo started a new organisation called Awakened, campaigning against racism and prejudice against women, which she is passionate about. She added "I didn't stop dreaming. I have always been passionate about leadership because I see how important it is. That is why I decided to pursue a different path altogether".

In this way, Gobodo is able to remain productive in work and to maintain (even enhance) self-esteem. Although she is conscious of the passage of time, and is prepared financially for retirement in 2022, Gobodo has no plans to retire fully.

## 6   Discussion

The development of Gobodo's illustrious career corresponds closely with the career stages described in the Greenhaus et al. (2019) model. She entered Stage 1 at around 17 (the typical age range is 18–30) and began her transition to Stage 2 (the typical age range is 25–45) at around 26 which is aligned with the theory. She progressed to Stage 3 (typical age range is 40–60) at around age 50 and into Stage 4 (typical age range is 55 to retirement) at around 55, where she continues her career and has, as yet no intention of retiring.

Although Gobodo's transition between succeeding stages is presented as having occurred at specific ages, this is done for the purpose of interpretation against the career stage model. Since the transition between stages may take place over several years and not be neatly defined in terms of one specific age (), the age estimates are based on where the data revealed that the main developmental tasks in each stage had been addressed and those in the next stage were at hand.

This is not to say that Gobodo had her entire career planned out early on, but that she contemplated each of the developmental tasks in each career stage, made sound decisions, and took the necessary actions. This is in accordance with Greenhaus et al.'s (2019) description of a career as being a journey of continual exploration and discovery, each decision building those previously made. Decisions relating to the key developmental tasks were made thoughtfully with a keen awareness of her own vision and goals and the opportunities for her to realise these. The planful nature of her approach to her career development is clear. She made use of a series short-term strategies to facilitate her long-term goals.

Greenhaus et al. (2019, p.) commented on the need to approach career decisions with both head and heart and Gobodo did so. She did so in forming her occupational self-image and in deciding when it was time to make a career move to align her passion and her career. Themes from her formative years, such as entrepreneurship, a pioneering spirit, the pursuit of excellence, and professional and career development of women in the workplace were evident throughout her career journey.

Gobodo was able to develop from technical, to managerial, to entrepreneurial and corporate business leadership roles and to adjust adeptly to the needs of the organisations she worked in. Greenhaus et al. (2019) discussed the work of Hall, who described a protean career as directed by the individuals themselves, primarily based on their personal values, rather than by an organisation or organisational culture. Gobodo was true to herself when she to take a gap year to clarify her personal and career goals rather than rush into an occupation. She made the decisions not to enter the medical profession or to take up the offer of a job in academia. Once she had decided to become a CA, she pursued this youthful vision relentlessly and effectively. On becoming a CA and obtaining a prestigious and lucrative offer of a partnership at KPMG, Gobodo turned it down to pursue her own career goals and later, she initiated the partnerships and mergers that propelled her to the point where she could state "I exceeded my wildest expectations".

In summary, the Gobodo psychobiography highlights how she piloted her career through the various stages and managed the key developmental tasks in each stage of her pioneering journey. Examination of her life and biographical data revealed strong alignment between Gobodo's career stages, and the broad, approximate age ranges presented by Greenhaus et al. (2019), the typical developmental tasks associated with each stage and the reoccurrence of some tasks in other stages.

## 7    Conclusion

The life and career of Nonkululeko Gobodo were explored and described to examine the development of her career. When this set of biographical data was examined and selected for interpretation, it revealed that Gobodo's career has progressed in close correspondence with the four career stages presented by Greenhaus et al. (2019). The key developmental tasks associated with each career stage have been completed successfully over the course of her ongoing pioneering career.

The psychobiographical study of Gobodo's life and career may serve as a catalyst for the development of excellent careers and be as a guiding beacon for those who are tussling with their own key developmental tasks. Given the situation where vast arrays of influencers on any subject can attain a global presence, there should be an increased awareness of the personal narratives and life stories of outstanding individuals, especially in the context of overcoming exclusion, racial and gender discrimination, and the prejudices. As Bulut and Cissy Usman (2021) comment, such awareness deepens the understanding of human behaviours and experiences.

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**Grant Freedman**   is an Industrial and Organisational Psychologist with a doctoral degree from the University of South Africa. He is an Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and the Head of the Unit for Positive Organisations at Nelson Mandela University. Building on three decades of corporate management and consulting experience, his research interests include the convergence of research and practice in the areas of leadership development, talent management, and organisational development and change.

**Roelf van Niekerk**   (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

# The Career Development of Albertina Sisulu

**Roelf van Niekerk and Grant Freedman**

**Abstract**  Albertina Sisulu (1918–2011) was a South African anti-apartheid activist and spouse of Walter Sisulu who spent 25 years in custody alongside Nelson Mandela. While Walter was on Robben Island, Sisulu was the breadwinner of the family, worked as a nurse, raised their five children as well as three foster children, did community work, and became a prominent political figure. Albertina's career was extraordinary in more than one way. The security forces used repressive legislation to inhibit the activities of the liberation movements. Consequently, Sisulu's career has been influenced by harassment, police raids, solitary confinement, banning orders, imprisonment, and suffering. The aim of the study was to interpret the career development of Albertina Sisulu within the prevailing socio-historical and political context. The study employed a psychobiographical single-case study design. Sisulu was selected as subject via purposive sampling. She was considered an appropriate psychobiographical subject because she was one of the most influential South Africans of the twentieth century. The data collection and analysis focused on publicly available primary and secondary data relating to Sisulu's career development. The data processing followed guidelines suggested by prominent psychobiographical researchers and methodologists. The theoretical model of Jeffrey Greenhaus, Gerard Callanan and Veronica Godshalk was used as a template for collecting, processing, and analysing biographical data that described Sisulu's career development. The study contributes to a number of areas, namely, the legacy of Albertina Sisulu, the career development of extraordinary individuals representing non-WEIRD contexts, and the use of career development theory in psychobiographical research.

R. van Niekerk (✉) · G. Freedman
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University,
Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa
e-mail:
roelf.vanniekerk@mandela.ac.za; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roelf_Van_Niekerk;
grant.freedman@mandela.ac.za

# 1 Introduction

The anti-apartheid freedom struggle in South Africa lasted more than 80 years and produced leaders who demonstrated extraordinary courage and commitment (Russell, 1989). With their followers they succeeded in replacing the minority government with a non-racial democracy in the 1990s. Several female activists played a prominent role in the struggle. They resisted the apartheid government, against enormous odds, for many years. One such leader was Albertina Nontsikelelo[1] Sisulu (née Thethiwe, 1918–2011).

Albertina was a nursing practitioner, anti-apartheid activist, and spouse of Walter Sisulu (1912–2003) who spent 25 years in prison with Nelson Mandela. Although born into a poor family, Albertina became one of the most influential South African leaders of the twentieth century (South African Government, 2018; Walker, 1991). Due to her exceptional leadership and the admiration she earned from her compatriots, she is deemed by many to be the *Mother of the Nation* (Earl, 2011). The Sisulu family's involvement in the struggle stretched over approximately 50 years (1944–1994). One of her daughters, Lindiwe, still serves as Minister of Tourism in the South African Parliament.

Ponterotto and Park-Taylor (2021a) coined the term *careerography*. Careerography adapts psychobiographical research to the field of career psychology. It refers to psychobiographical research that focuses on the "lives of historically significant individuals throughout history through the lens of established theories of career development" (p. 3). According to Ponterotto and Park-Taylor (2021b) careerographies "can serve to elucidate the complex interaction of life experiences, specific life events, and historical and cultural context that shape career development" (p. 10). Careerographies also contribute to the advancement of the historical records of individuals under study as well as the particular theories employed to interpret their life histories.

The aim of this chapter is to describe and interpret Sisulu's life in the context of the career development framework of Jeffrey Greenhaus (Greenhaus et al., 2019). The study forms part of a larger psychobiographical project focusing on the career development of extraordinary, historically significant individuals (e.g. Mayer, 2019; Mayer et al., 2021; Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2021a; van Niekerk et al., 2015; van Niekerk & Fouché, 2010, 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

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[1] Nontsikelelo means "blessing".

## 2 The Life of Albertina Sisulu (1918–2011): A Brief Overview

Nontsikelelo Thethiwe was born in 1918 in a remote rural setting. Her childhood was characterised by poverty and the ill-health of her parents and grandparents. Her mother's poor health made it difficult for her to take care of her family. Her father was a migrant mine worker who spent little time at home. To survive, the family moved in with Nontsikelelo's maternal grandparents. When Nontsikelelo started her primary school career she was given a list of Christian names to choose from. She chose the name Albertina.

Albertina's father died in 1929 when she was 11 years old (Sisulu, 2003). The health problems of Albertina's mother deteriorated simultaneously. Albertina subsequently missed 2 years of schooling because she was required to take over her mother's duties and care for her younger siblings (Magona & Sisulu, 2018). She later returned to school and completed her primary school career. The family could not afford sending Albertina to secondary school. However, Albertina entered a competition in which she won a Roman Catholic scholarship to attend a boarding school (Russell, 1989). The scholarship enabled her to complete her school career. She then moved to Johannesburg to qualify as a nursing practitioner and midwife.

She met Walter in 1941 and they married in 1944. Albertina immediately joined Walter in the anti-apartheid resistance movement. Walter was elected as the secretary-general of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1947. His political activities lead to regular conflict between him and the security forces. Between 1949 and 1963, he was imprisoned eight times, banned,[2] placed under house arrest, tried twice for treason, and finally incarcerated for life with Nelson Mandela and six other ANC leaders in 1964 (Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu, n.d.-a). Meanwhile, Albertina was the family's breadwinner.

Albertina joined the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) in 1948 and helped establish the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in 1954. She played a leading role in the Mass Boycott of the Bantu Education System in 1955 as well as the Women's March[3] a year later (Russell, 1989). She also offered support during the prolonged court proceedings many activists were involved in. She played an important role in establishing an underground political community by serving as a link between prisoners and community members (Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu, n.d.-b). In addition to her political activities, Albertina cared for an extended family

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[2]Banning was a repressive and extrajudicial measure used by the South African apartheid regime against its political opponents. Banned individuals were not allowed to attend meetings, contact other banned persons, engage in any political activity, speak in public, publish written material, or travel outside a magisterial district. Furthermore, the press was prohibited from broadcasting or publishing their words.

They had to report weekly to a police station.

[3]This march was organised by the FSAW and involved 20,000 women who walked to the government buildings to protest against pass laws.

comprising five children and three foster children (Shelembe, 2018). The environ-
ment in which she raised her children was challenging and the Sisulu family counts
among the families who suffered most under security force brutality (Earl, 2011).

Albertina held several formal leadership positions throughout her career and her
involvement in the political struggle came with high personal cost (Shelembe, 2018).
She had to cope with long periods of separation from loved ones, harassment, police
raids, dehumanisation, solitary confinement, banning orders, and imprisonment
(Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu, n.d.-a; Bearak, 2011; Matsebe, 2018). Despite
these experiences Albertina continued with both her nursing and political activist
careers. Her children also faced harassment. At one stage Albertina, one of her
children, a foster child, a grandchild as well as Walter were all in prison at the same
time, while two of her children were in exile (Villa-Vicencio, 1996).

When the Nationalist government embarked on a range of political reforms in
1989, the harassment ended and the lives of Albertina and her family eventually
normalised (Magona & Sisulu, 2018). The Sisulu children returned from exile,
Walter was released from prison, and Albertina received a passport to travel inter-
nationally. Although Walter retired from politics after his release, the 72-year-old
Albertina remained active and held several senior leadership positions. However, the
couple also set time aside for international travels and holidays. Regrettably, these
well-deserved leisure opportunities proved to be short-lived. In 1996, 2 years after
the couple's 50th wedding anniversary and 7 years after his release from prison, the
84-year-old Walter was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. He died in 2003 at the
age of 90 years. Albertina died in 2011, aged 92 years. They were married for almost
60 years of which they spent less than half the years together. They were survived by
five children, 26 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren (Magona & Sisulu, 2018).

## 3   Career Development

Work is an important part of life, fulfils both personal and social needs, and
contributes to the meaning individuals experience and the identities they construct
(Blustein, 2006; Doherty, 2009; Faheem, 2017; Lent & Brown, 2013; Mayer, 2019;
Super et al., 1996). While work usually refers to general effort and activities, the
term career refers to a series of related employment in a field. Greenhaus et al. (2019)
defined career as "the pattern of workrelated experiences that span the course of a
person's life" (p. 10) and career development as a "process by which individuals
develop, implement, and monitor career goals and strategies" (p. 12). Several
theorists (e.g. Schein, 1978; Super, 1980) viewed career development as a lifelong
process comprising predictable developmental stages, each with its own character-
istic developmental tasks.

Greenhaus et al. (2019) also proposed a stage-based career development model.
They viewed career development against the background of work, family, and self-
development dynamics and identified four stages (i.e. occupational and
organisational choice, early, middle, and late career) each with their characteristic

tasks and proximate age periods (these will be described in more detail in the Findings and Discussion section). Greenhaus et al. (2019) acknowledged that the progression through career stages is not always orderly, but influenced by several factors (e.g. business, cultural, demographic, economic, gender, and global dynamics). They added that career stages tend to reoccur periodically over the course of a career.

Career development theories are useful because they represent comprehensive frameworks that structure career knowledge as well as guide investigations and interventions in a coherent manner (Faheem, 2017). However, stage-based career development theories also receive considerable criticism. The criticism typically focuses on the limited evidence supporting theoretical propositions, the influence of contextual factors on career development; the relevance of traditional careers; uneven access to occupational opportunities; the culture-fairness of career development theories; and the universality of career stages (Faheem, 2017; Hobololo, 2020; McIlveen & Patton, 2006; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017).

## 4   Methodology

This study had two aims: (a) to explore, describe, and interpret Albertina's career development and (b) to conduct an informal assessment of the applicability and relevance of Greenhaus et al.'s (2019) theoretical framework to Albertina's life and career. According to Ponterotto and Park-Taylor (2021b), career theory can contribute much to the study of exceptional personalities while psychobiography can advance research and theory development in career psychology through intensive longitudinal case studies.

**Research Design** The investigation employed a single-case study design (Ponterotto, 2014) that is characterised by its longitudinal, qualitative, and morphogenic (i.e. an emphasis on individual characteristics within the prevailing social, historical, and political context) features. The design allowed for a description and interpretation of Albertina's career development according to the chosen theoretical framework. Psychobiographers focus on development or contributions across the lifespan or within specific lifespan segments. Therefore, psychobiographical research lends itself to the longitudinal investigation of the career development of individuals (Mayer, 2019; van Niekerk et al., 2015).

**Sampling and Participant** Psychobiographical research typically focuses on the lives of extraordinary individuals. Albertina was chosen purposively as the subject due to the prominent role she played during the anti-apartheid struggle (Sisulu, 2003) and the way she coped with persecution, imprisonment, and hardship. Following her death the spokesperson for the ANC government described Albertina as "a mother figure to all activists" whose leadership combined political and parental roles and inspired a generation of leaders (Albertina Sisulu: Tributes and condolences, 2011).

**Table 1** Data sources related to the life of Albertina Sisulu

| Primary sources | Secondary sources |
|---|---|
| Sisulu (2003) | Albertina Sisulu: Tributes and condolences (2011) |
| Magona and Sisulu (2018) | Bearak (2011) |
| Villa-Vicencio (1996) | Downing and Hastings-Tolsma (2016) |
| | Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu (n.d.-a) |
| | SAHO (2020) |
| | Sisulu (2003) |
| | South African Government (2018) |

**Table 2** Data processing and analysis matrix

| | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Stage 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Occupational and organisational choice | Early career | Midcareer | Late career |
| Age (years) | 18–30 | 25–45 | 40–60 | 55–retirement |
| Developmental tasks | Develop occupational self-image Assess alternative occupations Develop initial occupational choice Pursue necessary education Obtain job offer(s) from desired organisation(s) | Learn job Learn organisational rules and norms Fit into chosen occupation and organisation Increase competence Pursue career goals | Reappraise early career and early adulthood Reaffirm or modify career goals Make choices appropriate to middle adult years Remain productive in work | Remain productive in work Maintain self-esteem Prepare for effective retirement, both financially and mentally |
| Biographical and autobiographical data[a] | | | | |

[a]This row is reserved for the life history data related to each of the four stages

**Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis** Primary (autobiographical) and secondary (biographical) data that are publicly accessible were collected for this study (See Table 1).

The data processing followed the guidelines proposed by several psychobiographical researchers (e.g. Alexander, 1988; Anderson, 1981; Ponterotto, 2014) and methodologists (e.g. Miles et al., 2013; Yin, 2018). The theoretical framework of Greenhaus et al. (2019) was used as a template for collecting, processing, and interpreting data that described Albertina's career development. A data analysis matrix was employed to process and interpret data in terms of the relevant theoretical constructs (see Table 2).

**Research Procedure** The study followed a procedure developed by Du Plessis's (2017), namely, to (1) select the subject, (2) identify primary and secondary sources,

(3) identify contextual data, (4) select an appropriate psychological theory, (5) allow the data to reveal itself, (6) ask the data questions, (7) code the data, (8) select formats of display, (9) integrate coding and display, (10) write the psychobiography, (11) revise the psychobiography, and (12) evaluate the research process.

**Ethical Considerations** *Psychobiographical research i*s by nature an intrusive process (American Psychiatric Association, 1976; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). During this study, four steps were implemented to safeguard ethical standards. Firstly, the researchers approached the data with objectivity, empathy, and respect. Secondly, they took care to avoid causing any distress or harm to Albertina's relatives and associates. Thirdly, the researchers only collected published data that are available in the public domain. Lastly, the researchers interpreted the data in a transparent manner.

**Trustworthiness Considerations** Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness was employed to ensure methodological rigour. This model includes four criteria: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (construct validity). Several strategies were employed to meet these criteria. The following strategies were employed to improve trustworthiness: prolonged engagement with data sources, triangulation of sources and data, use of published sources of data, comprehensive documentation of procedures, and the maintenance of a research audit trail.

# 5   A Brief History of South Africa: 1900–2000

This section gives an abbreviated account of the turbulent political history of South Africa in the twentieth century. At the beginning of the century, South Africans had to rebuild the country following the devastation of the South African War or Anglo–Boer War. This war (1899–1902) was a conflict fought between the British Empire and two independent Boer[4] Republics. The war claimed more than 70,000 lives while 40 towns and 30,000 farmhouses were destroyed (BBC News, 2010). South Africa remained a British colony until 1910 when it became a self-governing territory within the British Commonwealth, known as the Union of South Africa.

The Union was essentially viewed as "a white man's land" (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007, p. 250) where formal segregation existed between 1910 and 1930 and African people were regarded as second-class citizens. Most lived in tribal reserves and they were not allowed to vote. In 1912, they founded the South African National

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[4]The term Boer refers to South Africans of Dutch, German, or Huguenot descent, especially the early settlers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Today, descendants of the Boers are commonly referred to as Afrikaners.

Congress (ANC) to protest their exclusion. These developments led to tension and racial conflict that would characterise South Africa's twentieth century history.

In 1943, a determined group of leaders emerged with the launch of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Walter Sisulu (Magona & Sisulu, 2018). In 1948, the National Party came to power in South Africa. Although Whites and blacks were already segregated, the party introduced a policy of apartheid (separateness). This policy was enforced between 1948 and 1994. Apartheid rested on several bases. The most important were the restriction of power to whites, racial classification, group areas for each racial community, segregated schools and universities, the elimination of integrated public facilities and sport, protection for whites in the labour market, and a system of influx control (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007, p. 314).

The Apartheid policies and legislation were more rigorous than the previous segregationist policies. While the National Party increased its control, African opposition politics intensified. Gradually the resistance against the government intensified, mostly in the form of non-violent mass action (Russell, 1989). The government responded by banning many organisations. The situation threatened to get out of hand following the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960 when 69 demonstrators were killed. A year later, the government decided to leave the Commonwealth and establish a republic. Furthermore, the government proceeded to divide the African population into ethnic nations, each with its own homeland and to forcefully remove black people from certain areas.

The African people rejected these strategies and called for protests and strikes. Later most organisations abandoned non-violent resistance and turned to armed struggle. In turn, the security forces arrested most of the prominent leaders. Leaders who managed to avoid arrest went into exile. The government gained the upper hand when the security forces arrested a group of prominent leaders, including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, and charged them with treason in the so-called Rivonia-trial. The Rivonia-trial brought about a quiet period lasting approximately 13 years.

In 1976, resistance flared up during the Soweto *Youth Uprising*. This marked the beginning of sustained resistance against the Apartheid government. At the same time, the international world reacted by imposing economic sanctions. Mass resistance increasingly challenged the apartheid State, which resorted to intensified repression. Business and academic leaders as well as students also started to argue in favour of a more inclusive society. Some met with the banned ANC (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). In the late 1980s, the government recognised that Apartheid cannot be sustained. The declining economy, increasing internal resistance and international pressure inevitably forced the government to embark on a series of reforms and ultimately led to the fall of Apartheid. The first democratic, multi-racial elections were held in April 1994 and a month later Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa.

## 6 Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion section is structured according to the career development stages of Greenhaus et al. (2019).

### 6.1 Occupational and Organisational Choice (1936–1943)

According to Greenhaus et al. (2019) this stage requires that individuals complete six career tasks: (a) refine an occupational self-image, (b) explore alternative occupations, (c) develop a tentative occupational choice, (d) pursue the education or training required to implement the choice, (e) obtain job offers from organisations, and (f) choose an organisation that will satisfy their career aspirations.

Although Albertina considered joining the religious order of the boarding school she attended, she decided to become a nursing practitioner instead. The nursing training required her to move to Johannesburg, approximately 900 km from home. This happened in 1939 when Albertina was 20 years old. Two years into this training programme, Albertina's mother died. Also in 1941, Albertina met her future husband, Walter Sisulu.

The biographical data indicates that Albertina completed this career stage in 1943 when she was 25 years old with the completion of her nursing training and her appointment at the Johannesburg General Hospital. Compared to the typical age range proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2019), Albertina's occupational and organisational choice stage started 2 years later, but ended earlier when she accepted the job offer.

### 6.2 Early Career (1943–1963)

This career stage encompasses two periods, namely, finding a position in the world of work and striving to be successful in this position. The major tasks of this stage are to (a) master the technical requirements of the job, (b) acquire organisational norms and values, (c) fit into the chosen occupation and organisation, (d) increase competence and be accepted as a valued employee, and to (e) pursue career goals.

Albertina and Walter married in 1944. Due to Walter's role as organiser for the African National Congress (ANC), Albertina immediately became involved. In the process, she established a second career path, namely, that of community or political activist. The newly-wed couple started a family immediately. During Albertina's early career stage, they had five children: Max (1945), Mlungisi (1948), Zwelakhe (1950), Lindiwe (1954), and Nonkululeko (1957).

It soon became clear that Walter's political work would take precedence over family matters. In 1947, he was elected as secretary-general of the ANC. The couple

decided that Walter would devote himself to political work while Albertina would become the sole breadwinner. This arrangement did not prevent Albertina from active involvement in the political arena. She joined the ANC Women's League at its formation in 1948. This was also the year when the National Party came into power following a Whites only election. Six years later in 1954, Albertina was a founding member and elected to the National Executive of the non-racial, non-party Federation of South African Women (FSAW). In the same year, she qualified as a midwife and accepted a position in the Johannesburg Health Department. A year later she attended the launch of the Congress of the People, a non-racial movement that played an important role in the formulation of the Freedom Charter. At the same time she participated in the protest against the Bantu Education Act. As part of this protest, Albertina withdrew her children from their government schools and initiated a home school alternative. In 1956, Albertina was one of the organisers of the Women's March.[5]

It became clear during Albertina's early career stage that while she established her remunerated career as a nursing practitioner and acquired an additional qualification, she made more progress in terms of increasing competence and being accepted as a competent contributor in her non-remunerated career as a political leader. Another characteristic of Albertina's early career stage is how the Sisulu family was harassed by the South African Security Police. Between 1949 and 1963, Walter was imprisoned eight times, banned, placed under house arrest, tried twice for treason, and finally incarcerated for life with Nelson Mandela and six other ANC leaders in 1964. In 1962, Walter earned the reputation of being the most arrested South African political leader (Sisulu, 2003, p. 218). This harassment did not detract Albertina from sustaining a dual career as nursing practitioner and political leader.

The typical age range and description of the stage proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2019) are aligned with Albertina's experiences. Albertina's early career started when she was 25 years old and coincided with her appointment at the Johannesburg General Hospital, marriage, and start of her political career. Albertina completed the early career stage when she was 45 years old and in the year before Walter had been incarcerated for life.

### 6.3   Midcareer (1963–1973)

A number of tasks and concerns characterise the midcareer years. They emerge when individuals begin to reassess the lifestyle that dominated their early careers. This stage is characterised by four tasks, namely, (a) a reappraisal of the lifestyle and career established during the earlier adult years; (b) reaffirmation or, if necessary, a

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[5]Approximately 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings—the official seat of the South African Government—to protest against legislation aimed at tightening the government's control over the movement of Africans in urban areas by forcing them to carry passes.

modification of career goals; (c) consideration and implementation of new career choices; and (d) sustaining productivity.

Albertina's profile as a political activist and leader gathered momentum during her midcareer. In 1958, she and approximately 1000 women protested against the government's forced removal of black residents. She also served her first prison sentence for participating in this protest. Although Albertina's youngest child, Nonkululeko, was merely 1-year-old, she was refused bail. As a sole breadwinner and mother of five children (in 1963, ranging between 6 and 18 years old), Albertina struggled to make ends meet on her income. She therefore supplemented her income with sewing and knitting chores. Furthermore, in the early 1960s, Albertina decided to send her four oldest children to school in Swaziland.

The year 1963 was a particularly difficult year for the Sisulu's. Albertina was the first woman to be arrested under the General Laws Amendment Act.[6] During solitary confinement the security police insulted and provoked her in an attempt to gain information on Walter's whereabouts. While Albertina served this sentence, her 17-year-old son, Max, became the youngest person to be detained under the same act. Walter went underground to avoid the security forces. However, he was arrested later the year along with other prominent ANC leaders.[7] They received life sentences in 1964 and had subsequently been imprisoned on Robben Island.

The harassment by the security forces and Walter's life sentence probably acted as a stimulus for Albertina to reappraise the career she established earlier. Although Albertina received the first of six 5-year banning orders in 1964,[8] there are no indications that she intended modifying her career goals. Instead, she sustained her active political career by secretly re-establishing underground networks and acting as an intermediary between the internal and external liberation movements after the imprisonment of her husband and several other leaders. In this capacity, she kept the struggle alive and served as a reminder of the cause of those who were imprisoned (Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu, n.d.-b). In 1967, she also organised FSAW participation at the funeral of another prominent activist, Albert Luthuli.[9] After the first banning order expired, another was immediately imposed in 1969.

Compared to the typical age range proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2019), there is general alignment between Albertina's experiences during the middle career stage and the description of the stage by Greenhaus et al. (2019). Albertina's middle career lasted for 10 years between 1963 and 1973.

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[6]This notorious law ("90-day detention law") allowed those accused of anti-government action to be held for 90 days without charges. In 1963, Albertina was the first woman to be arrested under this law.

[7]The security forces arrested the leaders during a raid on the farm, Lilliesleaf, in the Johannesburg suburb, Rivonia. These leaders were later referred to as the *Rivonia trialists.*

[8]During her career, Albertina had been banned for a total of 17 years.

[9]Luthuli (1898–1967) was a South African teacher, lay preacher, activist, and president of the ANC between 1952 and 1967. He was the first African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize which he received in 1960 for his role in the non-violent struggle against apartheid.

## 6.4 Late Career (1973–1996)

According to Greenhaus et al. (2019), two tasks dominate the late career stage. Firstly, individuals must continue to be productive contributors to their organisations and maintain their sense of self-worth and dignity. However, the maintenance of productivity and self-esteem is often hindered by changes within individuals and by society's bias against older people. Secondly, individuals must also anticipate and prepare for retirement (financially and mentally) to ensure partial or full disengagement from work and a meaningful and satisfying retirement.

Albertina's late career spanned approximately 23 years. This stage was characterised by political activity and leadership, monitoring and increased harassment by the security police, imprisonment and banning orders, meetings with international political leaders, Walter's release from prison and the reunification of her family, as well as her appointment as a member of parliament.

The Sisulu's suffered at the hands of the Security Police in the 1970s and 1980s. During these two decades, South Africa experienced intense social and political turmoil. Several events contributed to this instability. For example, in 1974, the Department of Bantu Education decided that 50% of secondary school subjects should be taught in English and 50% in Afrikaans. This decision was met with resistance (especially against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction) and lead to the *Soweto Youth Uprising* in June 1976. Apart from this educational trigger, police brutality elicited strong protest action. A prominent leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, Steve Biko, died in police custody in 1977. Furthermore, an Umkhonto weSizwe soldier, Solomon Mahlangu, was executed in 1979 for his role in the commemoration of the Soweto Youth Uprising. In the 1980s, political unrest, worker stayaways, and student boycotts gained further momentum. The Nationalist government responded by restricting organisations in terms of State of Emergency regulations. At the same time, the international anti-Apartheid lobbying and diplomatic isolation of South Africa intensified. The range of financial and diplomatic challenges compounded the existing internal problems.

During the first part of this career stage, Albertina and her family experienced several serious setbacks. She received three 5-year banning orders (1974, 1979, and 1982). Furthermore, her children suffered as the onslaught by the security forces against them increased. Lindiwe was arrested in 1976 and detained, tortured, and held in solitary confinement for 11 months.[10] Max, who had been in exile since 1964 was badly injured when he and a friend opened a parcel bomb. In 1980, Zwelakhe was arrested for his involvement in the Free Mandela Campaign, detained for 8 months, and then received banning orders. He was again arrested and detained from 1986 until 1988. Mlungisi was arrested in 1984 and imprisoned for 5 years (in the same prison where Walter was held).

The 70-year-old Walter's health deteriorated suddenly in 1982 and he had to undergo a kidney operation. Albertina visited him in prison after the operation.

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[10]Following her release, Lindiwe went into exile.

Normally, no physical contact was allowed between political prisoners and their family members. However, a sympathetic warder allowed Albertina into the room where Walter was recovering and the couple was able to embrace for the first time in 18 years.

In 1983, Albertina played a leading role in the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF)[11] and was subsequently elected as one of its co-presidents. This focused the attention of the security forces on her and led to her arrest and detention in solitary confinement. Although she had been sentenced to 4 years in prison, she was soon released due to international pressure. Albertina also met Doctor Abu Baker Asvat in 1983 and worked in his surgery until his assassination in 1989. Although there were radical differences in their political beliefs, Albertina and Doctor Asvat collaborated to relieve medical and poverty-related social problems. Albertina was arrested again in 1985, charged with treason, and sentenced to 4 years in prison. She was released in 1986 after serving 2 years of the sentence. In 1989, at the age of 71 years, Albertina received her last restriction orders. These restrictions were lifted after 3 months when the government began considering political reforms.

Later in 1989, the political tide changed dramatically in South Africa and this had a dramatic effect on the Sisulu family. Following the election of a new Nationalist president, FW de Klerk, the government implemented a range of reforms and paved the way for a new democratically-elected government. The reforms made it possible for Albertina to receive a passport and lead a UDF delegation to Europe and the United States in 1989. This delegation met with political leaders from the United States (George Bush and Jimmy Carter) and encouraged them to impose stricter sanctions against the apartheid government. During the same mission, Albertina saw her daughter Lindiwe for the first time in 12 years. She was also reunited with two of her sons, Max and Zwelakhe, in Lusaka. Both went into exile as teenagers and this was the first time Albertina met their families. Walter has now spent 26 years in prison. Upon her return to South Africa, Albertina visited him. Four days later, on 14 October 1989, Walter was released. This made it possible for Albertina and Walter and their family to spend Christmas together.

Although Walter retired from politics after his release, the 72-year-old Albertina remained active and held several senior leadership positions. The ANC Women's League elected Albertina as deputy president in 1990. A year later she was elected to the National Executive of the ANC and in 1993 she was elected as the president of the World Peace Council. South Africa hosted the World Peace Council in 1995 and this event brought the curtain down on Albertina's late career stage.

From 1990, Walter and Albertina set time aside for international travels and holidays. Regrettably, these well-deserved leisure opportunities proved to be short-lived. In 1996, 2 years after the couple's 50th wedding anniversary and 7 years after his release from prison, the 84-year-old Walter was diagnosed with Parkinson's

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[11] A non-racial, anti-apartheid coalition of about 400 civic, church, students', workers', and other organisations.

Disease. This motivated Albertina to retire from her active political career. Walter died in 2003 at the age of 90 years. Albertina died in 2011, aged 92 years. They were married for almost 60 years of which they spent less than half the years together. They were survived by five children, 26 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren (Sisulu, 2003).

Compared to the typical age range proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2019), there is limited alignment between Albertina's experiences during the late career stage and the description of the stage by Greenhaus et al. (2019). Albertina's late career lasted for more than 20 years between 1973 and 1995. The late career ended with Walter's diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease and Albertina's active retirement from politics.

## 7    Conclusion

This study indicates that Albertina's career development partly matches the model proposed by Greenhaus et al. (2019). She had a shorter than usual occupational and organisational choice stage and an extended late career stage. Albertina died at age 92 years and her productivity remained exceptionally high, despite many challenges, up to the age of 78 years. Albertina's career illustrated how extraordinary careers are shaped by distress in the form of the brutality of security forces; enduring oppression, painful separation, persecution, and imprisonment. The study contributes to a number of areas, namely, the legacy of Albertina Sisulu, the career development of extraordinary individuals representing non-WEIRD contexts, and the use of career development theory in psychobiographical research.

Remarkably Albertina demonstrated, during a political career spanning more than five decades, adherence to the principles of human equality and dignity, non-racialism, as well as selfless and courageous commitment to the liberation struggle (Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu, n.d.-b). She devoted her life to the liberation of Black South Africans and resisted being tempted by personal enrichment or self-interest. Ultimately, her life represents an important historical record of one of the great struggles for freedom of the twentieth century in which she played a leading role. This study reminds psychobiographers of their duty to investigate the forgotten life histories of individuals who sacrificed much during liberation struggles.

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**Roelf van Niekerk**   (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of

personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

**Grant Freedman** is an Industrial and Organisational Psychologist with a doctoral degree from the University of South Africa. He is an Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and the Head of the Unit for Positive Organisations at Nelson Mandela University. Building on three decades of corporate management and consulting experience, his research interests include the convergence of research and practice in the areas of leadership development, talent management, and organisational development and change.

# Zenzile Miriam Makeba:
# A Psychobiography of "*Mama Africa*" from an Integrated African Psychology Perspective

**Paul J. P. Fouché, Wilhelmien Labuscagne, and Pravani Naidoo**

**Abstract**  Psychobiographical research tends to explore the lives of WEIRD individuals. Psychobiography thus seldom focusses on indigenous and transcultural approaches. African psychology emerged as a protest psychology, refuting the claims of European and American approaches to understanding the lives of African people. Due to the absence of a single, formal African theory, an integrated African approach was used in this psychobiography, relying on the work of various African theorists, which share multiple characteristics and can be integrated into a single, holistic theory. Within this Integrated African Psychology Perspective (IAPP), personality is understood through three main constructs, namely: (a) human nature; (b) cognitive functioning and the concept of time, and (c) optimal development and mental health. This study reconstructed the life of Zenzile Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), an inspirational South African female artist, renowned for her singing career and anti-apartheid activism, utilising the IAPP. Makeba was selected via non-probability purposive sampling. Publicly available primary and secondary resources were utilised and data extraction was guided by Alexander's indicators of salience. Findings demonstrate the relevance of the IAPP in reconstructing Makeba's personality development. The micro-cosmos played an important role in the life of Makeba who was raised in a household with an emphasis on togetherness or collectivism. Makeba was dubbed "*Mama Africa*" and became an international symbol of hope, peace, and empathy due to her involvement in humanitarianism. These characteristics align closely with the concept of *Ubuntu* which implies having compassion, care, empathy, and respect for others.

**Keywords**  Psychobiography · Miriam Makeba · Integrated African Psychological Perspective (IAPP) · Micro-cosmos · Ubuntu

P. J. P. Fouché (✉) · W. Labuscagne · P. Naidoo
Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa
e-mail: fouchejp@ufs.ac.za; naidoop@ufs.ac.za

# 1   Introduction

This study adopted an Afrocentric psychobiographical approach to reconstruct the life of Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), a political activist and African singer who was known to the world as *Mama Africa* (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Psychobiography involves the reconstruction of prominent, perplexing, or contentious individuals' lives, by employing a psychological perspective or theoretical lens (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Mayer et al., 2021; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019). Various African psychological theories were integrated and applied to Makeba's life to obtain a holistic understanding of her personality development. African theories or perspectives, African research subjects, as well as African females are underrepresented in the field of psychobiography (Swanepoel, 2018). Therefore, the researchers chose an Afrocentric perspective as well as an African female subject in an attempt to address this underrepresentation in psychobiography.

# 2   Theoretical Perspective: An Integrated African Psychology Perspective (IAPP)

Academic psychology in Africa is currently still largely influenced by Western forces, often with a disregard for endogenous African factors (Malherbe et al., 2021). Most Western theories fail to acknowledge cultural and contextual factors (Oppong, 2019), meaning these theories cannot be applied with credibility to African subjects (Viljoen, 2008). Accordingly, Ratele (2017) argued that in South Africa, the focus on Western psychology must shift to a focus on African psychology. Due to the absence of a single, formal African theory, an IAPP was utilised in this study. The African perspectives of Biko (2003), Eagle (2005), Holdstock (2000), Ruch (1973), Ruch and Anyanwu (1984), Sogolo (1993), Straker (1994), as well as Teffo and Roux (2003) served as African theories that share multiple characteristics and could, therefore, be integrated into a single, holistic perspective (Swanepoel, 2018). Three theoretical constructs were derived from the shared characteristics of these theories: (a) the view of human nature; (b) cognitive functioning and the concept of time, as well as (c) optimal development and mental health (Viljoen, 2008). The African view of human nature entails three domains all of which are based on a holistic and anthropocentric ontology, namely, the macro-cosmos, the meso-cosmos, and the micro-cosmos (Biko, 2003; Eagle, 2005). These shared theoretical constructs and characteristics are further explained and illustrated over the lifespan of Makeba in the Findings and Discussion section (Sect. 6).

# 3  The Psychobiographical Subject

Miriam Makeba was selected as the subject for this study via purposive sampling (Yin, 2018). Makeba was an exceptional artist. She was the first African singer to obtain international success and recognition (Baker, 2020), played a vital role in the fight against Apartheid[1] and became a symbol of hope for people around the globe (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) identified a particular need for more psychobiographical studies on females and African personalities. An electronic search (EBSCOhost) conducted on the 24th of February 2022, indicated that no previous psychobiography has been undertaken on Makeba.

## 3.1  Socio-Historical Context

During most of Makeba's life, South Africa was in a state of racial segregation referred to as apartheid. Apartheid was implemented from 1948 to 1994 by the National Party, the South African government of the time (Pretorius, 2012). Apartheid provoked resistance within South Africa as well as disapproval internationally (Klotz, 1999), with several organisations, such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Black Conscious Movement (BCM)[2] mobilising to fight against apartheid (Kurtz, 2010). Resistance was met with counter-measures by the government, leading to various anti-apartheid activists including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Albert Luthuli being imprisoned or exiled from South Africa (Pretorius, 2012). Miriam Makeba ranks among these activists, paying a heavy price for her involvement in the struggle against apartheid (Boehmer & Lodge, 2008). The researchers investigated Makeba's personality development in this difficult socio-historical context.

## 3.2  WEIRD and Beyond WEIRD Research

Previously, psychobiographies tended to focus on the lives of individuals who fit into the so-called WEIRD categories. The acronym WEIRD represents individuals who embody one or more of the following characteristics: (a) Western; (b) educated; (c) industrialised; (d) rich; (e) democratic (Henrich et al., 2010). Makeba does not fit the majority of the above-mentioned categories, making her an ideal candidate for such a psychobiographical study. Born in South Africa during the Apartheid era,

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[1] Apartheid refers to a former policy of segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-European groups in the Republic of South Africa (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

[2] Founded by Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness Movement was an anti-Apartheid activist movement that emerged in the mid-1960s.

Makeba's family struggled financially (Makeba & Hall, 1988). An argument can also be made that her immediate context did not reflect the industrialised component of South Africa, nor does the Bantu Education Act[3] adhere to the definition of education as implied by the WEIRD acronym. Muthukrishna et al. (2020) described cultural distance as the extent to which different societies are culturally and psychologically different from one another, and proceeded to quantify this distance using a sophisticated array of measures. Interestingly, the results suggest that the cultural and psychological distance between South Africa and the United States, the archetypal WEIRD society, is relatively limited (Muthukrishna et al., 2020). However, South Africa is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse countries, and also one of the most unequal, consistently ranking among the most unequal societies in the world based on various metrics (Ataguba, 2021; Moses et al., 2017). In a study of poverty in Mozambique, Jones and Tvedten (2019) demonstrated the importance of a qualitative, epistemologically emic approach which emphasises an insider perspective, especially when working in contexts plagued by structural oppression and inequality. As such, the researchers are of the opinion that when comparing Makeba's socio-cultural background to the WEIRD acronym, one can qualitatively conclude that there is a significant cultural distance between Makeba and the typical WEIRD subjects. Therefore, Makeba is an ideal candidate for the purposes of expanding the scope of psychobiography beyond the typical WEIRD studies.

## 4  Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to uncover and reconstruct the life and personality development of Miriam Makeba by making use of the IAPP. Accordingly, the applicability and relevance of the IAPP, to Makeba as an African female, was also investigated. The study further aimed to achieve inclusivity in the psychobiography field by investigating the life of a non-WEIRD subject. This psychobiography entails a single case-study design. The design allows for the informal evaluation of theoretical propositions or constructs contained in theories, models, or perspectives, especially against a significant individual's socio-historical life (Ponterotto, 2015; Yin, 2018). This study entailed an IAPP reconstruction of Makeba's lifespan, within her socio-historical context, and therefore represents longitudinal life history research.

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[3] An Apartheid education system that was designed for Black students, primarily focusing on teaching practical skills, such as needlework, handcraft, soil conservation as well as teaching the Christian religion.

## 4.1  Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations

The data were primarily collected from biographical and autobiographical materials on the life of Miriam Makeba. The researchers made use of triangulation, by incorporating a wide range of sources in the study, which strengthens trustworthiness (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Primary and secondary sources of data were collected from the World Wide Web, EBSCOhost as well as the Library at the University of the Free State. The researchers solely utilised existing published materials as data sources. Ethical clearance to undertake the study was obtained from the University of the Free State General/Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC), with Ethical clearance number: UFS-HUM-2014-68.

## 4.2  Data Extraction and Analysis Procedures

Yin (2018) proposed two strategies to guide the extraction and analysis of data. The first strategy entails the data collection and analysis, which is informed by the theoretical framework or perspective and the research aim. The second strategy requires the researchers to develop a descriptive framework to guide the organisation and integration of the collected biographical and historical evidence. The researchers, therefore, developed a conceptual psycho-historical matrix (Fouché, 1999) that guided the data extraction and categorisation process (Table 1).

## 4.3  Alexander's Model of Salience

The researchers applied Alexander's (1990) model of salience to identify and extract the most relevant information from the data. Alexander proposed two methods to guide the data extraction process. The first strategy entails the questioning of the data (Alexander, 1990). In this study, the IAPP guided the data extraction process. The researchers extracted data relevant to the shared theoretical characteristics of the approach with the view of obtaining an understanding of Makeba's life and personality development. The second strategy entails letting the data reveal itself. The following indicators proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990), namely, primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission, error or distortion, isolation, and incompletion guided the identification of the most significant data. A brief discussion of two of Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of salience follows to demonstrate how they were applied.

*Primacy:* Primacy refers to the assumption that the information presented initially in a text is considered to be psychologically significant. Accordingly, during data extraction, close attention was paid to Makeba's first words in her autobiography:

**Table 1** Psycho-historical Conceptual Matrix

| Integrated African perspective/theoretical framework: Shared multiple characteristics | | | Historical periods over the life of Miriam Makeba | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Early years (1932–1940) | *Umhome* (1941–1950) | Start of career (1951–1958) | Exiled (1959–1961) | The struggle (1962–1989) | Coming home (1990–1994) | Curtain call (1995–2008) |
| View of human nature | Macro-cosmos | | | | | | | | |
| | Meso-cosmos | | | | | | | | |
| | Micro-cosmos | | | | | | | | |
| Cognitive functioning and the concept of time | | | | | | | | | |
| Optimal development and mental health | | | | | | | | | |

[a]*Umhome* is a Xhosa lament, entailing a story of a young girl who had to serve in her husband's family. In traditional weddings, the young bride is usually accompanied by another girl, who would help her, as the bride, to get acquainted with the new family. In this lament, the young girl's husband falls in love with the escort girl (Stan, 2000)

> I look at an ant and I see myself: a native South African, endowed by nature with a strength much greater than my size so I might cope with the weight of a racism that crushes my spirit. (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p.1).

*Frequency:* The principle of frequency refers to repeated happenings, conflicts, patterns, themes, or symbols (Alexander, 1990). Makeba repeatedly referred to the important role that music and singing played in her life and her culture. Hence, this information was considered to be important to her development.

## 4.4  The Psycho-Historical Matrix

The psycho-historical matrix used in this study is presented in Table 1. The table offers a schematic representation that illustrates the application of the IAPP against the backdrop of seven significant historical periods throughout Makeba's life. These significant periods were demarcated based on seven distinct eras in Makeba's life.

# 5  Findings and Discussion

## 5.1  The View of Human Nature Against the Backdrop of the Macro-Cosmos

Within the macro-cosmos, God is encountered (Viljoen, 2008). However, a single, omnibenevolent, omnipotent God does not exist within traditional African religion. Instead, various Gods are encountered (Sogolo, 1993). God is therefore not directly concerned with humankind. Ancestors serve as a medium of communication between God and people. In their daily functioning, individuals are more concerned with the ancestors than with God (Holdstock, 2000). Religion is found in dances, customs, and wars and focuses on the entire community and is not based solely on the individual (Biko, 2003).

The macro-cosmos is evident early in Makeba's life, as going to church was extremely important in her household and MaVilakazi, Makeba's grandmother, was also strict regarding attendance at Sunday school (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Makeba mentioned various religious rituals, dances, and customs that were performed daily by her family to honour God and the ancestors (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). She further mentioned that, in her African community, ancestors were often turned to for guidance: "We ask them to prepare the way for us, because they have gone ahead and they are closer to the Superior Being" (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p. 14). The emphasis that was placed on a close relationship and communication with the ancestors above a relationship with one superior God aligns with traditional African religion.

Makeba's late teens were characterised by several troubling events including dropping out of school, falling pregnant, and enduring severe abuse from her husband at the time. During the same period of her life, Makeba's mother also left home to become an *isangoma*[4] (Makeba & Hall, 1988). These trying events prompted Makeba to critically reflect on her own beliefs to try and make sense of them. Later in her life, Makeba stopped attending church, citing the contrast of general poverty with exorbitant Sunday feasts as contradictory (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Despite leaving the church, Makeba remained religious. Later in her life, while visiting the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe,[5] Makeba averred: "the Superior Being is always with us, but there are places where He really lets you know it" (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p. 57).

In 1960, when Makeba was 28 years old, she was exiled from South Africa due to her involvement in anti-apartheid activism. Makeba's mother passed away in 1960 while Makeba was living in Chicago (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). She was denied entrance into South Africa to attend her mother's funeral, which was a trauma for her, given the African emphasis on burial rituals and the connection between the living and the dead (Makeba & Hall, 1988; Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004; Ngubane, 2019). When her daughter, Bongi, passed away in 1985 due to complications during childbirth, Makeba opted to incorporate burial rituals from her traditional African roots, alongside Christian influences, reflecting the influence of her time spent in the West (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004).

Upon her return to South Africa in June 1990, she was welcomed by the entire community. "Prayers were said and rituals were performed to welcome me home. Cows were slaughtered" (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004, p. 210). Makeba's later years were marked with recognition and praise for her music and also for her involvement in humanitarianism. Makeba regularly acknowledged the role that God played in her life, which is in accordance with the African perspective. While reflecting on her life, Makeba mentioned that she was grateful for the talent that she had been given, "I'm happy that God and my ancestors gave me this voice" (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004, p.246).

## 5.2 The View of Human Nature Against the Backdrop of the Meso-Cosmos

Sow (1980) and Ratele (2017, 2019) referred to the meso-cosmos as the structured collective imaginary. This cosmos encompasses the ancestors, the living reality, as well as the natural physical reality. The living reality refers to animals and humans, whereas the natural physical reality refers to trees and rivers, for instance (Viljoen, 2008). Forces such as the ancestors, malignant spirits, and shamans are found at this

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[4] A Zulu term that is used colloquially to describe all traditional healers in the South African context.
[5] Rhodesia at the time.

level, all of which can influence human behaviour (Holdstock, 2000). Accordingly, the African perspective holds that human behaviour is determined by external agents. Furthermore, the ancestors serve as guardians for the living (Teffo & Roux, 2003). Traditional Africans maintain a relationship with their ancestors, described as the living dead (Eagle, 2005), by communicating with them through various rituals and ceremonies (Holdstock, 2000). In turn, the ancestors communicate with humans through dreams and visions. If communication between the ancestors and humans does not take place, the harmonious relationship between humans and their ancestors is threatened (Viljoen, 2008).

Makeba's family often engaged in various religious rituals, dances, and customs to honour God and their ancestors (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). After Makeba's mother was chosen to become an *isangoma*, Makeba often helped her while she was in a trance and was, therefore, in close contact with the *amadlozi* spirits. Makeba mentioned that, even before she had plans to travel overseas, one of the spirits warned her about leaving South Africa, predicting that she would not be able to come home again (Makeba & Hall, 1988).

On her return to South Africa, Makeba immediately visited her mother's burial site (Makeba & Hall, 1988), a gesture which attests to the respect and connection that is maintained between the living and the ancestors. Throughout her autobiography, Makeba regularly mentions discussions with her deceased grandmother, further reiterating her relationship with the ancestors. Equating the African understanding of life to a stream of water, Makeba averred, "After we splash about in this life, our mortal beings leave the pool, but our spirits remain" (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p. 2). Therefore, it is evident that the African perspective views the living dead as an integral part of life (Eagle, 2005), which Makeba followed by maintaining a connection with her ancestors.

Based on Makeba's life story and the relationship she had with the ancestors, the researchers are of the opinion that the ancestors continued to play a significant role in her life, up to her passing. Interestingly, despite the trials she had faced during her lifetime, she conveyed the sentiment that she was satisfied with her life and would "have certainly selected to be who I am: One of the oppressed instead of one of the oppressors" (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p. 1). Therefore, the researchers are of the opinion that Makeba was content with the life she had lived. Furthermore, she was likely comfortable with the idea of death, as she would be joining the ancestors to become part of the "living dead".

## 5.3  The View of Human Nature Against the Backdrop of the Micro-Cosmos

The micro-cosmos entails the everyday collective existence of people (Viljoen, 2008). Within Africa, human interaction is guided by the Zulu concept, *Ubuntu*. Holdstock (2000) describes *Ubuntu* as the quality that makes us human. *Ubuntu*

refers to having compassion, care, empathy, respect, and responsibility for oneself and for others (Holdstock, 2000; Mpofu, 2020). People practising the principle of *Ubuntu* do not live for themselves. Instead, they live for other people, using their strength to help others, especially the weak (Viljoen, 2008). This term also relates to the Zulu expression, "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*", which implies that a person is only a person because of other people (Eagle, 2005; Holdstock, 2000). Therefore, African identity is determined in relation to others and is necessarily collectivistic (Eagle, 2005). Western and African values differ substantially from each other, resulting in different perspectives on the relationship between the individual and the community. From the African perspective, there is no distinction between the self and the community (Holdstock, 2000). In contrast with Western values, traditional Africans value the community and the needs of others above their own. The survival of the community is placed above the survival of the individual (Holdstock, 2000). Finally, the value of community is also evident in matrimonial practices, where marriage is considered a union of families, and not solely of individuals (Viljoen, 2008).

Makeba was raised in a family where *Ubuntu* was taught and upheld. She recalls the community living together in a collectivistic manner: "Our neighbourhood is one large extended family. Every adult is every child's parent, and every child is every adult's son or daughter" (Makeba & Hall, 1988, p. 12). However, in contrast to the doctrine of *Ubuntu*, Makeba also described the township she grew up in as violent, with community members fighting, stabbing, and often killing one another. Makeba implicated the Apartheid government for inciting violence and division among the African people (Makeba & Hall, 1988).

While living with her first husband, Gooli's, parents, she reportedly worked very hard, assisting with cooking, cleaning, brewing beer, and performing other tasks (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Gooli's family was wealthier than Makeba's family, and Makeba often mentioned feeling insignificant in their presence (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004). Despite this, all accounts suggest that Makeba performed her duties diligently and with humility. The spirit of *Ubuntu* was further embodied in the community events, such as church gatherings and fundraisers, where Makeba regularly performed.

Despite her exile from South Africa, and the warm welcome she received in the West, Makeba remained aware of the plight of South Africans. This sense of camaraderie compelled her to fight for the rights of her compatriots, even during times when she was not being affected by Apartheid herself. Notably, in 1963 and again in 1964, Makeba spoke out against Apartheid at the United Nations (Makeba & Hall, 1988). Makeba became a representative for Africans all over the world through her participation in the independence celebrations of various African countries (Ewans, 2008). She also performed at the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in Ethiopia and was dubbed *Mama Africa* (Sizemore-Barber, 2012). She promoted unity among African countries through songs such as *Westwind*, with the words "Unify us, don't divide us" (Miriam Makeba Official Channel, 2015). In her later years, Makeba established many foundations aimed at skills development, and was appointed as a Goodwill ambassador to Africa (Makeba & Mwamuka,

2004; Miriam Makeba Official Channel, 2015). The legacy that Makeba leaves behind continues to embody the spirit of *Ubuntu*.

## 5.4    Cognitive Functioning and the Concept of Time

A distinction is evident between the cognitive functioning of traditional Africans and the cognitive functioning of Westerners. In contrast to Westerners, traditional Africans mainly rely on intuition and emotion, instead of rationality (Ruch & Anyanwu, 1984; Sogolo, 1993). It is important to recognise that both approaches to cognitive functioning are valuable, and one is not better than the other. Similarly, traditional Africans also perceive time differently from Westerners (Viljoen, 2008). From the traditional African perspective, time is two-dimensional, consisting of a long history and a present. The future has no meaning for traditional Africans since it has not occurred yet (Mbiti, 1990). Once again, a contrast becomes evident, with the Western perspective valuing a future-oriented approach, while traditional Africans are not restricted by time, instead believing that time is something that has to be created (Mbiti, 1990). Traditional Africans perceive time as an *emotional time consciousness,* as opposed to the Western *mechanical time consciousness*. Emotional time consciousness is encapsulated by the term "Africa time", which is often used in a pejorative sense to describe individuals who live according to a less rigorous schedule.

Makeba's cognitive functioning is most evident in her involvement in anti-apartheid activism, where she displayed a personal, and necessarily emotional reaction to the situation. She often sang about her experiences and emotions, despite the repercussions thereof. The renowned American actor, Marlon Brando averred, "You have a split personality Miss Makeba. One minute you are as meek and quiet as a lamb. But when someone talks about your country you become like a lioness" (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004, p. 85). Additionally, there were numerous seemingly important events in Makeba's early life for which the dates were not specified in the autobiographies consulted. Instead, her autobiography follows a more narrative approach, where the emphasis is placed on emotion instead of chronology. For example, during the *Umhome* phase of Makeba's life, she mentions that she dropped out of school (Makeba & Mwamuka, 2004), but she does not mention the year, nor her age at the time of leaving school, hinting at the African concept of time.

## 5.5    Optimal Development and Mental Health

The African perspective views individual health holistically, with a non-dualistic understanding of the mind and the body's functioning (Eagle, 2005). In contrast to the Western approach, in Africa, health and medicine are not divided into rigid categories such as somatic, psychological, and psychosomatic. Instead, the entire

person is considered to be ill or healthy, not merely a specific part of the person (Viljoen, 2008). Traditional healers are concerned with the person as a whole and consider various factors of the person, including their social, cultural, and spiritual relations (Eagle, 2005).

According to the IAPP, misfortune does not occur due to chance. Three possible causes for misfortune are evident, namely: mystical, animistic, and magical (Eagle, 2005). Mystical causation entails a vulnerability to negative forces. People are seen to be more vulnerable to negative forces in situations that require a lot of energy, for instance, women who have given birth or people who are recently bereaved (Eagle, 2005). Animistic causation occurs when the ancestors have been offended and are no longer protecting the person or people (Eagle, 2005). For instance, failing to perform certain rituals may show disrespect to the ancestors and result in suffering (Bogoba, 2010; Straker, 1994). Finally, magical causation is associated with witchcraft, including curses, spells, and enchantment (Viljoen, 2008).

As a young woman, Makeba experienced extreme hardship and misfortune. Gooli abused her physically and emotionally, and was also unfaithful in their marriage. In dealing with these traumatic experiences, Makeba used her music to express her emotions. Makeba was also diagnosed with breast cancer while she was a young woman. When Makeba's symptoms became unbearable, she consulted with a Western-trained doctor first (Makeba & Hall, 1988). The doctor suggested that the only way to help her would be to surgically remove her breasts. Refusing this procedure, Makeba approached her mother, an initiated *isangoma*, for assistance. Eventually, it was Makeba's mother that cured Makeba's breast cancer by using African remedies (Makeba & Hall, 1988).

# 6  Conclusion

The findings indicated that the IAPP served as an appropriate perspective to explore and describe Miriam Makeba's life and personality development. Although the IAPP provided insight into the development of Makeba, the IAPP was lacking in certain areas. The African psychology field lacks a single, comprehensive theory that provides an in-depth explanation of personality development, while considering modern influences, such as globalisation. The IAPP also refers to various constructs and phenomena, but does not fully elaborate on how they influence personality development. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate how constructs and phenomena such as *ancestral spirits* and *Ubuntu* truly impact personality development and psychological functioning.

It is noteworthy that Makeba was able to develop an overall healthy and inspiring personality, despite her difficult socio-historical circumstances. After investigating the IAPP's influence on Makeba's personality, the researchers came to the conclusion that certain elements as presented in this theory may have aided Makeba's positive personality development. The following two elements in the IAPP stood out throughout Miriam Makeba's life:

1. *The importance and healing power of music* enabled Makeba to express her feelings towards the unjust political system.
2. *The spirit of Ubuntu* enabled Makeba to believe in humanity and togetherness, despite the cruelty she was exposed to.

The researchers therefore recommend further investigation into the potential transformative power of these IAPP themes in overcoming difficulties. The researchers were not able to conduct interviews with living family members and friends of Makeba, which limited the study and could have provided a different level of triangulation. However, an interview of Miriam Makeba (Miriam Makeba Official Channel, 2015) was utilised as a key source.

Several scholars have recommended applying a multiple case-study design in psychobiographical studies to enhance the transferability of the research (Saccaggi, 2015). As such, the researchers recommend conducting a comparative study between the lives of Miriam Makeba and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela for a future study. Miriam Makeba and Winnie Mandela share multiple circumstances and the same socio-cultural background. By using an IAPP, this study contributed to the African knowledge base in psychobiography and facilitated in a minor way the de-Westernisation of psychobiography in South Africa. Additionally, by placing Africa and Africans at the centre of this study, the researchers advanced the development of a situated psychology, which seeks to better understand the psychological lives of Africans (Ratele, 2019). Thus, this study promoted the use of an African perspective in psychobiography and moved beyond the WEIRD.

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**Paul J. P. Fouché** (DPhil) is a full-professor of Counselling Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, in South Africa. He serves on the Faculty Research Committee. Paul has published psychobiographical and psychohistorical articles in various journals. His interest is in the field of psychobiography and psychohistory and he acts as a research supervisor to post-graduate scholars undertaking life history research.

**Wilhelmien Labuscagne** is a post-graduate student at the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. Her e-mail address is: elmien0516@gmail.com

**Pravani Naidoo** (PhD) lectures at the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. She serves on the General and Human Research Ethics Committee and the Faculty of Humanities Scientific Committee. Pravani has been involved in the supervision of post-graduate students undertaking life history research, as well as research within the field of positive psychology, and student well-being in particular. Her e-mail address is: naidoop@ufs.ac.za

# Tragic Optimism: A Psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai

**Tinashe Harry and Roelf van Niekerk**

**Abstract** For many Zimbabweans, Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (1952–2018) became the face of courage and hope during his political career. Tsvangirai was subjected to and witnessed political violence, physical abuse, brutality, emotional humiliation, unlawful detentions, and persecution. He challenged the ruling party in Zimbabwe, and his leadership gave many people hope for the future. In the context of living in a colonial era, poverty, and having to endure the brutality of the Mugabe era, he lived a meaningful life that saw him becoming a Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (2009–2013). This single-case study explores and describes Tsvangirai's life and interprets it in terms of Frankl's existential theory. More specifically, Tsvangirai's life is interpreted from the perspective of Frankl's three triads, the fundamental, meaning, and tragic triads, as well as the noetic dimension. Tsvangirai was selected through purposive sampling based on his important role in Zimbabwean politics. The primary source of data was biographical and autobiographical publications. The findings indicate that Tsvangirai shifted emphasis within the meaning triad in living a meaningful life and that he was able to use the human capacity of self-distancing/detachment and self-transcendence to find meaning in his life. This chapter sheds light on how individuals make sense of their circumstances and search for meaning and purpose in adverse conditions. It also contributes towards the development of psychobiographical research among non-WEIRD samples.

**Keywords** Psychobiography · Morgan Tsvangirai · Existential psychology · Viktor Frankl · Non-WEIRD

T. Harry (✉)
Department of Psychology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
e-mail: t.harry@ru.ac.za

R. van Niekerk
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa
e-mail:
roelf.vanniekerk@mandela.ac.za; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roelf_Van_Niekerk

# 1   Introduction

This study aimed to explore, describe, and interpret the meaning-making process across the lifespan of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (1957–2018), a past leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) who provided the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), with strong opposition. Essentially, this chapter focuses on how Tsvangirai achieved meaning in his life while living in a turbulent socio-political context.

# 2   Context of Zimbabwean Political Environment

For the past 42 years, the Zimbabwean social, economic, and political landscape has been characterised by human suffering. Since attaining independence, the country's economy has been shrinking, yielding the second-highest estimated inflation rate of 79.6 billion percent in November 2008 (compared to a rate of 5.4% at independence in 1980), an unprecedented high unemployment rate, and political chaos (Hanke, 2008, 2018; Jones, 2010). The following examples illustrate Zimbabwe's unusual inflation rate. In 2008, the highest currency unit was a Z$10-trillion note, which was equivalent to US$8, and one could not buy two cans of Coca-Cola with the note (Biti, 2015). The highest note issued by the Zimbabwean government was a Z$100-trillion note. At independence, the highest note was a Z$20 note. At the height of hyperinflation in December 2008, Z$4-million was equivalent to US$1 per the official exchange rate (Globalisation and Monetary Policy Institute, 2011). The Economic Times (2008) stated that the value of a loaf of bread was equivalent to the value of 12 new cars a decade ago (i.e., Z$10-million).

Despite the challenges the governing ZANU PF faced, opposition parties such as PF-ZAPU (led by the late vice-president Joshua Nkomo) and the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (led by Edgar Tekere, a former member of ZANU PF) failed to pose any threat to the ruling party (Phiri, 2022; Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). The opposition parties faced challenges that included vote-rigging, political violence, and pre-and post-election intimidation of voters and opposition leaders that resulted in their demise (Phiri, 2022). Amidst this chaos, Zimbabweans became hopeful for a better future when the MDC, led by Tsvangirai, was launched in 1999 (Phiri, 2022).

# 3 Overview of Tsvangirai's Life[1]

## 3.1 Early Life

Tsvangirai was the eldest of nine children and grew up in a rural area of Zimbabwe. His mother was a housewife, and his father was a carpenter, bricklayer, and mine worker. The family experienced poverty, but Tsvangirai's parents valued education and ensured the children attended school. Tsvangirai described his father as stubborn and undaunted due to his persistence in schooling. He started his education in 1959. He remembers being taught to recite Psalm 23 by his first schoolteacher and continued being able to recite it with ease into his adulthood. During that period, failing a grade resulted in dropping out of school or looking for another place. Tsvangirai failed a few school grades, but due to his parents' dedication, he completed primary school at another school.

Tsvangirai often witnessed the arrests of political activists, including his teachers. Although he failed to understand the reasons for these arrests, the courage of the political activists impressed him. At a very young age, Tsvangirai listened to his father narrating how he detested his own life because of poverty and suffering. Tsvangirai also had to contend with racist remarks when he wanted to apply for high school places. Tsvangirai left school as a teenager in 1971, with a high school qualification (Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level— 4 years of high school), to assist his parents financially. Ironically, he was later called an "ignoramus" by Mugabe due to his lack of tertiary education (Nyambabvu, 2013). Tsvangirai noted that he learnt "manly" responsibility, fearlessness, and moral worthiness from his father. He learned independence, passion, empathy, kindness, survival skills, and communal solidarity from his mother.

## 3.2 Marriage

Tsvangirai met his first wife, Susan Tsvangirai (born 1958), in 1977 and married her in 1978. They welcomed their first son in 1979. The birth of his first son is described with greater joy than the birth of the other five children. No further information about his first marriage was provided until he was involved in politics. Tsvangirai shared his ambitions of founding a comprehensive opposition movement with Susan in 1997, who "laughed her heart out" (p. 218), as, during that time, it was inconceivable. Upon Tsvangirai assuming a political role, Susan had to take up a dual role (i.e. mother and father) due to Tsvangirai's work commitments. He did not have time to spend with his children due to his political involvement, which required his full attention. Tsvangirai was aware that his role in politics may have negatively affected

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[1]Unless otherwise specified, this section relies mainly on Tsvangirai's autobiography: Morgan Tsvangirai: At the deep end (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

his children. His family had to cope with *loneliness* even when he was physically present as he tended to be an absent father and husband.

Tsvangirai felt powerless after the accident that killed Susan in March 2009. Tsvangirai sounded grateful for the support and the opportunity that Susan gave him to pursue a political career. The death of Susan resulted in Tsvangirai experiencing dark anxieties as he had lost someone he had shared his life with for an extended period. The couple had been married for 31 years at the time of the death of Susan and had six children together. Tsvangirai describes Susan as a personal adviser, a confidante, a devout Christian, an honest spouse, and a consummate listener. He further describes Susan as a life partner who supported him through the trials and persecution he faced during his political career. Tsvangirai also highlights that his marriage had minimal conflict despite their hardships. After the death of his first wife, no further information is provided about his other marriages, which are in the media. It is reported that Tsvangirai "married" Locardia Karimatsenga (born 1972) for 11 days in November 2011 and Elizabeth Tsvangirai (born 1977, a daughter of a ZANU PF official) from September 2012 to his death (Mujakachi, 2017). He had no children with Elizabeth.

## 3.3   Early Career

Tsvangirai started his career in 1972 when he worked as a sweeper in a textile factory. He was arrested early in his career for using two names (Morgan and Richard). This attracted the attention of the police, who suspected that he used a pseudonym to cover up terrorist activities. Generally, Tsvangirai preferred to use the name Morgan rather than Richard, his Christian name. The first arrest marked the beginning of many unwarranted arrests to follow in his life. He joined a trade union in 1973 and quickly rose through the ranks. This culminated in his election as the Secretary-General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) in 1988. ZCTU adopted an increasingly political role, mainly due to the deteriorating economy and the plummeting of workers' living standards. At the time, Tsvangirai's involvement in the unions resulted in ongoing clashes between the ZCTU and the ruling party. In the early 1980s, Tsvangirai idolised Mugabe, who was among the most educated leaders in the world at that time. In 1997, as the Secretary-General of ZCTU, he was beaten and almost thrown out of the window of his tenth-floor office by a group of war veterans loyal to ZANU PF. This incident was due to his involvement in a protest against tax increases by the government (Hudleston, 2008). After the national protests, Mugabe regarded ZCTU as an opposition political party due to the unresolved differences.

## 3.4   Political Career

Owing to the growing tension between the government and trade unions, an opposition political party that the ZCTU fully supported was formed in 1999. Tsvangirai resigned from his position as a trade union leader to lead the new party. There was consensus among the founding members that Tsvangirai should lead the party. Tsvangirai understood that he ran the risk of being arrested or assassinated for challenging Mugabe's ZANU-PF (Fontein, 2018). But he duly accepted the responsibility to lead the party. He was brutally assaulted, charged with treason, and labelled a traitor. His dignity was denigrated on numerous occasions by Mugabe. In the process, Tsvangirai became a symbol of resistance and hope for many Zimbabweans. The new opposition political party defeated the government during a national referendum and won almost as many seats as ZANU PF during the parliamentary elections. At this point, Mugabe and ZANU PF realised that MDC was a formidable force.

In 2002, Tsvangirai challenged Mugabe for the presidency. Tsvangirai lost the election, but many reports suggested that irregularities made the election unfair. Tsvangirai challenged Mugabe and ZANU PF again in 2008. Despite the violence and intimidation, Tsvangirai gained the most votes. However, as per the official results, he had not secured enough votes to win outright. As a result, a presidential run-off was set for June 2008. The security forces victimised many voters for supporting the MDC. Tsvangirai withdrew from the elections as a result of the brutalisation of supporters. Mugabe was subsequently declared a winner with 90% of the votes. However, international outrage over voting irregularities and violence resulted in a power-sharing agreement. After months of tortuous negotiations, Tsvangirai became the Prime Minister from February 2009 to September 2013. Tsvangirai was able to transcend his past suffering for the country's benefit by having a civil relationship with Mugabe. He stated that:

> I signed the Global Political Agreement because my belief in Zimbabwe and its people ran deeper than the scars I bore from the ten-year struggle against Mugabe dictatorship. I went into an openly loveless marriage out of my hope for the future. The hope was and still is far stronger than the grief I felt for the needless suffering in my personal past. (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, pp. 537).

In 2009, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (eventually awarded to Barack Obama) (Chitiyo, 2018). He was also the recipient of three awards. He was the first non-lawyer recipient of the *Human Rights Award* and received a *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the International Bar Association and the *Spanish Foundation Cristobal Gabarron* for his fight for peace and the advancement of human rights.

From the perspective of ordinary Zimbabweans whose lives improved, Tsvangirai's term as a prime minister and his party in the government was successful (Nyarota et al., 2015). However, the terms for the coalition, for example, electoral reform, were not enforced. Consequently, he lost the presidential elections conducted in 2013 to Mugabe. There are suggestions that he may have lost the elections as he allowed Mugabe to control the coalition's narrative (Booysen, 2014).

Tsvangirai was diagnosed with colon cancer in May 2016 and died in February 2018.

## 4 Frankl's Existential Theory

Frankl suggested that there is a realm beyond the psychological and physical called the human (spiritual/noetic) dimension (Frankl, 2014). The spiritual dimension is the sphere of human freedom and is not subject to deterministic laws (Frankl, 2014; Lukas, 2014). He argued that a person "is not fully conditioned or determined but rather determines himself" (Frankl, 2004, p. 133). Frankl (2014) argued that humans do not merely exist as machines, as described by the deterministic approach, but are free to determine their character and take a stand against whatever circumstances they may face. The freedom of the human personality is fundamental in existential psychology. The noetic dimension offers resources (metaphorically referred to as a *medicine chest*) that individuals can use depending on the circumstances they face, such as the will to meaning, conscience, self-transcendence, self-distancing, responsibility and response-ability, choices, decision-making, commitment to someone or something, and forgiveness (Fabry, 2013; Frankl, 2006, 2011, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2020; Shantall, 2020; Wong, 2014). Frankl's theory rests on three basic assumptions, namely: (a) life does not lose its meaning regardless of the circumstances or conditions (meaning of life/to life); (b) a will to meaning is the primary motivation for humans, and the meaning can be actualised through self-transcendence (will to meaning); and (c) humans have the freedom (free will) to search and find meaning in their lives however within limits (freedom of will) (Frankl, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2002, 2020;).

Frankl contends that two fundamental phenomena within the noetic dimension can enhance human life: self-distancing and self-transcendence (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). Self-distancing refers to the ability of an individual to take a step away and discover meaning by looking at oneself from the outside rather than focusing on oneself. By distancing or detaching themselves, individuals can take a stand towards their somatic conditions, physical illness, determinants, and emotional states (e.g. anger and fear) (Fabry, 1988).

On the other hand, self-transcendence is the ability of an individual to look beyond their personal needs and reach out to someone or causes to serve (Frankl, 1984, 1997, 2006, 2014). Self-transcendence occurs when an individual makes a commitment that surpasses personal interests by acting for the sake of something or someone other than the self (Wong, 2014). Frankl suggested that self-transcendence allows individuals to go beyond their egocentricity and selfishness to reach out to something or someone to fulfil a task.

Frankl (2014) further averred that personality is dynamic and human beings can initiate change volitionally. Human beings, therefore, can change themselves depending on the circumstances or environment and the meaning of the moment attached to those occurrences (Fabry, 2013; Frankl, 1967, 2012; Wong, 2014).

Frankl thus asserts that humans have the ability to choose how to respond to any given circumstances. The freedom of will is aligned with Frankl's dimensional ontology, according to which humans cannot confine themselves to psychological or biological products such as genetic makeup and environment (Frankl, 2014). Humans have a spiritual (noological) dimension that can transcend their drives, instincts, and environment or unavoidable conditions. Human personality can thus transcend suffering, pain, guilt, and life transitoriness using the spiritual dimension. In general, it implies that it is not only about transcending the psychophysical suffering but taking a stance towards unavoidable situations such as chaotic political environments.

## 5   Aim of the Psychobiography

The purpose of this psychobiography is to explore and describe how Tsvangirai made sense of his life while experiencing life-threatening situations in the midst of a chaotic political context. The specific aims are: (a) to explore and describe the events and experiences that challenged Tsvangirai; (b) to interpret the events and experiences from the perspective of specific aspects of Frankl's theoretical framework (i.e. the fundamental triad, the meaning triad, the tragic triad, and the noetic dimension) (c) to supplement the paucity of psychobiographies of African leaders (see Fouché, 2015; Fouché et al., 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2009, 2010; Van Niekerk et al., 2019); (d) to respond to the call for more psychobiographies that focus specifically on meaning creation (Mayer, 2021; Mayer & Kelley, 2021); and lastly (e) to contribute towards psychobiographical research focused on subjects from non-WEIRD contexts.

## 6   Methodology

Fouché and van Niekerk (2010) described psychobiography as "the study of historically significant and extraordinary individuals over their entire life spans with the aim to uncover and reconstruct their lives psychologically" (p. 2). Through asking challenging questions, a psychobiographical study allows psychobiographers to adopt a holistic view of an individual and create a comprehensive narrative (Schultz, 2005). Furthermore, psychobiography can be used to facilitate or prove an existing psychological theory (Schultz, 2005). In simple terms, psychobiographical research uses a psychological theory to understand the lived experiences of a significant individual (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019; Van Niekerk et al., 2019). A longitudinal single-case study design approach was adopted to explore and describe the life of Tsvangirai (Ferrer & Ponterotto, 2020; Van Niekerk et al., 2019).

## 6.1 Psychobiographical Subject

Tsvangirai was chosen as the subject for this study using non-probability, purposive sampling. Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) argued that "psychobiographical study entails a systematic and descriptively-rich study of renowned, enigmatic, exceptional, or even contentious individuals in socio-historical contexts within a psychological frame of reference" (p. 495). With that in mind, Tsvangirai was selected for this study as he is a significant individual who lived a courageous life and paved the way for other opposition political parties to stand against the liberation movement rule in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

## 6.2 Data Collection, Extraction, and Analysis

Psychobiographers use two primary data sources to extract evidence, that is, primary and secondary sources (Du Plessis, 2017). The sources used for this study included biographies by and about Tsvangirai and transcribed interviews. The data were only extracted from sources available in the public domain to minimise ethical risks. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the respect and dignity of the psychobiographical subject (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). The study utilised Miles et al. (2014) guidelines to extract and organise the data. A deductive thematic analysis approach was utilised to analyse the data for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The themes in the data were identified using the various triads from Frankl's theory (noetic dimension, the fundamental triad, the meaning triad, and the tragic triad). The researchers were thus able to identify the themes directly related to Frankl's theory. As Runyan (1981) and Ponterotto (2014) suggested, the researchers looked at both confirming and disconfirming evidence to avoid artificially imposing themes on the data.

## 7 Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study will be discussed within the framework of Frankl's triads which were identified in Tsvangirai's existential journey.

## 7.1 Freedom of Will

Freedom of will is possible because of the human capacity for self-distancing or self-detachment (Fabry, 1988; Wong, 2012). This capacity allows an individual to detach from themselves and a situation. An individual retains the ability to choose his

attitude towards himself (Frankl, 2004; Shantall, 2020). Despite the adverse conditions that Tsvangirai faced, his life remained meaningful. During his career, he was confronted by many instances that could have resulted in losing hope (e.g. vote-rigging, brutalisation of supporters and officials, family members losing their livelihoods, and suffering) (Hudleston, 2008; Nyambabvu, 2013). Tsvangirai proved that an individual retains the freedom to fulfil the meaning of life despite the limitations an individual can face. He believed he was free to take a stand against the oppression that the opposition political officials and citizens had endured for years under the leadership of Mugabe.

It is also evident that Tsvangirai was responsible for his career and believed that he had the freedom to choose the type of career he would pursue and the responsibility to meet the demands of each situation. His freedom of will is evident through his choices in his life. The demands informed his decision-making in the different situations he faced, for example, choosing to look after his family soon after school as well as becoming a trade union activist and an opposition political leader. The human quality of self-distancing allows an individual to choose a stance towards the world and the physical and psychological self through the freedom of the will (Shantall, 2020). Tsvangirai was able to practice the concept of self-distancing/self-detachment as he was able to choose how he responded to the suffering he endured. Tsvangirai was able to choose his response to the torturing he suffered at the hands of the ruling party. In his book, Tsvangirai mentioned that "although I was now free, I could feel Mugabe's shadow looming over me. . .but I refused to be intimidated" (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, p. 131). It is evident that he was able to choose an attitude towards himself and the situations he faced.

## 7.2   Will to Meaning

Frankl argued that the desire to find or realise meaning is the primary motivational force for human beings (Frankl, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). A person needs someone or something to live a meaningful or purposeful life (Frankl, 2006; Shantall, 2003, 2020). As meaning differs from person to person, day to day, or even hour to hour, an individual thus must realise the unique meaning of their life situation (Fabry, 1988; Frankl, 2012; Shantall, 2020). For example, Tsvangirai could have become a political activist in high school, but he had other responsibilities towards his family (Hudleston, 2008). Being there for his family was more meaningful at that stage than being an activist. Humans want a purpose to live for and feel needed to fulfil responsibility for someone or something (Shantall, 2003, 2020). Tsvangirai pointed out that he had a responsibility towards his family and his supporters to continue with the cause. It is evident that Tsvangirai sought responsibility from a young age when he took over the responsibility of providing for his family (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). It is also apparent that Tsvangirai believed that his life responsibility was to play a role in freeing the Zimbabwean masses (Booysen, 2014; Hudleston, 2008). It seems his involvement in trade union activities

and being the leader of an opposition political party gave him a life purpose. He had set himself to form a comprehensive opposition movement which became his purpose (Hudleston, 2008). What is striking is that despite adverse circumstances in which he had to function, he remained dedicated to the cause through his orientation towards other people. Frankl (2014) posited that meaning can be discovered by reaching beyond oneself (self-transcendence). It is apparent that Tsvangirai found the meaning of his life by reaching out to others, committing to a cause, and serving others.

## 7.3 Meaning Triad

The meaning of life constantly changes, but life never ceases to have meaning (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). It has been argued that the more complex life becomes, the more meaningful it becomes (Shantall, 2020). Each passing moment should thus be used to actualise the values to live a meaningful life. Frankl (2006) indicated that the defiant power of the human spirit can be activated to resist pain, fear, and suffering. Humans can stand against their adversities, fears, and emotions when they are searching for meaning through the defiant power of the human spirit. Meaning of life can be discovered through (a) self-chosen creative activities, e.g. work, commitment to a cause, and hobbies (creative values); (b) experiencing something or encountering another person in their uniqueness (experiential values); and (c) taking a stance towards unavoidable suffering or tragic situations (attitudinal values) (Fabry, 1988, 2013; Frankl, 2006, 2012, 2014; Shantall, 2003, 2020).

### 7.3.1 Creative Values

Frankl (2014) pointed out that life remains meaningful under all circumstances. Humans are free to fulfil the unique meaning of their lives. It seems like Tsvangirai was able to actualise his creative values (through the work he performed), which gave meaning to his life. He continued being involved in the political landscape, trying to make a difference for other people by fulfilling a task (Wong, 2014). His creative values were actualised throughout his career, from being involved in trade union activities to being the opposition leader. Despite facing challenges that prevented him from actualising his creative values or fulfilling his task, he developed an attitude that allowed him to endure the suffering that precluded him from actualising his values. Tsvangirai also searched for work and took responsibility for work beyond his personal needs (Shantall, 2003; Wong, 2014). For example, he took up a trade union position, although he knew that his salary was going to be negatively affected (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). Despite the adverse conditions he faced, he was able to self-transcend in concern for other people through his deeds.

### 7.3.2 Experiential Values

Experiential values entail what we take or receive from the world, for example experiencing beauty and love towards and from another human being (Shantall, 2003). Humans can discover the meaning of a moment through engaging, appreciating, encountering, and experiencing relationships of all kinds. Experiencing meaning is also about being grateful and appreciative (Wong, 2014). Such experiential values were cultivated over the course of Tsvangirai's life. He gave and received love from his family. He also enjoyed walks in the garden with his grandson, which brought him peace (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

Moreover, he encountered people from various backgrounds when he was a trade union activist and an opposition political leader, arousing feelings of responsibility (Chitiyo, 2018; Hudleston, 2008). He might have felt the need to contribute to the well-being of other human beings from these encounters. Although his presence at home was limited, he found the little moments that he was able to spend with his family fulfilling. Tsvangirai was also grateful for the support and encouragement he received from his first wife (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). It is interesting to note in spite of the suffering, he was still able to notice and appreciate the encounters he had with his grandchild and other people.

### 7.3.3 Attitudinal Values

The most important part of the meaning triad is the attitudinal values which refer to taking a stance towards a situation (Frankl, 2011). Frankl (1984) claimed that everything can be taken away from a man but not the freedom to choose one's attitude towards any given circumstance. Attitudinal values take precedence above all the values, as attitudes determine how humans experience creative and experiential values (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020; Wong, 2014). The actualisation of attitudinal values is evident throughout Tsvangirai's life. For example, he remained determined to attend school, although he had to walk long distances during wartime (Hudleston, 2008). He refused to allow difficult circumstances and challenges to determine his ability to attain education. It shows that he remained resolute (was able to persevere) in his quest despite facing adverse circumstances. Attitudinal values are also evident when he was discouraged from applying for high school admittance (Hudleston, 2008). Tsvangirai actualised the attitudinal values by accepting that the political landscape could not be changed by being passive but actively involved. However, he knew the consequences of being an opposition political party in Zimbabwe. Although he had different views from the ruling party, in 2009, Tsvangirai accepted and worked with them for the sake of the people of Zimbabwe. He was able to turn human suffering into human triumph through the stance he took against the suffering (Wong, 2014).

Tsvangirai's transcendence over his psychobiological suffering reinforces Frankl's assertion that we can choose how to respond to challenging situations.

Although he was able to detach himself from his suffering, he remained concerned about other people's suffering (self-transcendence). The adverse political climate did not deter him from remaining committed to a greater cause (alleviating human suffering) than himself. Thus, Tsvangirai's horrific experiences give credence to logotherapy's basic tenets and ideas, especially courageously facing unavoidable situations.

## 7.4   Tragic Triad

Frankl (1967) noted that human existence is confronted by three inevitable facts, the so-called the tragic triad (suffering, guilt, and death). These facts are evident in Tsvangirai's life.

### 7.4.1   Pain/Suffering

The experience of *suffering/pain* as a human experience was experienced when he herded cattle barefooted, had to walk 16 kilometres to and from school, was subjected to racist remarks, was beaten by the state security forces, unlawful imprisonment, torture, and emotional humiliation (Chitiyo, 2018; Fontein, 2018; Hudleston, 2008). He grew up in an environment that was negative towards Black people. He grew up during a period when he did not have freedom from the circumstances. However, despite the oppression, he continued believing in the ultimate meaning of life:

> It may seem from all this that we were helpless victims of change and oppression. That was not the case at all: beneath the surface, our culture was robust and continued to thrive and survive, along with a strong feeling that an unfolding destiny awaited us. (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, p. 15)

### 7.4.2   Guilt

The second of the tragic triad, *guilt*, was experienced by Tsvangirai when he realised that he was not there for his family; he had put his family in danger because of his involvement in political affairs (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). As fallible beings, we can make mistakes that cause inerasable guilt (Frankl, 1997). Frankl (2012, 2014) indicated that when faced with inerasable guilt, one can decide never to repeat the action that may have caused the guilt by taking a stand against their emotions, which is self-distancing. Tsvangirai took responsibility for not being there for his wife and children due to the kind of work that he performed. He redeemed himself by spending time with them whenever he could. He also took personal responsibility for the remarks that led to his arrest for treason (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

### 7.4.3 Death

Tsvangirai also experienced *loss/death,* the third tragic triad. He lost an opportunity to further his studies due to the low socioeconomic status of his family and wanting his siblings to attend school. He also suffered another loss when his parents separated and his father died (Hudleston, 2008). Furthermore, he experienced indirect loss as his family members lost their employment opportunities and marriages fell apart. After being sworn in as a prime minister, he lost his wife in March 2009, resulting in him losing his emotional support. He was able to actualise the possibilities of the moment by not blaming his adversary for the death of his wife, although he had every reason to believe so. Throughout his career, it appears that he was aware that he might be assassinated at any given time (death awareness) (Fontein, 2018). Frankl noted that the highest meaning of life can be found through the transcendence of the tragic triad. It is striking that within the presence of the tragic triad, he did not lose a sense of life meaning as he remained determined and dedicated to the cause.

## 8 Conclusion

It is evident that Tsvangirai's life themes align with the fundamental triad as he was able to have commitments that transcended his personal struggles. Though he experienced personal suffering, he continued saying *yes* to life (Frankl, 2006, 2012). He was able to choose and take responsibility for his choices in his life. He was also able to strive for and discover meaning through his responsibility to his family when he discontinued schooling so that his siblings could also go to school, being the provider of his family when he started working, and his overall dedication to the Zimbabwean cause. Tsvangirai experienced many challenges in his life. He had many instances of pain and suffering from childhood to late adulthood. However, he was able to transcend the tragic triad to live a meaningful life that was dedicated to a cause and oriented towards other people. Tsvangirai was able to shift emphasis within the three values: from creative values to contemplation of experiential values and having a greater emphasis on attitudinal values. He clearly refused to accept the adverse circumstances as an obstacle through his stance towards those circumstances. Tsvangirai's life proves that life does not lose its meaning potential in spite of the tragic triad.

It is evident that Tsvangirai remained faithful to his beliefs and values. He was able to change his orientation according to his situation. Tsvangirai's life highlights that humans are not helpless victims of their environment, circumstances, instincts, genes, or physical limitations. It is widely believed that people can take a stand against their fate and maintain their dignity because of the defiant power of the human spirit (noetic dimension). The collated information highlights several strategies Tsvangirai used to actualise the meaning of his life. The strategies included a

commitment to serving others, commitment to a cause, encounters with other people and nature, practising his freedom through choices, responsibility, response-ability, and taking a stance against adverse conditions. It is evident that Tsvangirai did not allow external circumstances to control his search for meaning. He was able to choose his attitude towards himself and the situation and go beyond himself to discover the meaning of his life. It is apparent that Tsvangirai endured the torture as these experiences aligned with his beliefs. He also felt significant because he believed he was connected to something larger than himself. His work made a positive and lasting difference in the political landscape of Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai had a goal that gave him a reason to endure adverse experiences and helped him create his identity. He was able to transform his suffering into something more significant. Tsvangirai died as an influential person and significant individual in the political course of Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. His life is a true example of an exemplary sufferer and the defiant power of the human spirit considering the challenges and struggles he faced throughout his life. Tsvangirai was able to transcend the tragic triad and personal interests to benefit the country. He practised his freedom of choice/freedom of will by not allowing the external circumstances to deter him from fulfilling the meaning of his life. Tsvangirai found meaning in his life through self-transcendence, commitment to a cause, formulation and actualisation of goals, and actualisation of the meaning triad (i.e. creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values), taking a stance towards unbearable conditions or circumstances. The study overall concludes that the spiritual (noological) dimension plays an essential role in the personality of individuals. Evidence from this study suggests that self-distancing and self-transcendence are important phenomena in the noetic dimension and can enhance human life. However, a more in-depth analysis of Tsvangirai's life could provide more information about his development and life decisions. Also, this study is limited to pre-defined and selected aspects of Tsvangirai's life and does not account for his entire life experience.

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**Tinashe T. Harry,** Ph.D., is a registered Industrial Psychologist. He holds a MComm and DComm in Industrial Psychology from the University of Fort Hare. He has a keen interest in psychobiographical research, mental health disorders in the workplace, women empowerment, self-initiated expatriates, and graduate employability. He is currently employed by Rhodes University as a Senior Lecturer and a Deputy Head of Department at the Department of Psychology.

**Roelf van Niekerk**   (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial

Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

# The Moral Development of Albertina Sisulu Through Classic, Feminist and Indigenous Southern African Lenses

**Carla Nel and Barbara Burnell**

**Abstract** Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu (née Thethiwe) (1918–2011), popularly referred to as "the Mother of the Nation", was a prominent anti-Apartheid figure. A previous psychobiographical analysis of this nurse and activist demonstrated her concerned and caring nature. Albertina, a Xhosa woman from a rural upbringing, was purposively sampled for this study of morality from western and African perspectives. Based on the increasing complexity of the cognitive processes under-pinning decision-making, Kohlberg's theory of moral development has been criticised for its androcentric, cultural and ideological bias. Therefore, the study of moral development, especially of women or persons outside of the WEIRD context, should consider more diverse theoretical lenses. Gilligan postulated that morality is a matter of caring and compassion, in which moral dilemmas are resolved bearing the social context and human welfare in mind. *Ubuntu,* an indigenous philosophical concept of social ethics embedded in many southern African traditional cultures, is characterised by humanness and a pervasive spirit of caring, community and con-nectedness. The study demonstrates Albertina's moral development from the per-spectives of Kohlberg and Gilligan, with the application of the principles of Ubuntu illuminating the broader social-relational and societal dynamics missing from WEIRD conceptualisations of moral development.

**Keywords** Albertina Sisulu · Moral development · Kohlberg · Gilligan · Ubuntu

C. Nel (✉)
Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
e-mail: nelc@ufs.ac.za

B. Burnell
Independent scholar, Bloemfontein, South Africa
e-mail: barbara.burnell@lantic.net

# 1 Introduction

Through its exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic nature, psychobiography enables the holistic examining of individual lives within sociocultural and historical contexts (Mayer et al., 2021). Traditionally informed by psychological theories derived from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich and Democratic) contexts, the continued development of psychobiography calls for the use of more transcultural research practices. A non-WEIRD understanding of concepts such as morality may serve to augment and enrich mainstream psychological conceptual frameworks and could apply to WEIRD cultural contexts as well (Adjei, 2019; Sodi et al., 2021). This exploration of the moral development of Albertina Sisulu through both western and indigenous lenses aims to facilitate a more transcultural psychological understanding.

# 2 The Sociohistorical Context of Albertina Sisulu

Albertina was born as Nontsikelelo Thethiwe in rural Transkei during the 1918 influenza pandemic, at a time of increasing economic subjugation and political disenfranchisement of Black South Africans (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Sisulu, 2003). Her father, Bonilizwe, was a peasant farmer who worked at the Johannesburg gold mines for half of every year. He later died of a pulmonary disease that afflicted many Black miners. Her mother, Monica, was the daughter of the village headman. The family was wealthier than most in the area and had access to large fields for crops and livestock.

Monica suffered chronic ill health and impaired mobility after her recovery from influenza. Her condition did not improve with herbal remedies, and the family did not have access to western medical care. Subsequently, during Bonilizwe's annual stints at the mines, Monica and the children lived at her parents' home in Xolobe. Here, Albertina would eventually spend most of her time in order to attend school (Sisulu, 2003). As Albertina's grandfather could afford to build rainwater tanks, she did not have to cover long distances to draw water like the other village women. However, she did have other tasks typical to rural life, such as working the fields and carrying bundles of wood home on her head. She also had caregiving duties towards infant or injured siblings, which interrupted her schooling for about 2 years.

At the time of Albertina's birth, only a small percentage of the local Black population had converted to Christianity (Sisulu, 2003). She attended a Presbyterian missionary school, a 45-min walk from their home. On her first day, she picked Albertina from the school's list of Christian names. Hereafter, only her family continued to call her Ntsiki. She and her friends were quite envious of the freedoms the local non-Christian girls enjoyed, who swam wearing only their traditional wire waistbands instead of the petticoats and long bloomers worn by the Christian girls. Traditional Xhosa practices remained central to her upbringing (Sisulu, 2001, 2004),

such as performing as an *umkhapi*[1] during weddings in a traditional short skirt and an assortment of colourful beads around her neck, waving a white flag to guide the procession through the ululating crowd. At the time, both Xhosa tradition and Christian norms culminated in the widespread acceptance of *ukuhlolwa*[2] (Sisulu, 2003).

Despite difficulties caused by her interrupted schooling, Albertina eventually secured a scholarship to attend a Catholic secondary school. Thereafter, she started her training as a nurse in the section for African patients of a hospital in the highly segregated urban landscape of Johannesburg (Sisulu, 2003). This segregation in South Africa was formalised into Apartheid through numerous pieces of legislation by the end of the 1940s, severely restricting the movement and limiting the human rights of the disenfranchised and oppressed majority (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007). Albertina married political activist and African National Congress (ANC)[3] member Walter Sisulu. Their lives involved a series of profound personal sacrifices in service of the anti-apartheid struggle (Downing & Hastings-Tolsma, 2016; Sisulu, 2004). She became the sole breadwinner for their household, which by 1957 included their seven children, as well as those of relatives. She tended to crops in her garden in an effort to feed everyone at home (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). After participating in the 1952 defiance campaign,[4] Albertina became an increasingly powerful political figure (Sisulu, 2004). She assumed leadership positions and was one of the organisers of the 1956 Women's March.[5] Walter and Nelson Mandela formed the armed wing of the ANC in 1961, after which surveillance and raids on their home by the apartheid police, and lengthy detentions for both Albertina and Walter, became regular occurrences. After Walter's imprisonment in 1963, Albertina continued to provide for the family on a nurse's salary. She helped to keep communication in the underground liberation struggle alive, facing periods of detention, house arrests, and banning orders (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). Elected as co-president of the United Democratic Front (UDM), Albertina focused on securing international support for the movement by leading a delegation to Europe and the USA in the 1980s. The last of the restrictions on the Sisulu's were lifted with the unbanning of the ANC and Walter's subsequent release from Robben Island in 1989 (Sisulu, 2001, 2003, 2004).

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[1] Maid of honour.

[2] Periodic virginity inspections that started at puberty and continued until the eve of a woman's wedding.

[3] The ANC became the dominant force in the anti-apartheid movement, collaborating with other political groups. It operated underground during its banning and became the governing party of South Africa with the 1994 election (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

[4] An organised protest during which groups of volunteers across South Africa contravened apartheid laws, such as breaking curfew and using facilities designated for whites only (Walker, 1991).

[5] A total of 20,000 women marched peacefully to Pretoria's Union Buildings to present a petition against the carrying of passes by Black women (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007).

**Table 1** Kohlberg's stages of moral development

| Phases | Stages | Summative description (Kohlberg, 1984) |
|---|---|---|
| *Pre-conventional morality* | 1 | Following rules to avoid being punished by authority figures. Obedience is upheld for its own sake |
| | 2 | Concrete individualistic perspective: pursuing own interests in a world where others are understood to do the same |
| *Conventional morality* | 3 | Safeguarding reciprocal relationships through interpersonal conformity |
| | 4 | Maintaining broader social systems from which they can benefit |
| *Post-conventional morality* | 5 | Awareness of a variety of values, with non-relative values held as superior to those relative to one's social group |
| | 6 | Awareness of potential conflicts between law and morality. Consideration of legal and moral points of view. Making and keeping laws that protect individual rights and interests and for the welfare of all |

## 3 Theoretical Perspectives on Morality

*Lawrence Kohlberg* developed a model of moral development as an extension of the earlier propositions of Piaget (Kohlberg, 1984). In a longitudinal study, Kohlberg and Gibbs analysed the responses of 58 boys to hypothetical moral dilemmas. This resulted in the formulation of qualitatively distinct stages of moral development (Krebs & Denton, 2005) that retained Piaget's focus on cognitive structures and the use of reasoning about justice. Kohlberg noted that the responses of his young subjects followed an inner logic, far removed from adult expectations and contained clear underlying patterns of construction, validating the use of stages to account for qualitative differences occurring in development. These tentatively termed *ideal moral orientation types* were then empirically validated as developmental stages through cross-gender and cross-cultural longitudinal studies (Kohlberg, 1984). Kohlberg's theory rests on the increasing complexity of the cognitive processes that underpin moral decision-making, which he classified into phases and stages, summarised in Table 1.

Kohlberg's propositions have drawn considerable criticism for emphasising reason and cognitive processes (Arnold, 2000; Vitz, 1994). Researchers noted a neglect of the extent to which personality traits and behavioural habits, as well as affective and social processes and mechanisms (Arnold, 2000; Krebs & Denton, 2005; Vitz, 1994) are involved in moral decision-making. Although Kohlberg's propositions were frequently subjected to his revisionist spirit, "the strength of his commitment to reason as the core of morality never wavered" (Arnold, 2000, p. 367). Kohlberg (1984) argued that the cognitive definition of a moral judgement underpins any moral, emotional experience, such as guilt. He proposed that emotional experiences in situations that evoke moral judgements are determined by the socially communicated symbolic definition that results from the individual's inner logic, therefore proposing that the moral emotion is a consequence of, rather than a process within, moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1984). Furthermore, Kohlberg's model

accounts for developmental changes in the ability to provide reasoned moral arguments. However, it does little to describe or predict people's moral behaviours in their day-to-day lives, as it is: ". . .derived from people's capacity to offer rational justifications in ideal contexts for nonconsequential choices about how fictional characters should solve hypothetical moral dilemmas" (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p. 646).

Despite Kohlberg's addition of cross-gender and cross-cultural studies (Kohlberg, 1984), potential gender, cultural and ideological bias has been identified (Vitz, 1994). Critics have noted an overrepresentation of western liberal social and political ideology in his original conceptualisation of moral judgements (Vitz, 1994). Partly as a result of his exclusively male sample, the theory demonstrated an androcentric bias in its reliance on values of rationalism, individualism, and liberalism to the exclusion of values such as mercy, empathy and care, in its conceptualisation of moral maturity (Gilligan, 1977, 1993; Vitz, 1994).

As a student of Kohlberg's, Carol Gilligan coded numerous of his interviews and observed that many women's responses did not fit into Kohlberg's categories. Their responses seemed to introduce an entirely different approach and a different conceptual outline to morality than men—a morality of care (Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). Gilligan maintained that Kohlberg's theory systematically excluded alternative criteria that may better explain their moral development and criticised his findings of developmental inferiority of women ". . . due to the standard by which development was measured rather than women's thinking per se" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 489). This resulted in Gilligan's own research on the relationship between moral judgement and action. She included two real-life scenarios: (1) an abortion decision study and (2) a moral dilemma and decision study on college students (Gilligan, 1977, 1993, 2018). Gilligan (1977) found that the ". . .conventions that shaped women's moral judgements differ from those applied to men" (p. 492). Her alternative conception of moral development did not focus on abstract, rational principles such as justice and respect for the rights of others (Gilligan, 1977, 1993, 2018). Instead, it emphasised women's view of morality as a matter of caring and compassion and their tendency to resolve moral issues bearing relationships, the social context and general human well-being in mind:

> The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but by theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women's voices that I trace its development. . . the contrast between male and female voices are presented. . . to highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus on a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex (Gilligan, 1993, p. 2).

In her findings, the language employed to describe moral development is the language of selfishness and responsibility and defines the moral dilemma as an obligation to show compassion and care and avoid hurt while also bearing the social context and interpersonal relationships and connections in mind (Blum, 1988; Gilligan, 1977, 2018). Gilligan proposed three levels and two transitional phases in her theory of moral development, as summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2** Gilligan's levels of moral development

| Levels & transitions | Summative description (Gilligan, 1977, 1993) |
|---|---|
| Level 1:<br>*Orientation to individual survival* | The self is the object of concern and the individual is oriented to individual survival |
| Transition 1:<br>*From selfishness to a sense of responsibility to others* | Conflict arises between choosing what is good for the individual and choosing the responsible action. Social connection and participation is the focus, with survival seen as dependent on societal acceptance |
| Level 2:<br>*'Goodness' as sacrifice* | Self-sacrifice is seen as an indication of 'being good'. Concern for others predominates at this level. The infliction of hurt is seen as selfish and immoral, while the expression of care is considered moral (Gilligan, 1977, 2018) |
| Transition 2:<br>*From 'goodness' to truth* | The notion of self-sacrifice is examined, and a shift in the criterion for judgement from 'goodness' to truth occurs. Individuals need to integrate the contradiction between harm and care. Actions are judged for their morality and not in terms of the appearance of the actions, but rather in the realities of the intentions and consequences |
| Level 3:<br>*Morality of non-violence* | Requires reconciliation of the disparate concepts of selfishness and responsibility as well as integration of responsibility towards self and others not to cause harm. Non-violence, as the injunction against hurting and harm, is elevated to the principle governing all moral judgement. Care becomes a universal obligation and ethical stance that allows individuals to take responsibility for their choices and decisions |

The care perspective introduced by Gilligan's research indicates that there are alternative ways in which individuals of both genders may organise moral perspectives and define and resolve moral conflicts (Gilligan, 2018). Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) emphasised that neither the care perspective nor Kohlberg's justice perspective should be considered as superior to the other, but rather as complementary. Gilligan's work does not suggest the replacement of the impartial, justice orientation with the care perspective to morality, but rather suggests that mature morality may involve a complex interaction between the impartial, justice orientation and the care perspectives (Blum, 1988).

Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories both hail from the WEIRD theoretical context. However, in transcultural research, researchers should acknowledge that the "cultural world view that informs the WEIRD psychological frame of reference is substantially different from African ideas, practices, issues and social thought" (Adjei, 2019, p. 485). Therefore, "understanding the African sense of personhood... and moral thinking is fundamental to the methodological, ontological and epistemological considerations of not only the scientific discipline of African psychology but of psychology in general" (Adjei, 2019, p. 490).

Ubuntu[6] is an indigenous southern African concept that goes beyond the justice orientation of Kohlberg, sharing the care perspective of Gilligan's theory but within a broader societal context. It emphasises the interconnectedness of the individual-community relationship and may serve as an alternative conceptual framework to describe people, actions, behaviours and systems (Adjei, 2019). Ubuntu is a multi-faceted philosophical concept of social ethics and morality with decency and humanity at its core (Adjei, 2019; Oppenheim, 2012; Sodi et al., 2021). It is characterised by qualities such as humanness, kindness, compassion, gentleness, empathy, a sense of belonging and a pervasive spirit of community, generosity and caring (Battle, 2009; Mangaliso, 2001; Oppenheim, 2012; Sodi et al., 2021; Tutu, 2000). Ubuntu also values benevolence, reciprocity and humility (Abubakre et al., 2021) as well as taking a keen interest in the well-being of others (Adjei, 2019).

While Ubuntu relates to the person–community relationship, it is also a descriptive concept used to characterise a person. A person who is open, available and affirming of others, whilst remaining unthreatened by the ability or goodness of others, has Ubuntu: "for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished. . ." (Tutu, 2000, p. 35). Ubuntu is a spiritual ideal and guide to behaviour (Oppenheim, 2012) that is clearly not an automatic or inevitable process (Tutu, 2000). Instead, similar to the western theoretical conceptualisation of moral development, Ubuntu relies on the developmental processes of decision-making and moral behaviour in a given situation.

## 4   Methodology

### 4.1   Psychobiographical Subject

Albertina Sisulu was purposively sampled as previous psychobiographical enquiry (Burnell & Nel, 2021) confirmed Albertina's suitability as a subject to explore morality from WEIRD and non-WEIRD perspectives. This study used a eugraphic[7] focus to examine the moral development of a deceased public figure. Also, there was no intention of denigrating the subject, complying with an ethical consideration proposed by Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017).

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[6] From the Zulu expression *umuntu ngi umuntu nga bantu* (Sodi et al., 2021); can be translated as 'a person is a person because of other people' (Sodi et al., 2021; Tutu, 2000) or 'I am because we are' (Adjei, 2019; Oppenheim, 2012).

[7] Eugraphic psychobiography focuses on optimal human development and adaptation to life stressors (Burnell et al., 2019).

## 4.2    Data Collection, Extraction and Analysis

Biographical information was identified and sourced electronically and included biographies, journal articles, as well as published interviews and newspaper articles. Additionally, in line with the ethical recommendations (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), data collection consisted of only publicly available material, preventing revealing sensitive or potentially distressing information. The authors extracted the most relevant biographical data through two strategies: a) applying saliency indicators and b) posing questions to the data to uncover examples of the subject's morality (Alexander, 1988). These two strategies served to increase the trustworthiness and rigour of the study. The propositions of the three theoretical perspectives were then applied to the extracted data. This was done with the aim of analytical generalisation, as described by Yin (2018). The findings of this study should be seen in light of the inherent limitations of a single case study design and psychobiographical methodology.

## 5    Findings and Discussion

This section will present the application of the western and indigenous perspectives on morality to the salient biographical data on Albertina Sisulu's life.

## 5.1    Era 1: Obeying the Rules

Kohlberg and Gilligan's descriptions of early morality share similar features and concerns. During Kohlberg's first stage, moral judgements centre on following rules and avoiding punishment (Kohlberg, 1984). Gilligan's first level acknowledges the focus on individual survival during this time as the individual experiences a lack of agency and power, and morality is perceived as "sanctions imposed by society of which the individual is more a subject than a citizen" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 496). The biographical data indicates that Albertina's morality as a child matches the theoretical propositions of Kohlberg's (1984) *pre-conventional morality* and Gilligan's (1977, 1993) first level of morality. For example, she was a well-behaved, serious-minded student who acted as a disciplinarian, chastising peers for moral transgressions, such as laughing at the uneducated children in the community (Sisulu, 2003). Albertina unquestioningly obeyed rules and practices such as *ukuhlolwa*. The only mention of a rule transgression in the data was her secretly wearing a traditional wire waistband, for which she was severely beaten when it snagged her petticoat (Sisulu, 2003). Kohlberg also proposed little differentiation between the perspectives and interests of the self and of authority figures (Kohlberg, 1984). Albertina admired her teacher "to the point of hero-worship" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 49), instilling in her a desire

to also become a teacher. She later credited her with imparting the importance of modelling Christian values (Sisulu, 2003). Albertina's dreams of a future career reflected Kohlberg's second-stage reasoning (a concrete and individualistic focus in the pursuit of one's own interests). Albertina dutifully interrupted her schooling to help take care of newborns in the family and when her youngest sister sustained serious burn injuries (Sisulu, 2003). In line with Gilligan's proposed first transition, an orientation to individual survival would now be criticised as selfish (Gilligan, 1993). Albertina's school years were typified by self-sacrifice. It correlates with this transition, marked by conflicts between choosing what is good for the self, versus choosing the responsible action, followed by integrating responsibility and care (Gilligan, 1977).

Young Albertina's social context and the roles she had to adopt facilitated the development of values associated with the spirit of Ubuntu (e.g., care, compassion, kindness, gentleness and empathy). The data suggested that she experienced a sense of an integral belonging to her extended family through her sacrifices. The Ubuntu perspective emphasises the importance of social roles and responsibilities for moral development during this age range, which was absent from Kohlberg's propositions of pre-conventional morality. The data suggested that Albertina's first transition (in Gilligan's framework) possibly occurred at an earlier age than what one would typically expect of a child in a WEIRD context.

## 5.2   Era 2: Her Calling

The application of Kohlberg's (1984) theoretical propositions to the biographical data suggests that Albertina made the transition to conventional morality during her career decision-making process. Her choices also reflect that she entered Gilligan's (1977) second level of morality. During Kohlberg's proposition of *conventional* morality, the dominant motivation behind moral decisions centres on being seen as a good person by the self and others (Kohlberg, 1984). According to Gilligan's description of level 2, self-sacrifice is seen as an indication of 'being good', and moral judgement relies on shared values, expectations and social norms (Gilligan, 1993). The responsible and self-sacrificing role of carer that she adopted from an early age may have contributed to her continued experience of herself as a 'good' person. Despite being head girl and achieving academic success, Albertina was disqualified from the bursary she needed to access secondary schooling due to her interrupted school attendance (Sisulu, 2003). She was, however, persistent in her efforts and obtained a scholarship to a prestigious boarding school (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). Albertina gladly and dutifully met the requirements of her board and lodging at secondary school by staying behind during many school holidays to work in the fields and the laundry room. After converting to Catholicism, she renounced any romantic interest to focus on her education and faith and dreamed of being a nun (Sisulu, 2003). Inspired by the nuns who taught her, she also started in-service training in the school's offices. However, she soon discovered that being a nun

conflicted with her earlier vow[8] to her father. When she learned that this would make it impossible for her to provide for her family, she instead enrolled as a trainee nurse (Sisulu, 2003). According to Gilligan (1977, 2018), the infliction of hurt or 'harm' is seen as selfish and immoral, while the expression of care is considered moral at this level. Albertina resolved her dilemma by opting for the continued sacrifice of her own interests to avoid harm towards her family, demonstrating Gilligan's second level of morality.

When her uncle, her guardian at the time, arranged that she marry a young law graduate, she rejected the arrangement, plainly stating: "I had my own plan" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 56), her first overt defiance of authority. This was driven by her distrust that a husband would accept her commitments, as these would traditionally fall on the shoulders of her older brother. Therefore, Albertina's decisions and motivations fit with the descriptions of Kohlberg's (1984) fourth stage, as it involves being motivated by one's conscience to meet obligations, uphold laws, and fulfil duties as determined by one's place within the system. This correlates with Gilligan's proposition that a concern for others predominates at this level. A person seeks to validate their claim to social membership by accepting and adopting social values, defining their self-worth in relation to the care for and protection of others (Gilligan, 1977). However, "...when no option exists that can be construed as being in the best interest of everyone, when responsibilities conflict and decision entails the sacrifice of somebody's needs, then the woman confronts the seemingly impossible task of choosing the victim" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 496). Often the woman chooses herself, due to the other-oriented concern of this level. This is demonstrated by Albertina's many acts of self-sacrifice to fulfil obligations to her family. It could thus be seen as a striving to validate her worth through a role as caregiver and provider.

The findings for this biographical era in Albertina's life correlate with the description of social morality according to the framework of Ubuntu. Albertina's choices and actions demonstrated continued development of the values of Ubuntu, such as generosity, compassion and empathy and a pervasive spirit of community. She was typified by caring and benevolence. Albertina demonstrated both a keen interest in the well-being of her loved ones and a sense of belonging in her family and immediate social context. According to Tutu (2000), personifying the principles of Ubuntu develops a person's sense of self-assurance and self-worth, which is closely linked to a sense of belonging to a greater whole. This is consistent with Kohlberg's description of conventional morality (1984), as it also acknowledges the importance of social perspective during that stage. The findings from the Ubuntu perspective also correlate with the continued emphasis of the social context in Gilligan's (1977) theory.

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[8] At the age of 11, Albertina's dying father broke with cultural convention by asking her to promise to take care of her younger siblings: "It could not have been easy for my elder brother who was standing next to me, but I resolved that day that I would honour my father's trust in me" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 35).

## 5.3   Era 3: Political Awakening and Life-Long Activism

The biographical data on Albertina's adulthood reflect a growing capacity for post-conventional moral reasoning, described by Kohlberg (1984) as the awareness of a variety of values and the appreciation of the influence of one's social group on the establishment of those values. The individual begins to place non-relative values, such as *life* and *liberty*, in a superior position (Kohlberg, 1984). Albertina enrolled as a trainee nurse, where she "took to nursing like a duck to water" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 86). Albertina's training exposed her to life in a racially segregated setting and her first personal encounters with racism. Albertina once had to nurse Black mass casualty victims on the floor of an overcrowded ward after they were denied emergency treatment in the largely empty European section of the hospital. This conflicted with her ethical awareness and her perception of healthcare workers' sacred duty "to do everything possible to preserve life" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 83). Her powerlessness towards the immorality of a segregated system may have resulted in a moral injury for Albertina. This time in her life correlated with the second transition described in Gilligan's (1977) theory. This requires a shift in the criterion for judgement from 'goodness' through self-sacrifice to that of truth. As such, actions are judged for their morality not in terms of the appearance of the actions in the eyes of others but rather in the realities of the intentions and consequences of actions (Gilligan, 1977, 1993). The data on this incident also correlates with Kohlberg's (1984) description of the post-conventional stage as an awareness of potential conflicts between law and morality. Her awareness of this would find validation and expression through her relationship with the politically active Walter Sisulu. Originally, she and Walter only shared the "desire to build a stable home not only for their own children but for the extended family as well. . . Walter was generous to a fault. . . A woman less generous and more materially-minded than Albertina would probably have lost all patience with him" (Sisulu, 2004, p. 102). Albertina was initially the conventional wife and mother, with only a supportive role in Walter's political life (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). As her sense of personal agency grew through her increased political involvement, the image of the "smiling and pleasant wife" (Kuzwayo, 1985, p. 245) in the background began to change (Sisulu, 2004). According to Gilligan (1993), the essence of the moral decision includes (1) valuing of the self as well as others, (2) claiming and asserting the power of choice and (3) accepting responsibility and accountability for the choices made. She added that if a person sees ". . .themselves as having no choice, they correspondingly excuse themselves from the responsibility that decision entails" (p. 67). Data suggests that Albertina both exercised choice and accepted responsibility for her choices. She became the family's sole breadwinner and a strict disciplinarian, unwavering in her determination to instil a strong work ethic in her children, earning her the nickname *Bhubesi*[9] (Sisulu, 2003). Albertina also became an increasingly powerful figure in the political arena after the Defiance Campaign (Sisulu, 2001, 2004). As the

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[9]*Bhubesi* means lion.

anti-Apartheid struggle gained momentum, police raids and intimidation became a frequent occurrence at the Sisulu residence, with policemen searching their home for ANC documents, trampling Albertina's "well-tended garden with their heavy boots" (Sisulu, 2003, p. 125). The couple remained resolute and began to prepare for Walter's inevitable detention if the movement was to have any chance of challenging Apartheid laws (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). Albertina's commitment to the national liberation struggle to enhance Black South Africans' welfare and individual rights by opposing legislated segregation and oppression by White minority rule (Sisulu, 2003) reflects the post-conventional decision-making that underpins Kohlberg's (1984) last phase of morality. The remainder of her life remained dedicated to both her work as a nurse and to the cause. As a professional nurse-midwife, Albertina provided care, often on foot, to the community of Soweto.[10] After her shifts, she facilitated communication between the imprisoned, exiled and underground members. She helped arrange safe passage out of the country for those seeking education or military training. These tasks relied on the deception of the security police and were executed under constant threat of harm and relentless persecution (Sisulu, 2001, 2003). She demonstrated deep concern for the welfare of not only her family, but also the broader community of Black South Africans fighting for liberation, occasionally resulting in conflictual commitments. During her detentions, concerns over her children's welfare and care resulted in deep distress and near despair. During her detention under the notorious 90-day act,[11] Albertina stated that it was out of concern for her family that she could not betray the struggle by providing the information that could secure her release (Sisulu, 2003). The data at this stage of Albertina's life correlates with the final level in Gilligan's theory, which proposes that the responsibility of care is extended to both the self and others and the obligation not to cause harm is freed from conventional constraints and becomes the universal guide in moral choosing (Gilligan, 1977). Experienced as a caring leader, she became known as the Mother of the Nation (Downing & Hastings-Tolsma, 2016) and served in different formal leadership roles later in her life. These included the first co-President of the UDM, one of the founders of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA), and as Member of Parliament after the fall of Apartheid (Seggie, 2011).

Albertina's early expression of care, responsibility and sacrifice in her family of origin easily translated to her expression of the principles of Ubuntu in her nursing and political careers and served as a strong driving force behind her "sense of responsibility for the sacred duty of caring for others" (Downing & Hastings-Tolsma, 2016, p. 223). The Sisulu couple's lifestyle and choices to care and support clearly epitomised the spirit of Ubuntu, with significant sacrifices 'for the greater good'. According to the philosophy of Ubuntu, a person "belongs in a greater whole

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[10]A large and densely populated urban area near Johannesburg, whose name was derived from South Western Townships.

[11]According to Walker (1991), the General Laws Amendment Act (No 76 of 1962) gave increased powers to the State to detain persons for 90 days without charging them.

and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished. . ." (Tutu, 2000, p. 35). Albertina's leadership roles within her family and community as well as the contributions she made to the broader liberation struggle could have provided her with the self-assurance that she belonged to a greater whole. The findings indicate that the full realisation of the principles of Ubuntu coincided in Albertina's life with the attainment of mature moral development as suggested by the theories of both Kohlberg (1984) and Gilligan (1977).

## 6   Conclusion

Nelson Mandela identified certain internal qualities as crucial in assessing one's development as a human being: "Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others—qualities which are within easy reach of every soul—are the foundation of one's spiritual life" (Mandela, 2010, p. 211). Albertina's life exemplified these characteristics and indicated maturity in her moral development, impacted by both cultural and western religious influences. It is difficult to pigeonhole a multifaceted woman such as Albertina Sisulu as representing solely a non-WEIRD context. While strongly rooted in her African culture and fiercely loyal to the anti-Apartheid cause, she was also greatly influenced by Westernised education and training. Such tensions may exist between WEIRD and non-WEIRD contexts, and there may be broad differences between the experiences of subjects from developing countries. The dichotomy presented by Albertina as a non-WEIRD subject reinforces the need to include complementary perspectives of all influences when examining and attempting to understand subjects from non-WEIRD contexts.

WEIRD and non-WEIRD theoretical approaches offer complementary perspectives. In this study, the two western theories contained the values associated with the WEIRD context, including those that only gained psychological relevance following Gilligan's (1993) feminist interpretation of western ideals. The use of Kohlberg's (1984) theory highlighted the role of the value of liberalism in the development of her moral decision-making on the life of Albertina Sisulu. Applying Gilligan's (1977, 1993) theory brought the socio-relational values of empathy and care into focus. However, a truly holistic and transcultural description of the moral development of Albertina Sisulu is only possible with the consideration of the indigenous concept of Ubuntu. This results in the centrality of the values of humanity and dignity in morality, extending the investment in the well-being of others from the interpersonal sphere to the broader society and future generations. Combining WEIRD and indigenous understandings to the notion of morality thus expanded its conceptualisation from an individualistic (*Kohlberg*) to a socially interconnected (*Gilligan*) and, ultimately, a collective (*Ubuntu*) framework.

It is recommended that transcultural approaches continue to be used to enable eugraphic researchers to better understand optimal development in various contexts and from a variety of frameworks. Morality represents but one aspect in multiple

psychological domains and constructs. Future psychobiographers could use the Ubuntu perspective to investigate other constructs holistically and uncover the influences and impact on the lives of subjects in non-WEIRD contexts. This may serve to expand current theoretical conceptualisations to more transcultural psychological understandings.

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**Carla Nel**, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. She completed her PhD (Clinical Psychology) in the field of psychobiography. She acts as a research supervisor to post-graduate scholars undertaking life history research and continues to pursue psychobiographical research projects.

**Barbara Burnell**, (PhD), is a clinical psychologist in private practice. She completed her doctoral dissertation in the field of psychobiography.

# Part II
# European Contexts

# "Impressionen Unter Druck": A Psychobiography of Leni Riefenstahl

**James L. Kelley**

**Abstract**  The chapter uses the methods of psychobiography and object relations theory to conduct a single-case study of the life and loves of German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003). Leni's childhood home was dominated by her father, who had to be cajoled, and sometimes outright deceived, into supporting his daughter's desire to enter a career in the performing arts. Unfortunately, Leni's success was often her worst enemy: Just as she evaded her father Albert's censorious glance, so did she avoid the barbs of German film critics by gaining Adolph Hitler as her patron until the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945. At this time, Leni lost not only her marriage and her film career, but even her sanity, if only for a short time. The chapter shows, through a Fairbairnian analysis, how Leni adapted to the disaster that was her early career by reinventing herself as a photographer of African tribes. Also, in her romantic life, she changed tacks. Compared with her late-in-life companion Horst Kettner, Leni's early romances were relatively shallow because her counterpart was either too involved in promoting her career (Harry Sokal) or too far removed from her working life (Peter Jacob).

**Keywords**  Psychobiography · Leni Riefenstahl · Ronald Fairbairn · Object relations theory · Women's studies

## 1   Introduction

As a woman filmmaker in 1930s Berlin, Leni Riefenstahl found herself doubly alienated. In 1932, when she helmed her first film, she was one of the few woman directors in the world, and certainly the first to gain international renown (Simkin, 2020). But being the only woman in a boys' club was just one aspect of Leni's marginalization: After the Nazis came to power in 1933, she had also to worry about highly-placed Nazi figures who were jealous of her supposed influence over Adolf

J. L. Kelley (✉)
Independent Researcher, Norman, USA

**Table 1** Leni's key relationships

|  | Pivotal Male | Advantage Sought | Adaptational Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| Early Phase | Alfred Riefenstahl | Authorization | Intra-familial splitting |
| Middle Phase | Adolf Hitler | Patronage | Socio-cultural splitting |
| Late Phase | Horst Kettner | Mutual support | Tactical reframing or limited reparation of familial and sociocultural splits |

Hitler (Bach, 2007; Trimborn, 2007). After the end of the Second World War, Leni was far from out of the woods. She endured many hardships that surrounded her denazification process, including time spent in a psychiatric facility to recover from exhaustion, after which she went through a painful divorce from her husband Peter Jacob (Riefenstahl, 1993). From 1946 until her death in 2003, Leni was effectively blacklisted from the global film industry (Riefenstahl, 1993; Scuba Dives, 2002).

This chapter takes a view of Leni Riefenstahl's life, not from the outside-in, as it were, but rather from the inside-out. It focuses first on the intimate relationships, those within the nuclear family, and then branch out to consider the wider concentric circles: Leni's lovers, collaborators, and patrons. Each of these intimate relationships will be presented as an offering of some desired commodity to Leni, the having of which required Leni to adapt her actions accordingly (Table 1).

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Fairbairnian Object Relations: The "Cathectic Conduit"

Though precursors have been suggested (Bonomi, 2004; Ticho, 1978), object relations theory is widely acknowledged to have begun around 1921, when Melanie Klein began to psychoanalyze children in Berlin (Frank, 2009; Karas, 1986). Klein's observations led her to theorize that children "have a fantasy that they create a world within themselves by 'swallowing' parts of the external world" as building blocks for the construction of a world of "inner objects" (Caper, 1988). These internal objects serve a two-fold purpose for the child: (1) they directly constitute or concretize the child's intuition that she is a unique embodied entity that abides in and interacts with an outside world (Hinshelwood, 1994, and (2) they indirectly realize the child's ability to experience her emotions as real (Klein, 1946). While Anna Freud and others followed classical Freudian theory in denying children the capacity to form a transference (King & Steiner, 1990), Klein believed that, not only children, but even newborns operate with an inner world of objects (the first and most important being the mother's breast) that are actively split into separate psychic compartments (Klein, 1955). Each internal object was severed into a good object and a bad object. At a later stage of organization, the child feels grief over any aggression

she may have shown toward the mother as bad object (Klein, 1952). However, according to Klein, this sense that the primal object has been injured is universal and actually opens up a space for mature interpersonal relations based upon humility and forgiveness (Klein, 1957).

Ronald Fairbairn read Klein's work enthusiastically and even interacted with her personally beginning in 1934 (Padel, 2014). The two were not merely colleagues; rather, Fairbairn and Klein incorporated significant concepts from each other's published work (Clarke & Scharff, 2014). But Klein's emphasis on the self's guilt over aggressive projection contrasts with Fairbairn's introjection-centered model of the self as being split between a more calculated outer shell that interfaces with the environment and an isolated inner core whose rawer, more unfiltered content is less able to establish links with the outside world (Rodríguez-Sutil, 2014). In any case, the core of Kleinian-Fairbairnian object relations is the notion of a "mouth ego" (Fairbairn, 1940). The infant's first and most crucial relationship centers upon her point of contact with the nurturing mother, what we might term the nipple-mouth nexus. Fairbairn notes that the child is not only taking in food in the original "sucking situation" (Fairbairn, 1940), but she is also discovering her primary model for how emotions are to be experienced (Sutherland, 1989).

The fundamental problem of psychic life, as originally set down by Freud's ego psychology, which he articulated after 1914, is how to relate and adapt to the environment while keeping intact a sense of the reality of one's internal world (Fine, 2014; Sutherland, 1989). The earliest object relations theories of Klein and Fairbairn elaborate upon Freud's ego psychological work by underscoring two decisive dichotomies that crosscut the inner world of the feeding infant: (1) taking life substance versus giving life substance (Kelley, 2021a), and (2) attraction to the primary object versus repulsion against the primary object (Kelley, 2021b). Sucking the life-giving milk from the mother leaves the child with a sense of emptiness since she cannot reverse the flow and return the gift to the primary object (Fairbairn, 1940). This is a problem that cannot be solved with a facile technical maneuver, such as that of an amoeba that, once being pierced by another amoeba's pilus, forces a backflow of genetic material back through the urethral "mating bridge" (Singleton & Sainsbury, 2006) into the intruder's cell wall (Kelley, 2019). Rather, the human child must take a psychic detour through the emotions she is experiencing and those she perceives the mother to be experiencing. Fairbairn followed Melanie Klein in envisioning the mother's nipple as a kind of reverse mouth, a protrusion designed to fit to the child's lips, the latter being a concave inversion of the convex nipple (Fairbairn, 1940, 1941; Soto-Crespo, 2001).

## 2.2 Authorization, Patronage, Mutuality: A Tripartite View of Interpersonal Relations

### 2.2.1 Authorization

Unlike the young of innumerable other life forms, the human infant is totally dependent upon its parents and other caregivers for the fulfillment of its physical and psychic needs (Small, 1998). As the child develops, she gains the ability to move around freely and to make tentative judgments about her situation and her future (Stern, 1985). At each juncture, however, the child requires authorization, which can be defined as a spoken or unspoken sanction for actions and thoughts granted by a parent (or other authority) to a dependent (Schore, 1991). The key to authorization is its "double-bind" (Bateson et al., 1956) character: Any possible independent action on the child's part is always already framed by the authority's previous command (Kelley, 2021a). After all, the word "authority" derives from the Latin *auctor*, meaning "producer," or "he that brings about the existence of [something], or by his efforts gives greater permanence or continuance to it" (Lewis & Short, 1958).

### 2.2.2 Patronage

Institutions and other groups or individuals that can guide those coming-of-age into a productive career can be said to be patrons. The patron, in the object relations sense which I am defining it, is a father figure (the Middle English *patron* is derived from the Latin *pater*) who assists the neophyte in gaining entrance to the wider, extra-familial sphere of commerce and vocation (Booth, 1835). The patron steps into the void created by the young person's exit from direct parental control and decouples the authorization phase's yoking of emotional or vocational production from the potentially stifling intimacy of the parent. Researchers from Freud down to the present day have noticed that adolescent girls are especially prone to a parental decoupling crisis (Winn, 2000), and Leni Riefenstahl was no exception, as we will see. The patron is interested in the product (the young adult's artistic or vocational output) at least as much as the producer (the young adult per se), whereas the parental authority is more invested in the child as a dependent person, rather than in the child as an extra-familial cathectic trailblazer. The adult who secures patronage has, in one respect, reversed the cathectic flow, in that she is no longer simply receiving the authorizing anti-cathexis of the parent, but has succeeded in directing her energy toward the wider world of society, work, and achievement. Usually, the early adult who has been initiated into society by the patron takes on a more adaptive, practical mode of thinking that contrasts starkly with the more idealistic and anti-parental adolescent thought pattern (Sinnott, 1998).

### 2.2.3 Mutuality

However, most adults will not be fulfilled by work alone, and thus the non-familial, less intimate support that accompanies patronage will find its counterweight in an intimate, usually romantic, relationship that is nourished by a core of mutual love or cathexis (Freud, 1914; Miyawaki, 2012). Often this partnership will be fulfilled in marriage, but it can also become manifest in close friendships or business partnerships that integrate vocational achievement with the intimacy of "interindividual cathexis" (Wolman, 1984).

The three-stage developmental model we are proposing takes up classical Freudian concepts such as cathexis (Ornston, 1985) and drive vicissitude (Freud, 1915) and tinctures them with object relations notions of dependence (Ainsworth, 1969) and reparation (Klein, 1957). Instead of the classical model of self-cathexis, wherein an original id-based cathexis is balanced by a parental anti-cathexis to form a robust, reality-testing ego (Meissner, 2008), the model starts with a parental anti-cathexis (the parents as the penile-nipple or conduit of life substance), which is countered by reversing the flow of this cathexis by means of vocational or commercial collaboration with the patron. The third stage is the integration, through an intimate romantic or professional relationship, of the centripetal force of the parental relation with the centrifugal force of the patron–client relation.

## 3   Methodology

The present writing is a single-case study of the life and career of actress and filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl that follows mainstream psychobiographical theory in its use of primary and secondary sources by and about the subject to find resonances between psychological theory and the known facts surrounding the case (Kőváry, 2011; Mayer & May, 2019; Schultz, 2017). These fact-theory echoes are evaluated hermeneutically, so that each new piece of information is seen as a possible confirmation (or challenge) to the proposed theory and vice versa (Mayer & Kelley, 2021).

## 4   Findings

### 4.1   Childhood

Leni Riefenstahl was born Helene Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl on 22 August 1902 in Berlin (Trimborn, 2007). Her father Alfred, having made the difficult leap from plumber to heating-and-air contractor (Wieland, 2015), wished to bring up his daughter according to the prudish standards of a nouveau bourgeois (Knopp,

2003). Alfred met Leni's mother Bertha (née Scherlack) at "a fancy-dress party" (Riefenstahl, 1993), and both shared a great fondness for theater and the performing arts (Wallace, 1975). It was assumed that Leni would grow up to either work for the family firm or enter into the business world in some other acceptable capacity. But the drabness of this expected path contrasted starkly with the excitement Leni felt toward the musical, literary, and athletic pursuits her parents encouraged in the household (Berg-Pan, 1980). Alfred, who ruled his family with an iron fist, threatened divorce when Bertha conspired to get dance lessons for her daughter (Salkeld, 1997). Leni herself, perhaps lacking strong connections to the outside world owing to the family's frequent moves to bigger and more luxurious apartments, was especially close to her parents as well as to her only sibling, Heinz (Bach, 2007).

In her formative years, then, Leni found herself torn between her father's insistence that she enter a business career (preferably as his secretary) and her own desire to integrate her love of the arts and of nature into her life path (Wallace, 1975). After all, the one interest Leni's parents shared was the theater, and the genesis of their relationship occurred in a high-culture setting, a ball with music, dance, and formal dress (Riefenstahl, 1993). The link between aesthetics and nature may have occurred during the Riefenstahl family's trips to their country cottage in the village of Pätz (a little more than 30 miles outside Berlin), during which the usually-tense Alfred became mellow and playful, showing affection for his wife and children (Trimborn, 2007). Leni summed up her childhood thusly:

> It was not a happy childhood, but good. Not happy, because my father was a despot, towards...my mother, me and Heinz. I don't doubt he loved and wished to protect us, but it was an incredibly repressive love, taking away from us almost any semblance of freedom. My mother was not allowed money of her own and had to get his permission to go out for cake and coffee with her friends. I wasn't allowed out without a chaperon even at twenty. It created an incredible resistance in me, a *screaming* resistance (Sereny, 2000, p. 237).

Here we see our subject's ambivalence toward her overbearing, tyrannical father, whom, it seems, Leni could only combat by emulating. In keeping with Leni's childhood need for authorization, she had to become a despot herself, though in the realm of her art, in order to escape from his control. Already during these early years, Leni found solace in a fairy-tale fantasy world (Riefenstahl, 1993), as when she made a kind of enclosure out of plant boughs in the wilds around Pätz and dreamed up little scenarios that she would enact for (and sometimes with) her brother Heinz (Riefenstahl, 1993). Just as Alfred was a self-creator, a self-made man in the business world, so Leni built her own artistic sphere, over which she was author, and which would, in her early adult years, offer her an exit from Alfred's control.

## 4.2   Stages: Dance Halls to Big Screen (1918–1926)

In 1918, when Leni was 16, she graduated from the Kollmorgen Lyceum and began studies at the State School of Commercial Art on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse (Bach, 2007). At this time, Leni remained aloof from the opposite sex, unlike her friends,

each of whom already had boyfriends by this time. In fact, according to Leni, she did not begin her menstrual cycle until she left her parents' home at the age of 21 (Riefenstahl, 1993). Also, she developed a penchant for exhibitionism that complemented her early-teen tendency to retreat to her room and write for herself alone, an example being when Leni spontaneously jumped up and danced in front of the audience at a piano recital (Trimborn, 2007).

Between 1918 and 1921, Leni locked horns with her father over her plans to pursue a career as a dancer (Riefenstahl, 1993). Once Leni won the struggle, she began training with a succession of famous dance instructors, and, by the time she reached her 21st birthday, moved into her own apartment in Berlin and earned a living as a solo dance performer (Trimborn, 2007). At that same time Leni met Harry Sokal, a banker from Innsbruck who became her patron and, for a short time, her fiancé (Infield, 1976). Sokal first helped Leni embark upon international tours as a dancer; however, in 1925 Leni met director Arnold Fanck, and convinced him to give her a part in his upcoming film, *Der heilige Berg* (Fanck, 1926; Wallace, 1975). Sokal, who may have been hoping to rekindle a romance with Leni (Riefenstahl, 1932), but who in any case believed in the profitability her talent, was convinced to buy Fanck's failing production company, most likely as an inducement to Fanck to cast Leni and as a favor to his ex-fiancé, who otherwise would have no project in which to star (Trimborn, 2007). In any case, Leni's film debut was successful, and she soon appeared in *Das blaue Licht* (Riefenstahl, 1932), which was also her directorial debut (Nenno, 2008).

## 4.3   Leni as Auteur: Zwischen Wolf Und Megaphon

It so happens that Adolf Hitler saw *Das blaue Licht* upon its 1932 release, and it became the future German Chancellor's favorite Riefenstahl film (Niven, 2018). Hitler and Leni met that same year. What led up to the meeting was Leni's attendance at a Nazi rally at the Berlin Sportpalast on 27 February (Bach, 2007). Leni's own words best convey her response to Hitler's speech:

> . . .I had an almost apocalyptic vision that I was never able to forget. It seemed as if the earth's surface were spreading out in front of me, like a hemisphere that suddenly splits apart in the middle, spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the earth. I felt quite paralysed. . . .I sensed that the audience were in bondage to this man. (Riefenstahl, 1932, p. 101).

It seems that Leni saw in Hitler a solution to the middle, patronage-oriented phase of her object relations. Early on, Leni needed her father's imprimatur to embark upon a career in the performing arts. Once she won this battle against paternal authority by gaining Alfred Riefenstahl's authorization, she found herself at a crossroads: *Das blaue Licht* did not promise her any future success as an actor or director. In fact, many at the time felt that Leni could not succeed outside of the *Bergfilm* genre, and even her efforts therein were deemed by some to have been less than "resounding"

(Carr, 2021). But by 1933, Leni was making films under the aegis of the Nazi-controlled UFA studio, and the ruling party's threats against the Jews had already led to a mass exodus of actors, filmmakers, and film workers from Germany (Infield, 1976). Thus, while her father Alfred had authorized her entry into the life of the aesthete by financing her training as a ballet dancer and by giving her his reluctant approval, by the early thirties Leni needed a patron who had the resources to bankroll her film projects as well as the power to shield her from any competition or negative press inside Germany. Harry Sokal sufficed as a kind of stop-gap patron, allowing Leni egress from her parents' world and entry into the world of performing arts, but Hitler was the patron par excellence, in that he was able to shield Leni from any adverse press (he more-or-less controlled all media in Germany) and was able to give her film projects almost unlimited financial backing (Trimborn, 2007).

## 4.4   *Outcast, Photographer, Underwater Explorer*

With the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945, Leni not only lost her ability to make films (since no one would back her projects); she also had to endure imprisonment and then house arrest at the hands of the American and French authorities (Trimborn, 2007). At the same time, Leni's marriage to soldier Peter Jacob was falling apart, owing both to the latter's philandering (Trimborn, 2007) and to Leni's inability to focus upon anything outside of film sets and cutting rooms (Schwarzer, 1999).

In 1956, Leni decided to travel to Nairobi in order to scout out locations for a possible film project. During the trip, Leni was in a car accident (Hartley, 2010), and, in addition, she suffered much discomfort and hardship, all of which she bore with amazing stoicism. Her single-minded dedication to her creative projects, as well as her rare indefatigability, found its male counterpart only in 1962, when Leni took on Horst Kettner, a German over forty years her junior (Bach, 2007; Riefenstahl, 1993). With Horst, Leni forged a romantic relationship that was not threatened by her career, since Horst was more than happy to play a supportive role therein. Not only this, but he possessed the rugged, adventurous spirit that virtually all of Leni's former lovers lacked (Bach, 2007; Riefenstahl, 1993). Though Horst, in a relationship filmmaker Ray Müller quipped was "*Harold and Maude* in real life," lived his life through Leni and her work (Bach, 2007), he was no pushover, as is evinced in Müller's documentary film *Die Macht der Bilder* (Müller, 1992). In the scene in question Leni tries to walk off of the set when asked to walk and talk simultaneously by Müller. Horst bars Leni's path and gently pushes her back toward the set (Müller, 1992).

# 5  Conclusion

In Leni's early life, she sought to individuate from her father Albert, who, as *paterfamilias*, was able to authorize her aesthetic pursuits (Bach, 2007), but not without attempting to control her romantic and vocational paths, and in general, without smothering her with his rules and expectations. A summation of the relationship between father and daughter is found in their chess games, which Leni had to let Alfred win, lest he explode with rage and storm away without a word (Riefenstahl, 1993). Bearing in mind Mahler's notion of a necessary "separation-individuation process" (Mahler et al., 1985), Leni's mother—always caring and empathetic, yet unable to counter her husband's despotic ways—was unable to fully meet Leni's needs for authorization or patronage. However, we should not underrate the positive influence Leni's well-meaning mother had on her (Riefenstahl, 1993), which could have afforded her a solid empathic base upon which she could later build a mutually-supportive partnership with Horst Kettner.

Once Leni broke from her father's influence, she lost her virginity to a man who was close to her father both in age and in looks, tennis star Otto Froitzheim (Bach, 2007). Leni eventually rejected Froitzheim, and soon afterwards become involved with Harry Sokal, her first love interest to wield the power to further her career, and thus partially fulfill her need for patronage (Trimborn, 2006). However, once Leni began to star in films, she began engaging in casual affairs with various crew and cast members, even, in one case, her director Arnold Fanck (Bach, 2007). The turning point was Leni's acquaintance with Adolf Hitler, an individual who far surpassed any other potential patron, in that he could both protect her from criticism inside Germany and funnel untold funds and resources toward Leni's film projects (Bach, 2007).

In order to evaluate Leni's relationships after her first fumbling attempt with Otto Froitzheim, we will omit the authorization category, since it pertains more to the pre-adult life situation, and we will split the mutuality category into two: (1) lover, which pertains to romantic intimacy, and (2) collaborator, which covers the vocational side of interpersonal support. The two poles are Albert Riefenstahl and Horst Kettner. Leni's father merely gave his grudging authorization to her without the added gifts of intimacy, mutuality, or patronage (Riefenstahl, 1993). We may assume that, since he remained by her side from the 1960s until her death, Horst hit the mark in terms of Leni's need for intimacy (Bach, 2007). Though he was not the creative match of Leni, neither were any of the other men with whom she paired up, and thus we must fall back on Horst's willingness to undergo great hardships, as well as his undoubted expertise in many areas essential to filming and traveling, and conclude that Horst fulfilled the role of collaborator. Lastly, though Horst certainly lacked the money or power of an Adolf Hitler or a Harry Sokal, he did devote himself to Leni's work (and to Leni herself) without any strings attached. Unlike Hitler, Horst did not badger Leni to produce documentaries with any predetermined content or bias (Riefenstahl, 1993), nor did Horst draw up some potentially stifling

**Table 2**  Leni's many: The men in her life and the roles they did or did not fulfill

|                    | Lover (intimacy) | Collaborator (co-working) | Patron (power) |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Albert Riefenstahl |                  |                           |                |
| Harry Sokal        | X                |                           | X              |
| Luis Trenker       | X                |                           |                |
| Hermann Storr      | X                |                           |                |
| Hans Schneeberger  | X                | X                         |                |
| Peter Jacob        | X                |                           |                |
| Adolph Hitler      |                  |                           | X              |
| Horst Kettner      | X                | X                         | X              |

itinerary of appearances and film appearances for Leni, as Harry Sokal did (Riefenstahl, 1993).

Overall, the study concludes that Leni Riefenstahl was able, at least to some degree, to reverse the cathectic flow initiated by her father Alfred. This she accomplished by becoming the top filmmaker in Germany once she climbed the ladder of success with the help of her patrons Harry Sokal and Adolf Hitler (Riefenstahl, 1993). Unfortunately, the same set of blinders that allowed Leni to pay no heed to her many doubters during her years as a dancer and actress, also afforded her an ignorance of the socio-political implications of her Nazi-sponsored documentaries (Bach, 2002). This latter fact led to Leni's downfall in 1945. In the pitiful years that followed, Leni lost her husband, her immediate family perished, and she was even institutionalized for a time. However, Leni adapted her approach in the last decades of her life by sticking to photography (for the most part) and choosing subject matter that had little chance of being questioned politically. Ultimately, though Leni Riefenstahl may have remained somewhat blind to the implications of her work under Hitler, she nevertheless changed her approach to her art, as is reflected even in her choice of companion, Horst Kettner, a man who needed Leni as much as she needed him (Table 2).

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# Graça Simbine Machel: A Psychobiography of an Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist

**Claude-Hélène Mayer**

> *Preventing the conflicts of tomorrow means changing the mind-set of youth today.*
> *Graça Machel*

**Abstract**  This psychobiography presents life events of the contemporary Mozambican South African public political figure and social activist Graça Machel. It reflects her life by exploring her social agency, activism, and identity development, which serve as touchstones for her sense of purpose, educational, gender, and anti-violence activism. The study explores the life through two theoretical lenses: social agency and Erikson's identity theory. It contributes to building the literature on psychobiography in the context of social justice, change, and identity development with regard to African women activists and leaders. Machel is identified as an ultra-committed change-maker who, throughout her life course, embraced her role as an independent activist, as well as her role as a governmental employee and the First Lady in two countries, Mozambique and South Africa. Machel strongly draws on a powerful sense of generativity that motivates her to support the vulnerable, such as women and children in Southern Africa.

**Keywords**  Political activism · Social agent · Social change · Woman leader · Politician · Psychobiography · Identity development · Africa

C.-H. Mayer (✉)
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

# 1   Introduction

Psychobiographical research has gained momentum during the past years (Mayer et al., 2021; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019), using particular psychological theories to explore and significant episodes of selected extraordinary individuals throughout their lifespan (McAdams, 1994; Schultz, 2005; Stroud, 2004). Erikson's *epigenetic principle* describes the development of human beings in eight stages, through which individuals develop their personalities (Boeree, 2006). Progress through the stages is viewed as individually determined by individual success and/or failure to develop and the influences of social factors which impact on the individual through society (Meyer et al., 2003). This psychosocial development progresses through life while the individual is confronted with various developmental tasks during the different life periods (Welchman, 2000).

Research in the area of psychobiographical approaches to social change is still limited (De la Sablonnière, 2017). This is what motivated the article's focus on social change and identity development in the life of an extraordinary woman from a psychobiographical perspective. Not only is social change a topic of policymakers, educators, sociologists, or psychologists, but it has also become an important aspect of global and local political arenas. Further, some studies have explored social change in relation to identity, for example in terms of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986), or identity threat theory (Steele et al., 2002). Casey (2017) recommends that the voices and narratives of women of South Africa should in particular be heard regarding their role as social change agents, thereby integrating the perspective of diversity on the individual's life and on her role as social change agent. This interlinks with De la Sablonnière (2017) call for a closer look at social change on an individual, micro level as well as at the macro level of society itself.

This study focuses on the social change and identity development of Graça Machel, through a psychobiographical lens (see also Adler, 2018), using selected theoretical approaches to explore Machel's identity and social agency development across her lifespan. The social change approach chosen for this study is anchored within a cultural psychology context in which social change is defined broadly as social transformation (Sun & Ryder, 2016). The article attempts to respond to the research question: How did Machel develop in terms of personal identity and as a social change agent throughout her life?

By exploring Machel's life through the two theories, this psychobiographical account aims at presenting new insights into the life history of an extraordinary woman, her social activism, as well as her identity development. It connects social agency and identity development in an innovative way, contributing to psychobiography by exploring her individual development and her social activism at the same time. Machel's life will briefly be presented, followed by the presentation of two theories (social change and identity development) which will then be used to analyze the data from a psychobiographical perspective.

## 2   Graça Machel

Graça Simbine Machel was born on October 17, 1945 in Incadine, Mozambique (SAHO, 2021), previously known as Portuguese East Africa. She became a freedom fighter in Mozambique and, in 1973, joined the Mozambican Liberation Front FRELIMO (Portugese: *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) which was founded in 1962 in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania by Samora Machel and Eduardo Mondlane. During her studies at the University of Lisbon in Portugal she was active in a political underground organization that fought against colonialism. She received sponsorship through a mission scholarship and developed her liberation politics together with other students from Portuguese colonies (Williams, 1999).

She then returned to Mozambique, joined the FRELIMO, supporting Samora Machel's movement. She married Machel—who had five children with two different women—and who had been married once before. They were married between 1975 and 1986 (when Samora died and she became the First Lady, three months after Mozambique's independence (The Elders, 2021).

She is a women's and children's rights activist, a former freedom fighter, and the first Education Minister of Mozambique. She later married Nelson Mandela (1998–2013) and became the First Lady of South Africa. Machel received several international rewards for her work to reduce hunger in Africa, increase the welfare of refugee children, drive the Education for All movement in Mozambique and was also awarded several honorary doctorates internationally (SAHO, 2021). During the past years she has been active in international and African organizations (e.g., as United Nations expert on the impact of armed conflict on children, and as a high-level panelist on the post-2015 Development Agenda) and has founded others, such as *The Elders,* in 2007, and the *Graça Machel Trust,* in 2010, to support and enhance social change and human rights (The Elders, 2021).

## 3   Social Change and Social Change Agents

Social change has been defined in multifold ways since the 1970s, bringing social change theory and psychology together (Blackwood et al., 2013; Pizer & Travers, 1975; Silbereisen & Tomasik, 2010). It is described as an inevitable societal force (Youniss, 2020). Further, social change is pervasive, global, and not restricted to any specific country or form of political structure (Greenfield, 2016; Nolan & Lenski, 2011). Social change is evident in political and economic upheaval, in migration or in human and natural disasters (de la Sablonnière, 2017). Its impact is visible in empowering individuals, building capacity within organizations and society, contributing to global understanding and promoting social mobility (Dassin et al., 2018). Social change agents are defined as individuals who become involved in activities that improve the lives of individuals and communities locally and globally and put

the needs of others before their own (Cobb, 2014). Six different categories of social change agents (Walden, 2013) are described next.:

**Ultra-committed change-makers** usually dedicate their lives to making a change in society and communities and are satisfied by their social impact. They act through conversations, new technological and online innovation, and believe in early social change education. Often, they are brought up in families conscious of social change. They personally want to make a difference in the world; they are actively engaged and continuously involved in so doing because they have experienced others making a social change difference in their own lives.

**Faith-inspired givers** are driven by religion and faith. They enjoy faith-to-faith contact and are usually older than other social change agent types and wish to set an example, as they have experienced their own parents' example. They are further morally obliged to contribute to social change and feel blessed. Finally, they are motivated through their faith and attend religious services regularly and are seldom motivated by online campaigns.

**Socially conscious consumers** support social change through responsible behavior as consumers. They are driven by social justice and environmental protection goals and educate others about social impact, connecting locally and globally, often online. They are committed throughout life, being inspired by socially just behavior and environmental and green issues.

**Purposeful social participants** usually aim to promote social change through organizations (for example, at work) using monetary funds or services. They are often not personally involved in the cause and experience social change agency as risky and a personal sacrifice. They are social change agents because they see their job chances increase; however, they experience problems with friends and family because they are time-restricted due to social change commitments.

**Casual contributors** are usually committed to social change agency when related to projects and are not likely to be committed for their entire lives. Often, they are older adults who do not have children and are social change agents based on work or religious beliefs. They are inspired by social networks or websites to be change agents and are driven to be socially engaged to increase their career chances.

Usually, **social change spectators** are only social change agents at some point in their lifetimes and are not regularly engaged. They experience their actions as being hardly influential in society and are seldom personally involved in social change. Some say they never engage in social change activities at all.

According to Putnam (2000), older women typically contribute as social change agents to social capital, strong connections and social networks, and norms of reciprocity. Social engagement and actions are empowering and positive for older women (McHugh, 2012). Ugwuegbu (2021) has recently emphasized that women need to be included in social change programs in African contexts and can be effective as agents of social transformation and change on different governmental levels. Particularly with regard to the global pandemic of Covid-19, it has been suggested that radical social change is needed on a global level to foster global health, address inequality, and fight eco-social problems (Benach, 2021).

## 4 Psychosocial Personality Development

Erik Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development is a well-established psychoanalytic theory which has often been used in psychobiographical research (e.g., Oosthuizen, 2018; Pietersen, 2014; Prenter, 2015) since it explains the epigenetic principle and human development across the lifespan (Boeree, 2006; McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015; Santrock, 2018).

Erikson's stages are defined as follows: trust versus mistrust (first 18 months), autonomy versus shame and doubt (18 months to 3 years), initiative versus guilt (3 to 5 years), industry versus inferiority (5 to 13 years), identity versus role confusion (13 to 21 years), intimacy versus isolation (21 to 41 years), generativity versus stagnation (40 to 60 years), and integrity versus despair (60 years and older) (Erikson, 1950; Welchman, 2000). The theory describes the life cycle, integrating social, biological, and psychological aspects, including important "turning points" (Erikson, 1968, p. 96), crisis and crisis resolution (Erikson, 1995; Prenter, 2015) through ego strengths (hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom) and virtues.

Erikson's model has been described, explored, and applied during the past decades in many different accounts and is therefore not described here in detail. For further insight into the theory, see Boeree (2006), Corey (2013), Craig and Baucum (2002), Erikson (1950, 1965, 1978, 1982), Hook (2002), Newman and Newman (2018), Santrock (2018), Welchman (2000).

## 5 Research Methodology

This study uses a psychobiographical case study design (Ponterotto, 2014) and explores the life of Machel through the theoretical lenses of social change and social agent research and the psychosocial identity development theory of Erikson. The research paradigm is qualitative in nature and uses a hermeneutical interpretative research approach (Creswell, 2013).

### 5.1 Psychobiographical Subject

In this study the psychobiographical subject was selected purposefully (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019), exploring an extraordinary African woman social change agent. Primary and secondary data on the sample were collected, such as commentaries, interviews, autobiographic pieces, but also biographical notes and books, articles, and research pieces.

## 5.2   The Research Process

The data were collected and analyzed with regard to the topic of social agency and followed psychobiographical guidelines suggested by psychobiographical researchers (Alexander, 1988; Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Ponterotto, 2014). Exploring themes in the data collected across the sample's lifespan, the researcher makes sense of experiences and their meaning in the life of the sample and within the provided theories (Terry et al., 2017). The step-wise process developed by Du Plessis' (2017) and used by van Niekerk et al. (2021) was applied here: (1) select the subject, (2) identify primary and secondary sources, (3) identify contextual data, (4) select an appropriate psychological theory, (5) allow the data to reveal itself, (6) ask the data questions, (7) code the data, (8) select formats of display, (9) integrate coding and display, (10) write the psychobiography, (11) revise the psychobiography, and (12) evaluate the research process.

The entire research process is based on the adherence to the qualitative research criteria (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) of confirmability, credibility, and trustworthiness. Confirmability was reached through a thorough documentation of the study, while credibility was reached through presenting accurate research findings and interpretations based on an in-depth analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure credibility, primary and secondary data were used from reliable resources published in the public domain. Trustworthiness is connected to the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Haverkamp, 2005). The researcher is a white, able-bodied, European-born, German female researcher who has spent over half of her lifetime in African contexts as a researcher, ethnologist, and psychologist. She has worked in different social and voluntary projects and studied African cultures in-depth. The researcher is primarily interested in researching extraordinary women and the transformation of challenges for women leaders in an African context. She has been involved in socio-cultural voluntary work during the past two decades in African contexts and has contributed to projects fostering education, mental health and well-being and women leadership in Africa. The view on the Machel is informed by a transcultural (European-African) and academic lens. In this study, strategies to employ and improve trustworthiness were applied, as described by van Niekerk et al. (2021): Prolonged engagement with the data, triangulation of sources and data, the use of published sources of data, comprehensive documentation of procedures, and the maintenance of a research audit trail.

## 5.3   Ethical Considerations

Psychobiographies need to take certain ethical considerations into account to protect the individual researched, as well as their social connections. According to Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017), subjects and their information and data need to be treated with respect, fairness, and consideration. Psychobiographies need to

contribute to new information about human beings as well as diverse approaches to life (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019). To conduct a fair and respectful approach to the research subject, the study is conducted in not only an empathetic, accountable, but also ethical and respectful manner (Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2005). Further, referring to Wegner (2020), the study aims at contributing to the public knowledge of Machel with special regard to her impact on social change and without causing any potential harm.

## 5.4  Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to literature reviews in English, German, and French. No Portuguese literature was used. Information on Machel's childhood were limited in comparison with information on her adult life (SAHO, 2021; The Elders, 2021). The study was conducted by one researcher only and is exposed to the researcher's subjective bias (Yin, 2018) as a middle-aged, White woman of European-German descent with residence in South Africa.

## 6  Findings and Discussion

The findings refer to Machel's life as a social change agent and explore her identity development based on two selected life events during her time in Mozambique and in South Africa.

## 6.1  Becoming a Social Change Agent

Machel is one of the women social activists who have implemented strong social change internationally (SAHO, 2021; Sheldon, 2021; Wessels, 1998; Youniss, 2020). She has fought in Portugal, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa for the anti-colonial struggle and for gender and children's rights through social, educational, and political action (SAHO, 2021). As a social change activist in Southern Africa (Cobb, 2014; Dassin et al., 2018; de la Sablonnière, 2017; Sheldon, 2021; Walden, 2013), Machel empowered individuals, built capacity, and contributed to social mobility and global understanding through her social engagement in socio-educational and political organizations across countries (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021a; SAHO, 2021).

Machel was the last born of six children. Her father, who worked in the mine and who was a Methodist minister, died three weeks before her birth (SAHO, 2021). Her older siblings helped her through high school and she attained a scholarship to study at Lisbon University in Portugal in 1968. It can be assumed that her early family

experiences, growing up in a rural, poverty-stricken environment in Mozambique, influenced Machel in terms of her identity development and as a change-maker: Besides her father's early death, Machel's family was committed to send all the children through formal education (Sheldon, 2021) while the mother managed without remarrying for social support (All Africa, 2014). Family legend says that the father had made his wife promise to provide the unborn child with schooling (Mail & Guardian, 2013). Machel therefore experienced her mother as strong and self-driven and she took over these attributes to be strong, independent, and self-driven (Sheldon, 2021), as can be seen in many eminent individuals (Krulwich, 2013). The absenteeism of the father brought the family together in their mutual support and their clandestine anti-colonial struggle. Machel received then a sponsorship for her high school and was the only African student in her class of 40 students (Mail & Guardian, 2013). She felt estranged and foreign in her country and that was an initial point, when she internally decided that she has to change something for the future generations.

Core events of Machel's life course, such as becoming a freedom fighter in Portugal, the Minister of Education, and the First Lady in both Mozambique and in South Africa, are anchored in the challenges of her childhood, her sibling's anti-colonial activism, and the experience of the racialized educational system and she aimed at changing the future for the following generations, focusing on programs for education for all in rural Mozambique (SAHO, 2021; The Elders, 2021).

From 1998, aged 23, Machel viewed herself consciously as an active social activist. Since her father was a Methodist minister, Machel grew up within a family of strong faith (SAHO, 2021) which supported her to walk her path to higher education which then led her to her fight for children and women's rights. In her early thirties (from 1975), she was strongly involved in the FRELIMO movement, thereby showing her strong loyalty and partnership (Santrock, 2018) and concern for future generations (Stage 6).

In the 1980s, Machel moved forward in intensifying her social activism on a global level through enriched networks, in particular after Samora's death. She expanded her own socio-cultural focus, acting on a global level, intensifying her personal growth and identity (Stage 7) and intensified her global social impact in the 1990s (Learning for Justice, 2021; SAHO, 2021; The Elders, 2021). When she was urged to run for secretary general of the UN in 1996, she declined, pointing out: "There is no political will. So, what would I do there?" (Mail & Guardian, 2013). Machel, throughout her life, always had a strong political will and expressed it in different ways—within the clandestine struggle, in opposition and within governmental positions. This shows that she explored many different roles throughout her life to implement her political aims.

As emphasized in Stewart and Vandewater's study (1998), women in early adulthood often show generativity—defined as the concern for and commitment to the well-being of future generations which usually starts in middle adulthood (McAdams & Logan, 2004)—earlier in life than men. So did Machel. According to McAdams and Logan (2004), generativity is developmental, shaped by culture and the individual, selfish and selfless at the same time, promotes psychological

well-being, and is expressed in narrations in individual lives. Further, generative life stories are energetic and aim for renewal, as well as resilience (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

Machel displays an integrated, resilient, and grown identity, inheriting wisdom, renunciation, and strengths, with the ability to bounce back from individual and collective setbacks such as Mandela's death and Covid-19 (Stage 8). Her strengths is generative in the way that she puts all her strengths into the well-being of future generations: In her role as the first woman and black person as a Chancellor at the University of Cape Town between 1999–2019, she, for example, declined to be honored at a formal farewell function and asked the university to allocate the expense toward students (UCT, 2019). Her wisdom and the integration of her identity seem to be reflected in her integrative approaches at community, societal, pan-African, and global levels (Learning for Justice, 2021; SAHO, 2021; The Elders, 2021).

Machel can be classified as an *ultra-committed change-maker* (Walden, 2013) who dedicated herself from an early age to making a change in her community, the anti-colonial student movement, as well as the freedom fighters to free her country from colonial occupation (SAHO, 2021). She stood in for the pan-African idea (Machel, 2014), early childhood development (Machel, 2016), acted against child marriages (Machel et al., 2013) and employing children as soldiers (Machel, 2001). As typical for *ultra-committed change-makers* (Walden, 2013), she aimed at making a difference in her environment, based on her own experiences. Her family of origin made a huge change in her life by providing her with education, being role models in the fight against colonialism and acting independently and self-driven. She used her given opportunities at her best by excelling in school during childhood and teenage years (Learning for Justice, 2021). Her passion for children and women was ignited by realizing the terrible "effects of conflict" children suffer in wars and violent situations (Africa 360, 2014, minute 11:25): "I felt, you know, I had to have the obligation to be in their skin to speak on their behalf, to tell adults that your responsibility is to care, to nurture, to molt, is to protect. . ." She further on highlighted that she learned that care starts at home and then socially through others who care (Africa 360, 2014, minute 13:34).

Currently, Machel acts through conversations, technological and online involvement (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021b). Throughout her engagement in political struggles, she stood in for early social change education (Machel, 2016; Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021a; SAHO, 2021), aiming at making a significant positive change at the grassroot level of societies. Her husbands, Samora and Mandela, supported her endeavors and were key players to help her to access influential positions in Mozambique and South Africa. Sheldon (2021) points out that Machel's marriage with Samora Machel:

> ensured her inclusion in the party leadership and her appointment as Minister of Education in the first independent government. There were other intelligent audacious women in Mozambique, yet for at least the first ten years after independence, Graça was the only one to reach the highest levels of government.

Through the access to influential government positions in Mozambique, Machel could engage fully in her self-driven agenda. She used her institutionalized power to foster education and her abilities to build networks through the FRELIMO and her husband (Putnam, 2000). Thereby she ensured her success as ultra-committed and long-term engaged change-maker. She became a role-model for other women social change-makers in Africa (Machel, in Ugwuegbu, 2021) with the intent to foster global health, the eradication of inequality, and eco-social problems. She highlighted: "Women must redesign the table, and not just expect to be at the table" (ADBP, 2018). On a deeper level, however, Machel might have struggled as a woman, wife and mother in her relationship with her first husband who changed his partners frequently, was absent as a father, and displayed patriarchal tendencies and sexist behavior (Isaacman & Isaacman, 2020). Her own conflicted experience with her husband's behavior may have been another spur to encourage her generativity and empathize with others who experienced oppression.

## 6.2 The Fight for Freedom and Becoming a Minister

Owing to Machel's political student activities in Portugal, she had to flee to Switzerland (SAHO, 2021). In Europe, she joined the FRELIMO organized resistance movement and fought against Portuguese colonialism (Learning for Justice, 2021). She was prepared to take risks by addressing the global system's injustice and fought for equality. Returning to Africa, Machel arrived in Tanzania and underwent military training in a FRELIMO camp, thereby overcoming stereotyped roles for women. Later, she met Samora Machel who was a FRELIMO commander at this time. She joined him and their common fight for freedom from colonialism became one of her strongest identity narratives from her twenties to her forties.

It can be assumed that during her first years of life, Machel developed a strong relationship with her mother and siblings and learned to trust them, building up faith and hope, as well as self-confidence and trust in her own abilities. The strong family-bond in her early childhood most probably led to her ability to develop strong relationships in later adulthood. With regard to Stage 2, through her strong family-relationships and her caregivers, Machel could develop a sense of self-reliance and the ability to stand on her own feed. She had to space for exploration which provided her with the permission to experiment and make mistakes. She further experienced how the initiatives of her caregivers made a different in her own life with regard to gaining education (Stage 3). During stage 3, her moral judgment was formed strongly based on her siblings' anti-colonial movement and their initiatives to ensure education for the entire family. She—at least unconsciously—aged 3 to 5 experienced a sense of psychosocial strengths and virtues of purpose and courage in her family.

Machel's time in school (Stage 4) was influenced by the desire to acquire education, follow the goals of her family, and develop friendships and self-esteem

(Santrock, 2018; Sheldon, 2021). Her gender-identity was formed by the idea that girls should be educated as well as boys.

Machel developed her identity based on her success in school and her strong family-relationships (Step 5). She could see that, based on a common idea and goals, aims can be reached with confidence and that her initiative can make a meaningful contribution to the environment. Her siblings in the anti-colonial movements and her peers were role models to establish her identity and she developed a strong sense of loyalty toward the people she grew up with in poverty.

She made friends easily (Stage 6), especially in her political realm (Santrock, 2018) and committed to a partnership (Santrock, 2018). Samora Machel became the first president of the newly independent Mozambique, and she became the step-mother of his five children and had two children together with him. Although her husband had multiple relationships and treated her in a patriarchal way, Machel built a strong relationship with him husband and children (Erikson, 1950) and experienced love and affiliation with the family and transferred it to her own children (Erikson, 1965, 1978). She also managed to build political and professional affiliations for her country as the first Minister of Education and Culture in Mozambique until 1986 (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021a). This institutionalized position was key to her international establishment as a change agent and recognized politician.

At this stage she transformed from an independent freedom fighter of the opposition toward a social activist in an established governmental position, always keeping in mind that her aim was to make a difference through political activism (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021b). She used all levels of possible activism (freedom fighter, opposition, Ministry) to implement political actions and change the societies for the better. Her aim was thereby always to empower the vulnerable, no matter through which political position. The main aim was to have an impact, bring education to all Mozambicans; in this, she had significant success by tripling the number of children in Mozambiquan schools within a few years, reducing the illiteracy rate of children in Mozambique by 72% (SAHO, 2021). Since Machel had illiterate parents, the aim to create literacy in the country seemed to be one of her major educational objectives. However, from 1977, Mozambique was destabilized by a war and the anti-FRELIMO army—called RENAMO—destroyed health centers, clinics, and infrastructure (Learning for Justice, 2021).

Machel left her political position in the government in 1986 after her husband died in a plane crash on October 10, but continued to bring social change through her independent work as the President of the Foundation Community Development (FCD), which aims to increase sustainable human development and technologization (SAHO, 2021).

During the 1980s, Machel entered Stage 7 of Erikson's (1950) life development stages earlier than usual (Stewart & Vandewater, 1998) and started to focus on social activism beyond her political career, specifically at the community level, thereby intensifying her aim to go beyond her own family bonds (Corey, 2013). The early engagement in Stage 7 is seen in women often earlier than in men (Stewart & Vandewater, 1998): Machel had already begun to focus on social activism early in her twenties and thirties and intensified her efforts to "make a contribution to the

societies" through social care and a humanistic value set (Africa 360, 2014). The strong social commitment within her family of origin most probably also contributed to her never-ending political and social activism which is based on her strong sense of meaning and purpose to contribute positively to the society and in particular to women, children, and peace (Machel, 1996, 2016, 2021a; Learning for Justice, 2021). She expresses her own connection to the grassroot—her place of origin—as a key to change societies and inequalities: "Grassroot voices are key to fighting gender oppression" (Mlaba, 2021).

In the 1990s, she strengthened her commitment to work on behalf of children (Learning for Justice, 2021). Although she had experienced the tragic loss of her husband in the helicopter crash, she was able to give her life a new direction. While she had built an enduring relationship with her husband (fighting for their common cause), at the same time she had maintained her self-identity, aims, and goals with confidence (Erikson, 1950, 1978; Stage 6). From the 1980s, she became even more generative, contributing to the health, well-being, and rights of children and adolescents and to the betterment of the life of girls and women (Machel, 1996, 2016, 2021a; Learning for Justice, 2021). Through the FCD which aims at post-war support, facilitation of socio-economic justice and strengthening of communities, Machel worked for the "decolonialization of the mind," human dignity, and taking pride in being African (BBC, 1999). She highlighted that "we Africans may be impoverished, but we are not poor. . . . We can learn things from others, but we also have a lot to offer the world" (Learning for Justice, 2021). She became the Chairperson of the National Organization of Children of Mozambique, aiming at rehabilitation of orphans and empowerment of women (SAHO, 2021). She demonstrated considerable concern for the vulnerable, thereby presenting herself as a very caring person, which is the core concept of Erikson's (1982) Stage 7. Since the 1990s, she worked at international levels (UNESCO, UNICEF), attending conferences, conducting research and writing reports (e.g., Machel, 1996, 2001, 2014, 2016; Machel et al., 2013). Besides her work with displaced children and armed conflict on children (Machel, 1996, 2001), she has also worked for reconciliation processes, the clearing of landmines and fostering peaceful agreements, for example as a United Nations Peacemaker (The Elders, 2018). She aimed for demilitarization in African countries (Meldrum, 1994; SAHO, 2021) and generativity through caring for the future generations (Bloomberg, 2021).

## 6.3   First Lady in South Africa

Machel's friendship with Nelson Mandela deepened after her Samora Machel's death, and they married on July 18, 1998, on the day of Mandela's 80th birthday. Accordingly, she became the only women to be the first lady in two countries while gaining international recognition for her achievements (Lamb, 2017). However, for Machel, the experience was not to marry to heads of state, but rather to marry two exceptional individuals and thereby working herself into the hearts of two nations—

which was a challenge in particular with being accepted as a foreign First Lady in the South African context (Lamb, 2017). Interestingly, she decided to marry two heads who had been referred to as having contradictory views on gender, manhood and fatherhood. Both of them were described as having a strong, intimate relationship with their "nation and struggle for liberation" (Naidoo, 2018, p. 7). However, Machel felt that she was the "luckiest of all of his wives," because in his old age, Mandela was gender-sensitive, affirmative, mature and both of them could focus on mutual understanding, love for each other and companionship (Lamb, 2017).

After Mandela passed on in December 2013, Machel continued her mission to bring education, peace, equality, and human rights to the world, speaking out against violence and aiming to achieve a better world for all (The Elders, 2018). Part of her efforts went into fulfilling his wish to build a children's hospital (NDTV, 2014), while readjusting her own mission.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, she criticized global leadership with regard to the pandemic, the withdrawal of the USA from the World Health Organization (WHO) and highlighted in her "Call for Action" the crisis of African women and children's rights (Bryer, 2020). She emphasized in particular the loss of education for African school children during the pandemic and called for humanitarian action (Machel, 2021a, 2021b).

Machel confirms that she has been very proud and happy regarding the progress to combat inequality during the past decade, but that these gains have been overshadowed by Covid-19 setbacks (Bryer, 2020). According to Erikson's theory (Erikson, 1963, 1965, 1978) and the development into Stage 8, Machel seems to be at peace with herself. After the loss of her second husband, she had to reconnect with herself, to recover her own identity and explore her way forward with social activism (Smith, 2014). It might be assumed that her life and identity were strongly impacted by the absence of her father in her childhood and the readjustment of her own life after the loss of two extraordinary husbands (Williams, 1999). Smith (2014), however, highlights that she coped well with her successes, her disappointments and losses in life, always being able to bounce back, working herself through the pain (Erikson, 1978; Smith, 2014). Her resilience might not only lie in her strong personality, her strong family upbringing, but also in her strong belief and faith (SAHO, 2021). During Covid-19, Machel emphasizes that new thoughts for action and leadership are needed in a post-Covid-19 world (Bryer, 2020; Machel, 2021b). This might derive from her upbringing under severe conditions in combination with her personal resiliency and her ability to transform challenges into tasks that can be addressed and resolved with an active, communal, and relationship-based approach which increases hope, dignity, and freedom (BBC, 1999).

She called for non-violence and peace during the period of extreme civil unrest in July 2021 in South Africa, on Mandela's 103th birthday and highlighted unity in diversity, peacefulness, and resilience (Makhafola, 2021):

> The political violence, racial tensions, and the debilitating lawlessness we are experiencing have no place in this beautiful country. And all during the week of Madiba's birthday! I cannot sit quietly as the land of his birth wages war with itself.

Machel relies on Madiba's presence, calling on his guidance, reminding the nation of its resilience in the "darkest times," its ability to overcome challenges by focusing on justice and dignity of all (Makhafola, 2021). Presenting figures of increased teenage pregnancies which rose by over 60% during Covid-19, most probably due to GBV and rape (Nicolson, 2021), she combines strengths of faith, and the core values of communal power, guidance of the elders, justice, dignity, wisdom, renunciation, togetherness, and integration of differences, while South Africa finds itself "at war." She is the opposite of resentful, but rather generative (Erikson, 1978), integrating diverse perspectives (Casey, 2017) to explore the core of the problems (de la Sablonnière, 2017), thereby working toward positive social transformation (Sun & Ryder, 2016). She spoke up against civil unrest; Machel used her influence through activating the mission of her late husband, conveying her political message to the ANC, the ruling political party in South Africa, to install peace and equality for Africans.

## 7  Conclusion and Recommendations

The article attempted to respond to the research question: How did Machel develop in terms of her personal identity and as a social change agent throughout her life? Machel is an ultra-committed change-maker who is strongly influenced by her own early childhood and teenage years upbringing in specific socio-cultural circumstances. Mainly influenced by the strengths of her single mother and the political engagement of her siblings, Machel dedicated her life, from her twenties onward, to her social cause of bringing freedom, equality, peace, and education to the world. Supported by her family and her social relationships and strongly equipped by her faith and self-direction, Machel fought the fight of being a social change agent as an independent activist, as well as a governmental employee. Acting in the beginning in the underground, she worked herself into established ministry positions and expanded her influence, through networking and supported by her two marriages with national leaders she could refer to and rely on. She thereby elevated herself into a position of power to support others from within a governmental framework. For her, social activism was not about her position of power, but rather about the fight for the rights of the innocent and the vulnerable in society. Since she had experienced social care herself, she decided to provide social care to vulnerable groups as well. The key topics of her social activism are education, inequality, violence, and poverty and to connect with people on a global level. Thereby she sees education as the key to African development through empowerment.

Her strengths are anchored in her social relationships, but also in her generativity and concern for the future generations. This concern for future generations is an important motivator since it might be easier for her to fight for the children of the future than for herself. This is also reflected in her attitude to rather stand in for others than to talk about herself. Her strong motivation might also refer to the idea of overcoming obstacles by finding future-orientated solutions and by fusing agentic

and communal desires. By moving between independent social activist activities (scholarship in Portugal, underground liberation movement) and governmental positions (acquired based on her marriage with Samora Machel) as a social agent, Machel fused her agentic and communal actions. Her personal focus and her intimate relationships with the two presidents helped Machel to integrate her social activism and her passion to create social change. This integration of compassion, intimate relationships, and social action subsequently guided many of her involvements in organizations that protected children and women and advocated for their healthy development and education.

Compared to other social changers, Graça Machel is very specific in the regard that she is ultra-committed and her actions are strongly influenced by her generativity. Extraordinary in her social activism throughout her life course is that her fight for her extraordinary activism has been based in two levels, the independent social activist level and the governmental and institutionalized activist level. Both of these levels of activism are connected to her strong intimate relationships and her compassion for future generations that make it possible for her to be resilient, self-driven, and seemingly infinitely active for the core values of her social course.

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**Claude-Hélène Mayer** is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

# "Looking on Darkness Which the Blind Do See": Psychobiography from a Social Perspective

Willie van Peer

**Abstract** If psychobiography is about historically significant individuals, then Shakespeare certainly fits the bill. His works belong to the most venerable, most studied and most read of world literature. But where is the biography? Can there be psychobiography in the absence of knowledge about meaningful events in the individual's life? In this chapter Shakespeare is viewed from the vantage point of the social outlier. His psychobiography will then be concerned with the ways in which later generations dealt (and deal) with him. Much of the mystery surrounding his person (mystification, idealization, but also denial, rejection, suppression, pathologizing) is to be understood in the light of how he escapes entrenched categories of evaluation. Psychobiography's concentration on individual personality thus misses out on understanding how human outliers function. The author therefore pleads for a *social* psychobiography and will illustrate the issue by two examples outside the Western context: the historical figure of *Sunjata* in the fourteenth century Mande epic, and Hatshepsut (fifteenth century BCE), one of the very few female pharaohs in ancient Egypt. In doing so, this chapter offers a criticism of the WEIRD concept, in terms of its (limited) applicability in socio-historic research.

**Keywords** Outliers · Social psychobiography · Shakespeare · Hatshepsut · Sunjata · The WEIRD concept · Homo clausus

## 1 Introduction

If psychobiography is about historically significant individuals, then William Shakespeare more than fulfils that criterion. His works belong to the most venerable, the most studied and read of all times. Even at the simple word-level, he stands out, with some 40-odd theatrical works, totalling some one million words. But these are words

W. van Peer (✉)
Faculty of Languages and Literatures, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany

that are repeated time and again, called *tokens* in linguistics. How many *different* words, so-called *types* did he use?

> Out of the million word tokens (total number of words) Shakespeare wrote, 31,534 words types (total number of different words) can be identified. (. . .) he even invented 1700 words that had not existed in the English language before but are now common, words such as *addiction*, *assassination*, *belongings*, *fashionable*, and *uncomfortable*. (Louwerse, 2021, p. 18)

How many new words has anyone of *us* invented?...

But it is not only his own works that show an exceptional profile. Also others testify to that status. The Library of Congress, for instance, harbours some 7000 book publications on Shakespeare—tendency rising. Bill Bryson once calculated that if you would want to read them all, and you would manage to read one every day, you would need more than twenty years! The British Library Catalogue lists more than 30,000 publications on Shakespeare; compare this to the number for his contemporary, Christopher Marlowe, which runs at 455. The *Shakespeare Quarterly* bibliography publishes some 4000 items on Shakespeare, each year! In other words, comparing Shakespeare with other authors, no competition is possible: his reputation is beyond reach.

And then there is the never-waning interest in his work. His drama's tragedies, comedies, classical pieces, historical plays are regularly performed still—after four hundred years. How many of the current authors will still be read and performed in four centuries from now? On the internet, hundreds of clips testify to his popularity by audiences all over the world, in English and in translation.

For these reasons: Shakespeare's phenomenal linguistic skills, the relentless flow of research devoted to his person and his work over several centuries, and the ongoing extraordinary amount of attention paid to his literary output, all these are reasons why I propose to look at his person as an *outlier*, meaning that his qualities fall far outside the scope of nearly all observations. He is indeed an atypical individual: the attention given to his work and person, both from readers and from scholars, deviates significantly from what can be expected in the usual range. His creative contribution both to English vocabulary and to its literary heritage is such that they belong to a category in themselves. In former times, the notion of *genius* may have been used in this situation. This definition comes close to how the philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment* defined genius: 'ein Talent, dasjenige, wozu sich keine bestimmte Regel geben lässt, hervorzubringen' [1] (Kant, 1790/1957, p. 406) Hence *originality* is its hallmark. But 'da es auch originalen Unsinn geben kann, seine Produkte zugleich Muster, d.i. exemplarisch sein müssen; mithin, selbst nicht durch Nachahmung entsprungen, anderen doch dazu, d.i. zum

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[1] 'the talent (natural endowment) . . . for producing that for which no definite rule can be given' (Kant, 1952, p. 525).

Richtmaße oder Regel der Beurteilung, dienen müssen'. [2] This is indeed what we observe in Shakespeare's case: he produces works that evade customary rules, but that themselves become models to be pursued and imitated.

So there can be little doubt that we are dealing with a highly special individual, from whose biography we could learn. But where *is* the biography? What do we know about Shakespeare's life? As good as nothing. That is: about his private life, his ideas and motives, his convictions and hopes, his relation to his wife and children, his contacts with his fellow actors. We do not have a single piece of evidence about his innermost thoughts and emotions—barred his literary works, of course. As Geoffrey Marsh in his recent *Living with Shakespeare* (2021) concludes:

> Biographers like to attribute the turns in Shakespeare's career to his psychological state (. . .). Surely what he was feeling must have deeply informed what he wrote; the problem is that we have no idea what he was feeling at any point (. . .) – other than by, in circular fashion, extrapolating this from his works. (p. 292)

On the other hand, we have a mass of data concerning administrative, commercial and legal issues in which Shakespeare was involved. We have knowledge of his property investments and financial transactions, for instance to secure the position of his wife and daughters in Stratford. Consider, for instance, our knowledge that in 1604 he

> was storing more malt in his barn in Stratford than he (or, more to the point, his wife) needed for domestic consumption. He sold twenty bushels of it to a neighboring apothecary, Philip Rogers, who had a sideline brewing ale. Rogers's debt (. . .) amounted to a little over two pounds. When the debtor returned only six shillings, Shakespeare hired a lawyer and took his neighbor to court (Greenblatt, 2004, pp. 362–363)

We are confronted here with a stark contrast between a mass of information of an objective, businesslike nature on the one hand, and a complete lack of information about the subjective aspects of his life. We know, for instance, that on 11 May 1612 he was present at the Court of Requests in Westminster, where he signed a deposition in his own name. But is this relevant information for a psychobiography? We would rather like to know more details about his personal life, particulars that give us insight into his heart and mind, his aspirations and his yearnings. But sadly, these are exactly the things we lack. How stark the contrast between those two kinds of information is has recently come to the fore by Marsh (2021), who revealed a mass of data on Shakespeare's surroundings while he was living in the parish of St. Helens, Bishopsgate Street, between 1593 and 1598. Highly interesting, but not exactly the kind of things we would *like* to know—and *need* to know—in order to write his psychobiography. As Shapiro (2015) so eloquently formulated it, referring to a court document in which Shakespeare acted as a witness to his former landlady, Marie Mountjoy: 'One of the odd facts about the surviving shards of Shakespeare's

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[2]because 'there may also be original nonsense, its products must at the same time be models, i.e., be *exemplary*, so not sprung from imitation, but must serve others as a guideline or rules of judgment'. (p. 256)

life is that we know more about what words passed between the playwright and Mrs. Mountjoy than we do about any conversations he had with his own wife'. (p. 284).

So the question arises: can there be a psychobiography in the absence of knowledge about notable events and actions in the individual's life, about his world views and his emotional life? And let there be no misunderstanding: there *is* no biography of William Shakespeare in the usual sense of that word. So why engage in his psychobiography? The presupposition of biography is not fulfilled.

## 2   Social Psychobiography

So if we want to contribute to a psychobiography of Shakespeare we are in a fix. Cherry picking or selective mining of biographical incidents present no methodological problem in this case, for the simple reason that there are none. Yet people would very much like to know about his personality. Schulz and Lawrence speak of the 'need to invent explanatory stories' (2017, p. 435), and this is indeed what we see in the various approaches to Shakespeare. First, because we lack the information on his personal life, and second because we find it hard to understand how someone from a relatively humble background produced such an impressive body of work. Hence we have to 'invent' explanations. One such explanation involves *denial* and *suppression*. Since we cannot fathom the extraordinary accomplishments by a country boy without any profound preparation, we simply deny that he did achieve this—it must have been someone else, someone who 'fits' our expectations of being 'great'. So a range of alternative authors for Shakespeare's works has been proposed, for example Edward de Vere, Sir Francis Bacon, Mary Sidney Herbert, and even Elisabeth I herself! In this view, Shakespeare's works were not written by him, and the very idea of an *outlier* is denied or suppressed, and supplied by alternative constructions, in which our everyday expectations are no longer thwarted. The attitude behind this stand boils down to a negation of human diversity in all its magnificence, in an attempt to reduce mankind to some sort of average and to disallow the full spectrum of abilities and energies humans are capable of. All such methods exemplify a fundamental *mystification*, putting a smokescreen between us and Shakespeare.

In the face of such obstacles, should we perhaps abandon psychobiography? That is possible, but in running to such conclusion, we would forfeit the possibility to learn from the situation. And learning about human nature has always been one of the goals of psychobiography. So we must persevere. The title of this chapter, words taken from Shakespeare's *Sonnet* 27, may guide us to a deeper insight. The darkness surrounding the figure of Shakespeare obliges us to adopt the strategy of the blind: to see where those gifted with sight cannot. Blindness presents the 'shadow to my sightless view' (Blakemore, 1996, p. 46). In order to arrive at this deeper understanding, however, we have to forsake the usual recourse to individualistic descriptions in psychobiography. In this chapter, I therefore propose to look at

psychobiography from a *social* vantage point, especially in analysing how later generations dealt with his singular status.

A comparison with another famous outlier is in place here: Mozart. In contrast to Shakespeare we are much better informed about his inner life. Nevertheless, we grope in the dark as to the cause of his early death. The circumstances 'require a better explanation than that provided by conventional medicine'. (Hildesheimer, 1977, p. 365). In his touching booklet on Mozart, the great sociologist Norbert Elias (1994) describes the tension between his high creative genius, on the one hand, and his low social status as a dependent musician, leading him to despair and death. Elias considers Mozart as a transitional figure, wanting to break loose from the fetters of a court musician and becoming a kind of free composer—something that did not yet exist at the time. After Mozart this did indeed become possible, as the example of Beethoven amply illustrates. But Mozart himself broke down under the weight of this discrepancy. By looking at Mozart's isolated psychology, we commit the fundamental error of treating him as a *homo clausus*, a trapped human being. The notion of homo clausus refers to a typical Western individualistic view of an overblown image of self-centred decision making.

It is in this sense, breaking out of the 'homo clausus' trap in psychology, that I plead for a *social* psychobiography, with a diminished focus on individual personality. If we wish to understand how outliers about whom little is known, we have to develop a form *social* psychobiography. As a starting point for this approach we may think of the work advanced by Ramachandran (1999) from the vantage point of neuroscience. In it, single cases that are outside the usual range of known cases provide an invaluable source for studying brain phenomena. In understanding such outliers we have to develop explanations at the group level, transcending individual interpretations. But before we delve deeper into the matter, let us consider Shakespeare from the vantage point of the WEIRD notion.

## 3 The WEIRD Concept

The WEIRD concept originated with Henrich et al. (2010), who found that '96% of psychological samples come from countries with only 12% of the world's population' (p. 63). In 2018, Rad, Martingano, and Ginges showed that nearly a decade after Henrich et al.'s paper, over 80% of the samples used in studies published in the journal *Psychological Science* employed WEIRD samples: participants from cultures designated by the properties of the acronym.

Many would immediately categorize Shakespeare as a person in the WEIRD category. But is that justified? Let us look at each of the separate characteristics. Was Shakespeare **W**hite (in the sense of being light-skinned)? No doubt. Was he **E**ducated? We can accept that, though we may remember that Ben Jonson famously wrote that he had 'small Latin and less Greek'. But young William Shakespeare visited the local grammar school, which certainly gave him a relatively good education—though not at university level. Did he live in an **I**ndustrialized country?

Here we encounter a first problem with the WEIRD concept: industrialization came to societies only in the nineteenth century, so that we must conclude that the concept cannot be applied before that time. Was Shakespeare **R**ich? A lot depends on what is meant here. Only one of his four sisters lived beyond childhood and only one of his three brothers lived until his forties. So out of a family of eight, only three survived until adulthood. On the other hand, he had amassed a small fortune at the end of his life, enabling him to purchase his house in Stratford. No doubt he became a prosperous man, but rich? 'We gain a little perspective on Shakespeare's wealth when we compare his £200 to £700 a year with the £3,300 that the courtier James Hay could spend on a single banquet, or the £190,000 that the Earl of Suffolk lavished on his country home in Essex, or the £600,000 in booty Sir Francis Drake brought home from just one productive sea venture in 1580'. (Bryson, 2007, p. 121) But let's accept, for the sake of the argument that—at least compared to most of his fellow human beings, Shakespeare was certainly well-to-do in his later life. What about the final term: did he live in a **D**emocratic society? No way! It was hierarchically organized, with the monarch and nobility at the top, the gentry below them, with Yeomanry and tenant farmers in the middle, and a large mass of poor and vagrant people at the bottom. Shakespeare's society was definitely not what we would nowadays call 'democratic'.

This leaves us in a somewhat muddled situation: if we want it to be applied to Shakespeare, the WEIRD concept is hanging in mid-air: three out of the five characteristics apply, two do not. While the term has some playful element in it, the above analysis shows the limitation of its applicability. Especially the concepts of **I**ndustrialization and **D**emocracy exclude basically all pre-twentieth century societies. That make it very unseemly to any historical analysis. With this in mind, let us now consider a person who would seem to fall outside the scope of the WEIRD concept.

## 4 Hatshepsut

Her name literally means *Foremost of noble ladies*, as the only child of Pharaoh Thutmosis I and his primary wife Ahmose, she certainly was. For our psychobiographical analysis here, however, the important aspect is that she became the fifth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty in Egypt. In that capacity she ruled from 1479 to 1458 BCE. During this long reign of twenty-one years, she was one of the most prolific builders in ancient times. You may have visited her majestic mortuary temple in the complex of Deir el-Bahri in the Valley of the Kings, or the intimate 'Chapelle Rouge' sanctuary at Karnak, next to the Temple of Karnak, in front of which stands the still tallest obelisk in the world, erected also by her. Through all this building activity, she revived Egyptian culture after the invasions of the Hyksos, a foreign people who ruled the country before the 18th Dynasty. Next to buildings, her reign was characterized by an abundance of statuary, which can be found the world over in museums and collections nowadays.

She was one of only five female pharaohs, and the longest-reigning one, during the extraordinary long history of three thousand years of Ancient Egypt. Depicted as a male, sometimes as a female but with the traditional male attributes of the pharaoh, such as the double crown, the kilt, and a fake beard. That already qualifies her as an *outlier*. (It is not possible in this short précis to do justice to her many and revolutionary accomplishments; see, for further information, Cooney (2014), Nadig (2014), Roehrig et al. (2005), and Tyldesley (1996).)

Even more important than her cultural legacy was her re-establishment of the trade routes to the Land of Punt. Its exact location is debated, but most probably it was situated in the Horn of Africa. During the ninth year of her reign, she equipped an expedition of five ships measuring 20 m each, with 210 men. She also personally made the voyage, an extremely unusual thing to do for a king, let alone a female pharaoh. The expedition brought not only highly valuable trade goods, such as frankincense and myrrh: 31 live trees were carefully kept during the voyage and planted in the courts of her temple complex. Her successors Thutmosis III and Amenhotep III continued the established trade route to Punt. Beside trade, however, the expedition also had some ethnographic aim, bringing back information on the natives and their land, its geography and wild animals. A report of that voyage is to be found in the reliefs of her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. All in all, the reign of Hatshepsut is characterized by innovation, lasting peace and economic boom—altogether a flourishing epoch, counting to the glory days of ancient Egyptian history. She is held to be one of the outstanding rulers. In this she certainly shared Kant's (1790/1957) *originality* as a mark of genius. Her vision could have become a model, were it not for the social reaction to her innovations.

When applying the WEIRD concept to Hatshepsut, we run into difficulties again. Was she white-skinned? That depends. She was not 'white' in the sense that her skin colour was that of northern Europeans. The problem here is that skin colour is not a binary concept, since pigmentation of the skin is a gradual notion. Basically, she will have been somewhere halfway between white- and black-skinned, so from that point of view, one should say she was 'half-WEIRD'! Was she **E**ducated? Not in the sense we would nowadays call it, but certainly compared to her contemporaries. **I**ndustrialized? Of course not. **R**ich? Beyond doubt. Living in a **D**emocratic society? It sounds like a silly question. So with Hatshepsut we must conclude that she had 2.5 out of the five characteristics of a WEIRD person. Again we run into difficulties applying the concept. Maybe we should be very critical of its usefulness.

So again, as with Shakespeare, we are dealing with an individual who was unmistakably an outlier in the sense defined above. Although women were held in high esteem in ancient Egypt, it was extremely rare for a woman to become pharaoh. We have the names of only six female pharaohs, over a period of three thousand years! Her reign was also unusually peaceful and brought wealth and grandeur to her country. In view of the time scale it will not come as a surprise that we know nothing about her private life or her feelings. But also in this case we may look at the *social* implications of her being an outlier. The reactions are, however, much more radical than the mystifications to which Shakespeare's reputation was subjected. After her death, a systematic effort was undertaken to erase all her historical records. One has

to understand this in the most literal way: the 'cartouches' with her name were chiselled off the stone monuments, statues were torn down and smashed or maimed. The enterprise was carried out rather thoroughly (at least for the most visible of her records), so much so that it created a tough problem for the nineteenth century Egyptologists: when inspecting the texts on the temple walls in Deir el-Bahri, even the great decipherer of the hieroglyphic script, Jean-François Champollion (1828–29) was confused. He reported:

> If I felt somewhat surprised at seeing here, as elsewhere throughout the temple, the renowned Moeris [Thutmose III], adorned with all the insignia of royalty, giving place to this Amenenthe [Hatshepsut], for whose name we may search the royal lists in vain, still more astonished was I to find upon reading the inscriptions that wherever they referred to this bearded king in the usual dress of the Pharaohs, nouns and verbs were in the feminine, as though a queen were in question. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatshepsut)

This was the famous Hatshepsut problem, running well into the twentieth century—which has meanwhile been solved: her position as an outlier was considered so extreme that all memory of her was considered off-topic. What exactly caused this relentless obliteration of her name remains unclear: 'Political rivalry [of her successor Thutmosis III] and self-glorification (perhaps also fear of women) led to an Orwellian rewriting of history: at Pharaoh's orders, all traces of the past are systematically erased'. (Van Peer, 1997) In terms of psychobiography, it is perhaps not too farfetched to see in this elimination a radical attempt to destroy the memory of one who fell outside the usual range of human capabilities. It is also quite probable that in the eyes of later successors Hatshepsut's position as an outlier was further aggravated by her gender. That a woman had accomplished great things must have seemed an anomaly to later male pharaohs—and may thus have been unacceptable to the long chain of male rulers. Thus, the memory of her grandeur had to be destroyed, a so-called *damnatio memoriae*. Let us now turn to another case, that of the African founder of the Mande kingdom.

## 5   Sunjata

Sunjata (also spelled Sundiata, Son-Jara) is the name of a hero in an epic poem originating in the fourteenth century in the Mande empire, in what is nowadays largely the Republic of Mali. The *Sunjata* has been passed on from one generation to another by professional singers (*jaliw*), but is also attested in writing by independent Arabic chroniclers such as Ibn Battúta (1304–1368) and Ibn Khaldoun (c. 1332–1406). He was the son of Sogolon Kedju ('the ugly'), who was the second wife of the king Nare Maghann Konaté. Crippled and dumb from childhood, he and his mother were permanently ridiculed and abused by their surroundings. Through his will-power, however, he overcame his disabilities, became able to speak and walk, and subsequently became a leader among his peers. However, after the death of his father, the first wife, Sassuma Bereté, together with her son, treated Sunjata and his mother in such a cruel way that they were obliged to flee the country. They

lived in exile during several years, until they were granted asylum by the king of Ghana. When Sumaoro (also Sumanguru), the king of a neighbouring people, invades, conquers and maltreats the Mande people, they send for Sunjata to liberate them—as he has been prophesied to become a powerful leader. Sunjata leaves and organizes a coalition of smaller peoples, and ultimately defeats Sumaoro in the battle of Kirina (also Krina or Karina), ca. 1235, whereafter Sunjata becomes the founder of the Mande kingdom (around 1240). For further information on the figure and poem of Sunjata, see Austen (1999), Jansen (2001, 2017), Johnson (2003) and Niane (2006).

We have here a semi-fictional account of an exceptional series of actions. First an African child overcomes his severe affliction, purely through his own determination and fortitude. Secondly, against all odds, his mother succeeds in fleeing the country, and delivers him from the lethal intrigues at the court. Next, out of exile the formerly disabled Sunjata manages to form an alliance against an evil sorcerer-king and stunningly defeats him in battle. Finally, he established a vast empire, stretching from the Atlantic coast to the upper Niger, comprising the present states of Guinée-Bissau, Gambia, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Mali, southern Mauretania, northern Burkina Faso, northern Ghana, and western Niger, some 1.5 million square kilometre. The state functioned in the form of a federation, with the Gbare, a General Assembly made up of representatives of the various clans, taking part in the government, advising—but also checking the power of the king, and settling disputes.

The outcome of the events—given their initial conditions—is so rare that one may justly call Sunjata an *outlier*. And again, as with Shakespeare and Hatshepsut, we are totally ignorant of his inner experiences. So his psychobiography must concentrate on the social reactions to his personality. But let us first ask how he would fit in the WEIRD concept. In his case it would seem that we are facing a clear case of a non-WEIRD culture: it is definitely not white, education in the modern sense was virtually absent, and we cannot even talk about industrialization. But . . . he was—later in his life—undoubtedly rich. And although we cannot refer to the kind of government as democratic in a modern sense, there was, through the Great Gbare, some kind of representation. So again, although we are now looking at an African country in the fourteenth century, the WEIRD concept cannot be applied without some further qualification. The conclusion must be, I believe, that the very concept is of little value in socio-historical research. It is a playful acronym, which will provide academics with some amusement, but as an analytic tool its suitability is highly confined.

We can nevertheless look at Sunjata's legacy and analyse how in his case his status of an outlier influenced the reactions of later generations. Contrary to our previous examples, the impact has been different in a double sense: it was less negative on the one hand, and it simultaneously became much deeper ingrained in the social fabric of societies that emanated from the Mande empire. Let us look at both of these effects.

First of all, as with Shakespeare, Sunjata's accomplishments count as an apogee of human ability, starting from—in his case—exceptionally adverse conditions but leading to the pinnacle of social achievement: how a disabled and discriminated

young African boy overcame his affliction and his exile, to become the creator of one of the greatest African empires. This fame has lived on and can still witnessed in present-day Mali, where Sunjata is considered not just a hero, but also a foundational figure, one who also became central during the de-colonization process. This leads us to the second effect of the Sunjata story.

Most countries in West Africa, including Mali, still make use of *patronymics*, personal names based on a male ancestor. They are the equivalent of Western surnames, but keep a link with the past more active in memory. The number of these patronyms is—compared to the number of surnames in Western societies—rather limited. But most important for our argumentation here: nearly all Malian patronymics go back to figures in the *Sunjata* epic. This has wide-ranging consequences. As Jan Jansen (2017), one of the world's authorities on Sunjata writes:

> Everyone in society (...) therefore feels personally addressed by the story. After all, his/her ancestor is one of the heroes of the tale. A patronymic is the source of great personal pride (...). Thus, if verses are recited for a hero from the Sunjata story, his descendants will feel addressed. They will be filled with pride based on their patronymic, and experience the words as a personal song of praise. This makes people so emotionally involved with the figure Sunjata; listening to stories about Sunjata is, actually, listening to your own personal history. (pp. 21-22; my translation)

Sunjata the outlier illustrates Kant's (1790/1957) remark on the *model* that a genius builds. The social ripple caused by his story forms the basis of social interrelationships in West-African cultures that are heir to the Mande kingdom. It indeed serves 'others as a guideline or rules of judgment'. As Jansen makes clear, the rules of conduct between different patronymics prescribe how the bearers must behave in public encounters. One such very special rule concerns the *senankunya* relations. These are fixed 'joking relationships', in which members of different patronymics are expected to tease and even insult each other according to specified patterns. Such joking relationship 'actually confirms the obvious support people give each other based on what their ancestors agreed upon and experienced. (. . .) [They] are not old-fashioned manners that are about to disappear. They still play an important role in everyday interaction in large parts of West Africa, even in large cities, in professional organizations and in government agencies'. (Jansen, 2017, p. 22) Need one say more about the social effects of outliers?

## 6   Conclusion

As Schulz and Lawrence remark, 'all psychobiography comes down to interpretation' (1997, p. 442), so we face the question what makes an interpretation *good* (in their words).

In this chapter, I have concentrated on outliers, individuals that deviated significantly in their actions and achievements from the general population. The argument concerns the very nature of extreme variability in human capabilities—and its

concomitant ways of dealing with this variation. Outliers present us with the possibility to study both the divergent nature of humanity and its social appraisal.

I have thereby criticized the WEIRD concept as unfit for analytical purposes in this respect. I have also criticized individualistic psychobiography as limited in scope, especially where detailed information about an individual's inner thoughts and feelings are lacking. That need not lead to despair, as I have shown a way to deal with such cases, i.e., by extending the analysis to *social* psychobiography. The chapter has demonstrated three such social scenarios in reaction to lacking information where outlier individuals are concerned: mystification (Shakespeare), downright destruction of remembrance (Hatshepsut), and integration (Sunjata). The analyses revealed the need to widen the vista of westernized psychology (as indeed the WEIRD proposal by Henrich (2020) envisaged), to overcome its image of 'closed man' and instead incorporate the social fabric of which we are all part.

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# Socrates and Jesus: Between the Honour-Shame Cultural Code and the Twardowski School

**Amadeusz Citlak**

**Abstract** This chapter presents two figures of the ancient Mediterranean culture, Socrates and Jesus, through the lens of several research traditions. The first of these is anthropological and sociological research, which resulted in the identification of the honour-shame cultural code as an interpretative framework in the analysis of social processes and individual behaviour. The second research tradition refers to the psychological work of Kazimierz Twardowski's school (Lvov-Warsaw School), which developed the theory of striving for power, and two psychobiographies. One concerns the personality of Socrates and is the oldest psychobiography in the world; the other focuses on the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. The honour-shame cultural code and the theory of striving for power seem to complement each other perfectly and form a coherent picture of both masters of the ancient world as seen from both the social and individual levels.

**Keywords** Honour-shame cultural code · Theory of power · Cratism · Lvov-Warsaw School · Ancient psychobiography · Psychobiography of Jesus · Psychobiography of Socrates

## 1 Introduction

Jesus and Socrates are two figures who resemble each other in many ways. They left no written works, only oral teachings, they enjoyed great respect from their contemporaries and had numerous followers, they fell into conflict with the establishment (Socrates fell foul of the city council, Jesus of the priests), both were accused of scorning others (Socrates for scorning the youth, Jesus for religious blasphemy and scorning the crowds). Both were also condemned and sentenced to death. Over the last one hundred years, psychologists have tried to assess their personalities and

A. Citlak (✉)
Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: acitlak@psych.pan.pl; acitlak@wp.pl

motivation, but it is an extremely difficult task, if it is possible at all (Brickhouse and Smith, 2010; Capps, 2004a, b; Charlesworth, 2004, 2014; Karpas, 1914; Schweitzer, 1913). Social sciences offer a very rich conceptual framework, the most important psychological theories, however, were formulated in the Western culture (mainly in the USA and Western Europe) in the twentieth century and they are not always adequate for this kind of analysis.

The perception of a person in ancient times differed significantly from the contemporary perception. Biblical literature, for example, presents characters from a dynamic perspective. They are people who are involved, who act, who fight, who are in action. The Semitic culture, however, differed from the Greek culture in terms of the presentation of the person of the narrative. They differ in the dynamics of description. In the Jewish tradition, for example, in the Old and New Testaments, characters are characterised by a certain changeability, and there are often dramatic transformations in their lives and actions. "Biblical characters can display change, unpredictability, ambiguity, complexity and surprise. Indeed, characters such as Jacob, Joseph, Saul or David can hardly be labelled as 'static', 'type' or 'flat' (…) biblical conception of character is often unpredictable, in some ways impenetrable (…) character is not subordinated to plot (as in Aristotle's view and modern structuralism)" (Bennema, 2009, pp. 381–382). By contrast, in Aristotelian thought, the character is fixed and subordinated in the plot. "Aristotle's 'character' or ἦθος comes close to the modern notion of disposition, people's inherent qualities that influence their thought and actions. Aristotle's notion of character corresponds to the modern category 'flat' or 'type'" (p. 382). Sophocles or Euripides, however, portray the characters more dynamically, which consequently prompts the view of the Hellenistic description of the character more between Aristotle and the Semitic world, rather than clearly in opposition to the latter. In the Greco-Roman period at the turn of the era, characters were not subjected to a typical psychological analysis but were described from the perspective of their actions and words, often in a rather stereotypical way (Burridge, 2004; Pelling, 1990).

Character descriptions are very often interwoven with social relations, which strongly determined the perception of reality in the antiquity. The subject is usually perceived through their relationship with the in-group, either as its representative or as its enemy. Such a dichotomy strongly influenced the preference for specific forms of description, among which broad moral categories were especially important (evil, good, purity, enemy, etc.) and the resulting characteristics (good, bad, pure, holy). This was a typical cognitive and linguistic procedure, which is also described by contemporary social psychologists (Semin & Fiedler, 1992; Wigboldus et al., 2000), aimed at maximising the knowledge of social objects like individuals or groups. A harsh criticism of enemies or a very positive assessment of one's own was the order of the day, as can be found in both biblical and Greco-Roman traditions (Batten, 2014).

## 2    The Concept of Individuum in the Ancient Mediterranean World

The problem of the individuum has been devoted much space in the literature, but in order not to complicate the course of considerations, a reference will be made to the anthropological and sociological research conducted in the second half of the twentieth century, the results of which have proven valuable for understanding and defining the individuum in the Mediterranean culture. The American biblical scholar, Bruce Malina, and his colleagues have presented interesting results of the analysis of the ancient Greek and Jewish world, according to which it is evident that the concept of individuum belongs primarily to the modern vocabulary. The ancient biblical and Hellenistic world was primarily socially determined. The individuum as an independent, autonomous entity, acting independently of the group simply did not exist. There is no basis for referring to the individuum understood in the modern way, as a unique, separate and autonomous centre of consciousness, feelings or actions which relates to other similarly understood subjects.

The personality of those times should be defined as dyadic personality. "A dyadic personality is one that simply needs another continually in order to know who he or she is (. . .) the person perceives himself or herself as always interrelated to other persons, as occupying a distinct social position both horizontally (with others sharing the same status, ranging from center to periphery) and vertically (with others above and below in social rank). Such persons need to test this interrelatedness, with the focus of attention outward from ego (. . .) such an individual needs others for his very existence, since the image he has of himself has to be indistinguishable from the image shared and presented to him by his significant others" (Malina, 1979, pp. 127–128). The image of "the self" was shared with others and with the social environment. Similarly, conscience was something located not so much in the centre of consciousness as an internal-psychic instance, but located externally, intersubjectively. Also, mental acts, behaviour and emotions have a social character. A person does not have similar or the same beliefs as the others in the group, but is immersed in a common and obligatory world of shared values, beliefs and behaviours. Such an establishment of the individuum had a direct impact on the perception of the world mainly from the perspective of the community. When describing and explaining the surrounding reality, the subject did not show the typical concentration on what is psychological or available introspectively, but concentrated on objective, observable phenomena. In the Greco-Roman tradition, especially among the philosophers, there was more space (than among the Semites) for describing man from the perspective of the body, the will or the consciousness. In both cases, however, the key dimensions of perception and description seem to be those focused on "inmost reactions (eyes-heart) as expressed in language (mouth-ears) and/or outwardly realized in activity (hands-feet)" (Malina, 1993/2003, p. 132).

In other words, a person is usually perceived as having a collectivist mentality, which is the opposite of the individualistic mentality (Triandis, 1995) so typical of the Western societies of the modern world. If they were to be described somehow by

their notion of self or mind, the best category seems to be that of the *dependent-self* (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or the *relational mind* (Rotman, 2021). It is even immanently, organically connected with the social space of the world in which it lives. It is the collective, relational and contextual self, which is formed and exists in a high context society (Hall & Hall, 1990). The key features of the self are determined by the community, and one of the signs of maturity is the ability to build harmonious relations with the group. What is now called personal development depended above all on being rooted in a community, on the *dyadization*. "The ultimate meaning of life consists precisely in conforming to the purely procedural and institutionally variable rules and regulations" (Malina & Neyrey, 1996, p. 230). *The dependent-self* or *relational mind* can be successfully applied to describe both the Semite and Greek mind of the time, albeit with a slightly different emphasis.

## 3 Sociological-Anthropological Conceptual Framework: Honour-Shame Cultural Code

The honour-shame cultural code has become one of the central conceptual categories of Mediterranean culture, proposed by anthropologists and sociologists as a result of their research in the 1960s and 1970s. The analysis of social relations, conducted first in southern Spain, then in Greece and Egypt, led to the conclusion that one of the dominant dimensions regulating interpersonal relations in these countries is the concept of honour-shame (Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers, 1992/2005; Pitt-Rivers, 1977). The analysis of social relations from the perspective of both variables allows not only adequate description of the interactions occurring between people, but also penetration into the real motives of their behaviour and prediction of the course of mutual interactions and conflicts. The study of other Mediterranean countries and, most interestingly, the analysis of cultural artefacts in the Mediterranean from the mediaeval and ancient periods have provided similar conclusions (Gilmore, 1987; Horden & Purcell, 2000). This is evident in Greco-Roman culture, the subject of many analyses (Barton, 2001; Lendon, 1997), and above all, the Semitic, biblical culture, which has experienced literally a deluge of studies and publications of this kind in recent years (Bechtel, 1991; Patterson, 2019; Rohrbaugh, 2009).

The notions of honour and shame performed an important regulative function, allowing the control or channelling of emotions and attitudes. Honour helped to identify socially desirable behaviours, whereas shame was a tool for their elimination. Honour is defined as a type of social recognition with a twofold character. On the one hand, it is an *ascribed honour* which is, in a sense, inherited, resulting from the affiliation to a particular family, clan or community. This honour should be maintained, protected and strengthened. However, any deeds incompatible with the group ethos or detrimental to its image may tarnish or weaken the honour. On the other hand, it is *acquired honour* which is closely linked to personal behaviour. It is not an attribute given once and for all, it requires a constant commitment to maintain

it. A person entering into social relations is constantly confronted with various forms of threat. The loss of honour (both ascribed and acquired) is the equivalent of losing face, losing public respect and losing dignity. The individual remains in a permanent relationship (physical or psychological) with the social environment, even when acting separately and alone, so that the community constantly regulates the subject's attitudes. The community judges whether a given behaviour upholds honour or not. The subject is therefore dependent on social judgement, which their place in the group and public esteem depends on. Any deed that undermines honour becomes a source of shame, and it is important to emphasise that this is not about shame as a sense of shame or guilt as it is known nowadays. The notion of guilt is strongly connected with the individualistic perception of the self, and this in the ancient Mediterranean culture was rare and might only concern people who rose above the status quo of the time (prophets, poets, leaders). The individual voice of conscience is rather the voice of the community in which the person is immersed. Thus, it is not so much about guilt as it is about shame experienced in public, shame resulting from condemnation, loss of honour and face, and shame resulting from committing acts condemned in public (Bechtel, 1991; Rohrbaugh, 2009).

A typical element of the honour-shame culture was a kind of social game of preserving honour in every public confrontation. Every social interaction could be a threat to honour, especially when it was public. Conversations, disputes and arguments usually followed a specific pattern: challenge–riposte. Behaviour, questions and allegations were most often perceived in terms of a challenge, which could be positive (e.g. an expression of appreciation, a gift) or negative (e.g. an accusation, criticism). However, it always required a response that strengthened or weakened the honour. What is important is that the decision about the outcome of the challenge–riposte game was made by the community and the social environment by expressing appreciation or disapproval (Malina, 1993/2003; Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers, 1992/2005).

## 4   Socrates and Jesus

Greek and biblical literature is heavily saturated with a terminological grid relating to the concepts of honour and shame. Power, glory, strength, exaltation, praise, exalted, humbled, inferior, superior, diminished, honoured or the asymmetry of human relationships are common concept in this literature (Olyan, 1996). The interpretation of the personalities of Jesus and Socrates will always remain more or less plausible, but it seems quite clear that their behaviours, statements and reactions reproduce the patterns of the interpersonal relationships mentioned above.

In the last 30 years a number of monographs and articles have been published (Hellerman, 2000; Krecidło, 2013; Landry & May, 2000; Malina, 2001; Neyrey, 1994) whose authors interpret the Gospel picture of Jesus according to the honour-shame code. Currently there are only four canonical gospels from the first century AD, two of which were written by the apostles (John, Matthew) and two by the

apostles' disciples (Luke, Mark). In each of them, the narratives are usually subordinated to this code. Beginning with Jesus' birth, the Gospel writers expose his Davidic (and therefore royal) and even divine origins (Matt. 1; Luke 3). The baptism in the Jordan is the moment when a voice from heaven proclaims him "the beloved Son of God". The temptation in the desert shows Jesus in the classic challenge–riposte pattern: Satan provokes with questions, denying his dignity as the son of God, while Jesus counters the accusation by showing Satan's incompetence, until finally exposing his aspirations (Matt. 4; Luke 4). Exactly the same pattern is observed in Jesus' disputations with the priests and Pharisees. Their questions are usually of a nature to question his position as master-teacher, an attempt to deprive him of his honour. And his answers prove that he accepts the challenge and responded to it. The consequence is always to discredit the authority or honour of the priests. For example, when asked, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matt 21:23), Jesus rises to the challenge by asking a new question about their attitude towards John the Baptist. Each of their answers undermines their religious, ethical and social credibility. The episode closes with the public court of reputation, which admires Jesus even more and, at the same time, denies the rabbis' competence. The notion of honour and shame also underpins Jesus' speech, i.e. the Sermon on the Mount, and more specifically the eight beatitudes (Matt 5; Luke 6). Jesus addresses the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the persecuted and the rejected, in other words, the dishonoured. And it is to them that he promises the restoration of dignity in the future in his kingdom. A similar construction can be found in the Passion narrative, in which, despite the attempt to disgrace Jesus through his scourging and death on the cross,[1] he overcomes death and regains eternal glory. The challenge–riposte can already be witnessed in the trial: the accusations of the priests (challenge) are met with a subtle riposte,[2] ending with Pilate's recognition of innocence (he passes sentence under pressure from the Jews), and finally with the resurrection (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1992).

In many respects, the life of Socrates resembles that of Jesus, except that while the latter was admired mainly by the people, the former formed close relations with the intellectual elite of Greece at the time. Jesus was a charismatic prophet, a messiah; Socrates—an intellectual, a philosopher. Practically all the dialogues of Socrates presented by Plato can be understood as a game of honour. Usually, either Socrates asks a question that opens the discussion, the question being a kind of a challenge addressed to the interlocutor, opening the game of honour or it is the interlocutors who open the game by posing questions to Socrates. The person to whom the question is related must enter into the dialogue, and if this person fails to do so, they automatically lose, in other words, they lose face. In the milieu of the Greek

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[1] Crucifixion was among the most heinous types of capital punishment, listed first before being torn apart by animals or being burnt (Cook, 2019). This punishment deprived the person of honour on every dimension of their existence.

[2] "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you stroke me?" (John 18:23) or "My kingdom is not of this world (. . .) My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

philosophers, the challenge–riposte has a far more intellectual character than in Judaism (Lendon, 1997; Pitt-Rivers, 1977). Although the disputes concern ethical, religious or social issues, the way of reaching the truth remains closely related to intellectual abilities and education (Kronska, 2001).

Socrates had exceptional intellectual abilities, ensuring him great success in verbal skirmishes and argumentation. Interestingly, Socrates seems to attach no importance to ascribed honour; it plays virtually no role in his relations with others. His eccentric and often bizarre behaviour even seems to openly disregard this kind of honour. Meanwhile, it is possible to suggest that the claim that acquired honour was a matter of paramount importance for Socrates and that everything else was subordinated to it. And it is not only about disputes as the main area for defending or gaining honour. It also applies to his manner among men: he does not show physical fatigue, he is unmatched in the amount of wine he drinks, forgoes sleep, etc. (*The Symposium*, 214–223). Similarly, during his military service, Socrates evidently displays his dignity as an expression of admiration from other Greeks. "There was another occasion on which his behaviour was very remarkable—in the flight of the army after the battle of Delium (. . .) you might see him (. . .), just as he is in the streets of Athens, stalking like a pelican, and rolling his eyes, calmly contemplating enemies as well as friends, and making very intelligible to anybody, even from a distance, that whoever attacked him would be likely to meet with a stout resistance" (*The Symposium*, 220). The importance of Socrates' dignity and honour is also revealed in the trial ending in the death penalty. As it is known, he had the opportunity to escape from prison and live on in exile, outside his homeland. Nonetheless, he chose death and drank the hemlock, explaining that escaping meant losing his dignity. Not only will he sink into shame, but he will be "regarded as a destroyer of young and thoughtless men (. . .) the conduct of Socrates would seem most disgraceful", others "would be amused to hear of the ludicrous way in which you [Socrates] ran away from prison by putting on a disguise, a peasant's leathern cloak or some of the other things". He will "live below his dignity(. . .) [Socrates] transgressed the highest laws (. . .) will have to listen to many things that would be a disgrace to you [Socrates]. So you [Socrates] will live as an inferior and a slave to everyone" (*Crito*, 53, C-D).

However, Socrates reveals quite unusual characteristics, for even considering the game of honour in his relations with people, he behaved in a way that went beyond the set social standards. In the challenge–riposte situations, regardless of whether it was he who posed the questions to the interlocutors or the interlocutors to him, he usually aimed at a complete victory in the dispute. It is possible to get the impression that, at a certain point, he was no longer engaged in the dialogue, but sought to defeat his interlocutor, or even to publicly humiliate and ridicule him. Having written about this in a previous publication (Citlak, 2021a), I identified one of the more interesting features of Socrates' personality, namely the quest for a sense of power and superiority. It can be asserted that the dynamics of honour played an extremely important role in his life, disregarding the psychological, social costs in the form, for example, of humiliating others. He is willing to defend his honour by depriving others of it. Of course, in Plato's *Dialogues*, Socrates is always guided by the moral

goal of discovering the truth, but in practice this took quite controversial forms. His ethical intellectualism, although it seems to be the overarching goal and to serve the salvation of man in the broadest sense (through liberation from the lack of knowledge and therefore from evil), is covered by the shadow of a specifically understood honour, which was perhaps subordinated to other motivations of the Greek philosopher which will be mentioned later.

What is most intriguing, however, is that both Socrates and Jesus very quickly enter into conflict with the social status quo. Socrates points the way to the truth found at the bottom of the soul, Jesus points the way to God and truth regardless of the temple system and ritual. The teachings they preached were interpreted as a threat to the established philosophical or religious authorities. Although in the case of the Greek culture, this was a different type of conflict than in the Judaism of Jesus' time, in the end, both masters were considered enemies of the people and of morality, who should be punished by death. Jesus was considered to be a blasphemer, possessed by demons, Socrates—a deceiver who demoralised young people and spread atheism. The life of Jesus is an exceptionally interesting example of breaking the status quo of the time. The socioeconomic realities of the Palestine of the first century was based on a patronage system, adapted from the political order of Rome, which, combined with a strict Judaism, created very unfavourable living conditions for the poor and those from the lower social strata (Lendon, 1997; Malina, 1993/ 2003). It was a system fostering social differentiation, dividing people into groups of those in power, with high authority and prestige, and the subjects, often poor, who did not enjoy much respect or recognition. The lowest was also the group of outcasts, the condemned, beggars and slaves, who instead of honour, were stigmatised, excluded and marked with shame. Some of this group were identified by the cultic rules of Judaism (e.g. lepers, sinners, the uncircumcised, cripples and illegitimate children). According to the gospels, Jesus' teachings and activities were directed mainly at this particular group—the dishonoured. He offered them a new source of honour independent of the temple system and the existing socio-religious order. This source was the new community created by Jesus, a community of the table, a community open to all, regardless of social position, religion, authority, or moral purity. Jesus created a new socio-religious order that was totally independent of the prevailing social hierarchy. He created a new family (Mark 3:31–35), he promised a blessing to all the "poor in spirit".[3] It was a community that transcended the prevailing social divisions. The old dividing line of the circumcised vs. the uncircumcised was to give way to a unified community of disciples in which the principle of mutual love against the principle of retaliation applied (Matt 5:43–48). Moreover, the previous social and religious hierarchy was disappearing here, from then on, all were to be brothers and their master was to be Jesus of Nazareth (Krecidło, 2013).

Similar features of public influence can be found in Socrates, only that the whole energy of the Greek philosopher concentrated on creating a new ethical

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[3]The poor in spirit, the persecuted, the hungry, the thirsty are the group of the excluded and dishonoured (Krecidło, 2013).

consciousness, which referred to the hidden, yet unexploited potential of reason and soul. Virtue (*arete*) is simply knowledge (*episteme*). Through them, a new social, religious and political reality could emerge, not only in Athens but also in Greece. Socrates, like Jesus, criticised the social order of his time (democracy and Judaism), indicating its flaws and creating new rules for living together. In both cases, these figures proposed non-standard forms of obtaining honour that departed from accepted social practice. Unfortunately, it is precisely for this reason that they have offended the authorities and then public opinion. Their death, however, paradoxically became a source of even greater recognition and admiration instead of dishonour and condemnation (although this concerns mainly the opinion of their disciples).

## 5 Psychological Interpretation

The first attempts to analyse the personality of Jesus appeared as early as in the early years of psychology as a science. Hall (1917) perceived him as the epitome of the process of human moral evolution. Hitchcock (1908) believed that he was the perfect type of the human psyche. Jung (1959) and Drewermann (1986/1994) were convinced that Jesus was an example of individuation. Martinez and Sims (2018) regarded him as having had the healthiest mind in the world. These publications show the personality of Jesus to be fully healthy, even perfect, a sort of crowning achievement of human development. But the history of the study of Jesus' personality also has another face, created to a greater extent by the psychiatrists of the early twentieth century, such as Binet-Sanglé (1908–1915), Hirsch (1912) and De Loosten (1905). What emerges from them is an image of a man with a personality disorder, usually paranoid. To avoid becoming entangled in detailed problems, it is sufficient to mention that as early as 1913 and 1922, it was convincingly demonstrated that the authors of these diagnoses not only disregard historical sources, but uncritically incorporated the twentieth century notions of psychiatry and psychology (Bundy, 1922; Schweitzer, 1913). A completely new perspective on the figure of Jesus appeared in the 1950s, which was connected to the development of biblical research on his self-awareness (*the second and third quest for historical Jesus*) and the development of transcultural psychiatry. Social-scientific criticism has played an important role, which draws on the achievements of contemporary anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Malina, 1993/2003; Elliot, 2008. Esler, 1994).

Currently, the behaviour of Jesus is not actually attributed to a personality disorder, but attention is drawn to the family context, especially the religious and social complications arising from the fact that Jesus was not physically the son of Joseph. According to Judaism, this deprived him of many rights of community life and even stigmatised him. It must have had a significant impact on his personality and his actions. Andries Van Aarde, for example, argues that the Gospel picture of Jesus well reflects the concept of 'fatherless figure/child' typical of the realities of Palestine at the time (Van Aarde, 2001). Donald Capps, referring to the DSM IV,

argues that the spectrum of Jesus' behaviour is well represented by the concept of 'fictive personality', which although it may characterise people with clinical disorders, in many cases socio-cultural conditions, it provides a coherent complex of beliefs and emotional and behavioural patterns that appear to be a classic 'fictive personality' and not necessarily related to clinical disorders (Capps, 2004b). In the tradition of Judaism, the function of a 'fictive personality' could be fulfilled by the notion of a prophet or messiah. They were not only cognitively accessible but also very popular and ennobling. In a similar vein, albeit from the perspective of anthropological analysis, Peter Craffert interprets the figure of Jesus, referring to the notion of the 'shamanic complex', the 'shamanic figure' (Craffert, 2008). The Gospel accounts of Jesus' life seem to be very consistent using these concepts and do not allow for attributing to him a disease entity according to the criteria of the twentieth century psychiatry.

However, what seems most intriguing to me is not the fact that the figure of Jesus is no longer viewed in terms of a disorder. This, by the way, raised many objections from the beginning, especially since his social competence (not only cognitive) was exceptionally high, which does not fit the image of a personality with delusions or schizophrenia. More intriguing appears to be the personality traits or motivation that may have played a key role in his life. Van Aarde, mentioned above, emphasises that the sense of alienation and marginalisation resulting from being an illegitimate son among the Jews must have become one of the most important motivational factors leading to the recovery of his deprived position and social recognition. Jesus achieves this regardless of the prevailing social rules of the time. He creates a unique relationship with the God-Father, creates a new type of community and undergoes an act of sonship at the baptism ("this is my beloved son") (Van Aarde, 2001). Capps (2004a, b) draws similar conclusions: Jesus had to face social rejection by finding his own identity in a unique relationship with the God-Father (Abba), in acts of sonship and religious—and indeed psychological—purification. A different, though complementary, proposition has been put forward by the psychiatrist, Jay Haley, even claiming that Jesus intentionally sought religious dominance in Palestine by claiming to be a prophet and messiah (Haley, 1985).[4] In trying to create a new socio-religious reality, Jesus had to display the characteristics of a charismatic leader with a rather radical way of thinking and behaving. Moreover, in order to realise the unique religious-social plan in which he played a key, salvific role, he often behaved in an uncompromising manner. Harold Ellens' words are significant here: "Jesus is not gentle, meek, or mild. He is robust, aggressive, uncompromising, incapable of negotiating his perspective on God's ways with humans (. . .) He was that tough guy from Nazareth" (Ellens, 2014, p. 1; see Capps, 2004b). Regardless of what the exact motivation of Jesus would be and which of the above-mentioned authors would be closer to the truth, their interpretations seem to form a certain picture of a character that can be described in terms already proposed a century ago by Alfred Adler as a

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[4]The intentional pursuit of political power by Jesus seems unlikely and has long rejected by biblical scholars.

character motivated by the desire to overcome powerlessness and achieve psychological strength/power (Adler, 1920) through a new type of social relations and a unique relationship with God the Father.

The figure of Socrates obviously (and unfortunately) did not live long enough to witness such a rich tradition of psychological or sociological research. Psychologists and psychiatrists have not really dealt with his personality, apart from identifying similarities between his activities and proclaimed philosophy and the techniques of modern psychotherapy (Buckley, 2001; Lageman, 1989). He was mainly of interest to historians of philosophy or scholars of the ancient culture. Certain insights into the motivational mechanisms of Socrates' personality were provided by research conducted in the honour-shame cultural code (Barton, 2001; Peristiany, Pitt-Rivers, 1992/2005), which are referred to above. The diagnosis of personality was presented long ago by Morris Karpas (Karpas, 1914). Karpas, as was the case with many other authors, emphasised Socrates' extraordinary need for self-control and even ascetic tendencies. On the one hand, he was a man of great physical strength, battle-scarred and admired for his endurance; on the other, he not only denied himself physical pleasures (e.g. eating, drinking), but actually derived satisfaction from it. He similarly treated love and feelings of sensual pleasure as things to resist. Karpas quotes him "And what do you think that you incur by kissing a handsome person? Do you not expect to become at once a slave instead of a freeman? To spend much money upon hurtful pleasures? (. . .) I advise you, Xenophon, whenever you see any handsome person, to flee without looking behind you" (Karpas, 1914, p. 190). Socrates, therefore, controlled himself in order not to show any weakness towards his own desires and wanted to have full control over them. This resulted from, firstly, the specifically understood notion of virtue, which was a reflection of reason and cognition, and therefore something different (and even opposite) to the body and its instincts. Secondly, Socrates was said to be emotionally dependent on his mother, who was a midwife. Even as a philosopher, he remained under her psychological control, which can be seen, inter alia, in his style of handling philosophy: he helps with the birth of truth, extracted from the bottom of the human soul by means of the dialectical method. Karpas also attributes psychopathic traits, hallucinations, ecstatic states and the mother-complex to him. However, he is a character who tries to achieve a certain balance between the wrong, the antisocial (usually unconscious) and the good, the socially desirable and the result of rational thought (usually conscious); he is also a character who values self-control and the ability to influence others above everything else. Despite his eccentricities and even personality dysfunctions, he is ultimately considered the father of modern psychology and psychopathology.

## 6 Lvov-Warsaw School Psychological Tradition and the Problem of Social Dominance

In the Lvov-Warsaw School, founded by Kazimierz Twardowski (a student of Franz Brentano),[5] two original psychobiographies of Socrates and Jesus were written. These are the only psychobiographies of both characters in the world written according to the theory of power, which was created largely on the basis of the analysis of ancient sources. The image of Socrates was created in stages, although the main theses were published as early as 1909, developed later in 1918, 1920 and 1922 (Witwicki, 1909, 1918, 1920, 1922) and constitute one of the oldest psycho-biographies in the world (Citlak, 2021a). A Portrait of Jesus was created in 1941 but not published until 1958 (Citlak, 2016). Psychology in Twardowski's school is available in the literature (Bobryk, 2014; Citlak, 2019, 2022; Płotka, 2020; Rzepa & Stachowski, 1993); this paper will only draw attention to the issues related to the presented topic. The psychobiographies of Socrates and Jesus were created by Władysław Witwicki—Twardowski's student and the professor of psychology at Warsaw University in the years 1919–1948—based on his own psychological theory, the theory of striving for power (the theory of cratism). It is twinned with the theory of Adler, although presented somewhat earlier (Witwicki, 1900, 1907). Witwicki considered the striving for power to be a culturally universal, biological instinct. It would determine the personality, emotions and even the whole social life of a human being. This striving for power is most often revealed in every human being in a unique combination of four tendencies: (a) humiliating oneself (e.g. remorse, humiliating oneself), (b) humiliating others (e.g. cruelty), (c) elevating oneself (e.g. pride, ambition), (d) elevating others (e.g. altruism) (Witwicki, 1907).

Witwicki analysed both figures based on the written sources (the canonical gospels and Plato's *Dialogues*[6]) and concludes that their motivational force was cratic desire: striving for a sense of power over oneself and the social environment. Socrates achieved it mainly by using his intellectual abilities. He delved into the secrets of his soul and learned the truth hidden at its bottom in order to achieve control over his own limitations and weaknesses of the body. "He abhorred the sight

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[5]The Lvov-Warsaw School—the most influential philosophical and psychological movement in Poland in the first half of the XX century—was founded in 1895 when K. Twardowski left the University of Vienna and became the Chair of Philosophy at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov. According to Wolfgang Huemer: Brentano's "influence was eclipsed by the work of his students, some of who founded philosophical traditions on their own: Husserl started the phenomenological movement, Meinong the Graz school, Twardovski the Lvov-Warsaw School" (Huemer, 2014; for more about the school, see: Bobryk, 2014; Brożek et al., 2017; Woleński, 2019).

[6]Witwicki translated the Greek *Gospels of Mark and Matthew* and wrote a 200-page commentary on them. He also translated Plato's Greek *Dialogues* and provided them with commentaries. It is the commentaries and introductions to the individual books that create a coherent, psychological picture of Jesus and Socrates.

of a glutton and a debauchee, or any man who bows his neck (. . .) to his own passions. He needed a sense of power so much that in his own eyes he felt insulted by his own young desires (. . .) bursting inside him, and which used to possess his soul" (Witwicki, 1999a, pp. 12–13). Witwicki attributes to him a cratic aspiration linked to ambition, according to which self-mastery is a matter of honour for Socrates. This is also exactly the reason for his reluctance to escape from prison or to exchange the death penalty for another (exile). It was ambition, dignity and pride that prevented him from behaving like a coward: "Ambition kept him in prison, ambition towards himself and towards the public" (Witwicki, 1999b, p. 607). This would be self-denial, condemning oneself to dishonour. Interestingly, however, Witwicki somehow unmasks the lofty aspirations and ethical intellectualism by attributing a cratic motivation to Socrates, which in practice meant something more than ambition, namely the desire for superiority and domination: "It is a need for power, for strength, for superiority over the surroundings and over one's own drives. He was not impressed by anything; he would not tolerate anyone's moral superiority, anyone's nimbus of seriousness" (Witwicki, 1999a, p. 13). This is how he interprets this part of Socrates' disputes, in which it is evident that he does not so much try to convince his interlocutor or make him aware of his error as he strives to humiliate and publicly discredit his adversary. It is as if he derives deep psychological satisfaction from this—the satisfaction of cratic desires.

Witwicki also recognised a similar motivational mechanism in the activity of Jesus of Nazareth, although compared to Socrates, to whom he devoted many years of work on Greek literature and culture, his translation of the Greek gospels and his analysis of the personality of the founder of Christianity were objectionable from the very beginning in Poland. Basically, Witwicki did not refer to any biblical research in this field, especially concerning the self-consciousness of Jesus—a subject which he was well acquainted with. Moreover, he attributed extreme cratic desires to him: the striving for a sense of power through domination over others and a tendency to humiliate them. He also considered him a schizotimist according to Ernst Kretschmer's typology, with severe difficulties in social relationships. However, he was not a sick man who had lost his cognitive faculties. According to Witwicki "the messianic self-feeling was his driving force, and sound human judgment—he retained it—served as his regulator of action" (Witwicki, 1958, p. 210). Claiming himself the messiah (which was to be the proof for his cratic desires), he accepted only those people who acknowledged his divine mission and were obedient to him and only to such people did he show mercy. Jesus expected absolute submission; he was even inclined, Witwicki argues, to induce a sense of guilt in people in order to later offer them forgiveness of their sins and salvation.

Jesus felt "superhuman power" (Witwicki, 1958, p. 203) and considered himself as "a unique being, chosen, destined for power and triumph over the world" (Witwicki, 1958, p. 205). He helped others insofar as they "accepted humiliation without protest and recognised his beneficial power and messianic dignity, regardless of his coldness and rejection" (Witwicki, 1958, p. 298). Thus, while Socrates is an example of positive cratism, involving the achievement of a sense of power by

elevating oneself and others (albeit coupled with a readiness to humiliate enemies), Jesus exhibits the pursuit of a sense of power coupled with a high readiness to humiliate others (negative cratism). Leaving aside the problem of the credibility of Witwicki's conclusions, it should be added that a preliminary verification of his theory has shown that the Gospel picture of Jesus is the least cratic when compared to the discourse of the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, the gospels present two psychological portraits of Jesus: one with a relatively high (Synoptic) and the second with a low (John's) intensity of this trait (Citlak, 2021b).

## 7   Conclusion

The honour-shame cultural code proposed by anthropologists and the interpretation of the social behaviour of Jesus and Socrates suggested in Twardowski's school according to striving for a sense of power are very similar. The first proposal has the character of a cultural and social framework; the second refers to the motivational dimension. Although they refer to different levels of functioning of the individual in social relations, I believe that they can be treated in a complementary sense. Witwicki identified an important motivational mechanism, although it is debatable whether the notion of cratism—the striving for a sense of power—is the most adequate. The cultural milieu of Israel and Greece at that time created a reality in which personal strength, not only physical strength but also a certain kind of charisma, and the ability to publicly demonstrate one's authority were of exceptional value. In this perspective, the notion of cratism or ambition seems to correspond very closely to the notion of honour, and therefore also to dignity, authority, social position and even power. I would add that the concept of power does not necessarily have negative connotations. Power, especially in the case of Jesus, appears to have a very different character as dignity, honour, authority and high social status. It also might seem intriguing that the honour-shame code is identified nowadays not only in Muslim culture (Mosquera, 2018), but also in many parts of the world like the Far East and South America. Personally, I think this is an emphatic signal that honour-shame may reflect another, more universal, regulatory mechanism that takes different forms of expression that social, cultural and evolutionary psychologists have been mentioning for many years, namely the quest for social status and social dominance (e.g. Patterson, 2019; Sidanius et al., 2004). This is exactly the conclusion reached by Saul Olyan, "In short, honour and shame communicate relative social status which may shift over time" (Olyan, 1996, p. 204). So did Collin Patterson, "Core values of honor and shame (. . .) can be subsumed under the broader category of social dominance, a biological/psychological motivational system which underlies each of them" (Patterson, 2019, p. 12).

I do not think it is an exaggeration to assume that not only the concept of honour but also the striving for a sense of power (cratism) are closely related to "social status and dominance". In other words, Socrates and Jesus appear in two independent

research traditions (honour-shame and the psychology of Twardowski's School) as figures with a similar psychological profile that can be discerned on an individual and social level. Was this their deliberate and conscious aspiration, or rather their natural trait, typical of the charismatic masters of antiquity? I suppose the latter, but this will remain more a matter of private conjecture that cannot be verified after more than 2000 years.

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**Amadeusz Citlak**  Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland; graduate of the Warsaw University (M.A. in psychology) and the Theological Academy in Warsaw (M.A. in biblical studies). Ph.D. study: Graduate School for Social Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. 2011—Ph.D. degree in psychology. Since 2012 till present at the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. My scientific interests include the psychology of religion, cultural-historical psychology, and the linguistic transmission of social knowledge. The main goal of my latest scientific projects is a psychological analysis of the historical-religious documents as the expression of moral and social beliefs and the psychobiography of famous ancient personalities (Socrates, Jesus).

# The Pedagogical Value of Psychobiography as Illustrated by an Examination of Eriksonian Psychosocial Development in the Life of Flora Tristan

**Jennifer Lodi-Smith, Lauren Mitchell, H. Shellae Versey, Nicky J. Newton, and Susan K. Whitbourne**

**Abstract** This chapter illustrates the value of psychobiographical approaches in modern psychological pedagogy, particularly psychobiographies of underrepresented lives where traditional empirical work is often lacking. We illustrate this with a psychobiography of Flora Tristan, a nineteenth century French/Peruvian feminist and social activist. Tristan's life serves to highlight the rich complexities that go beyond the conventional conceptions of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. Specifically, Tristan's passionate generativity showcased through her activist identity illustrates that Erikson's adult stages of identity development, intimacy formation, and generativity are not as independent and sequential constructs as traditionally presented in Erikson's model. This pattern echoes other psychobiographical work, recent psychometric and longitudinal studies of Eriksonian constructs, and Erikson's own theorizing and psychobiographical work. In illustrating these points, this chapter serves as an example of and provides

J. Lodi-Smith (✉)
Department of Psychology, Canisius College, Buffalo, NY, USA
e-mail: lodismij@canisius.edu

L. Mitchell
Department of Psychology, Emmanuel College, Boston, MA, USA
e-mail: mitchelll@emmanuel.edu

H. S. Versey
Department of Psychology, Fordham University, New York City, NY, USA
e-mail: sversey@fordham.edu

N. J. Newton
Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON, Canada
e-mail: nnewton@wlu.ca

S. K. Whitbourne
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA
e-mail: susan.whitbourne@umb.edu

tools for how psychobiographical exploration into non-WEIRD samples can be integrated into pedagogy and, by extension, can impact scholarship in specific areas.

**Keywords** Psychobiography · Generativity · Identity · Flora Tristan

## 1  Introduction

The traditional approach to psychobiography has one primary aim—to gain a better understanding of the life of an individual by applying psychological theory and research within a biographical context. In the pages that follow, we use the Eriksonian model of psychosocial development—specifically, identity, intimacy, and generativity—as an organizing framework for understanding the life of Flora Tristan, a nineteenth century French feminist and social activist. However, rather than being the primary aim of the chapter, this psychobiography of Flora Tristan serves to encourage, illustrate, and support with resources the integration of psychobiography into pedagogical practices (also see Ponterotto et al., 2015). As such, syllabi and project materials for the courses described in this chapter can be found at https://osf.io/pgkjr/. The psychobiography of Flora Tristan particularly emphasizes the pedagogical value of psychobiographies of underrepresented lives where traditional empirical work is often lacking. Specifically, Flora's experiences of oppression as a poor, illegitimate woman living in Europe in the 1800s provided novel insights into Eriksonian theory when the psychobiography was written close to 20 years ago.

The first author wrote the psychobiography that follows for a course she took with Brent Roberts as a graduate student at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 2004. In this course, students read Fredrick Douglass' autobiography (Douglass, 1845), read the original writings of a different historic personality theorist each week, and discussed Douglass' life from theoretical perspectives in weekly classes. For their final paper, students chose to write either a new personality theory or a psychobiography. The resulting psychobiography that follows illustrates one of the key values of the pedagogical psychobiographical exercise—a deeper understanding of theory that then translates into connections to and innovations for quantitative scholarship. While some modifications have been made to the psychobiography from the original paper for the sake of clarity and brevity, much of it remains intentionally unchanged to provide an example of the appropriate scope for a psychobiography for a single-semester graduate class. For example, a scholarly peer-reviewed psychobiography would incorporate many more sources about Tristan, with rich biographical investigations of her life—a task well outside the feasibility for a few months' effort by a graduate student. At the same time, we incorporate updated scholarship on Erikson's work to share the ways in which the class project sparked the authors' collaborations in this area and to illustrate where recent Eriksonian scholarship, including new psychobiographies, aligns with insights from the original psychobiography.

## 2 Conventional Conception of Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

Erikson posited an eight-stage framework for personality development with each stage focused on a central conflict at a specific point in the lifespan. The current psychobiography of Flora Tristan begins at age 15, corresponding with Erikson's fifth stage: the establishment of identity in early adulthood. Within this stage, an individual must establish an independent, individual identity. This is a time of discovering the self and determining one's niche in the adult world. During this period of life, individuals attempt to gain ownership over their lives, create a coherent story of why they are in the world and what the events in their life mean to them. The identity stage can often bring forth concerns with values, occupations, and general societal roles.

The sixth stage of Erikson's model is concerned with the establishment of intimacy, which he viewed as highly critical for women. This stage is centered on the attainment and maintenance of a loving, caring relationship. While the formation of a long-term romantic relationship is important at this stage, intimacy is also related to the establishment and deepening of positive, committed interpersonal relationships with friends, mentors, colleagues, and others.

The seventh stage of Erikson's model, and the last examined within the current psychobiography, is generativity. At this stage, most people are critically focused on giving back to society, with the aim of establishing the next generation and providing a good and functional world for them. As the life of Flora Tristan will illustrate and as Erikson emphasized (Erikson, 1959), generativity need not only be focused on one's offspring but also can be focused on establishing a better society for the next generation or on giving something back to society.[1]

Central to the conventional model of Eriksonian development regularly taught in psychology courses is that each stage builds on the previous stage. Thus, within that conventional model, a person must successfully navigate the conflict of establishing an identity before intimacy can be established and, subsequently, generativity. Difficulties arise when an individual becomes "stuck" within a stage and cannot progress to the next stage.

Likewise, a specific time frame is generally laid out for each stage. By adolescence and early adulthood, an individual should be working on identity and should, by the end of this period, if healthy, have established a clear, coherent sense of identity. Once identity is established in early adulthood, the individual should work to establish intimacy, at which point they can work on generative concerns through midlife.

Psychobiography provides an accessible means to push beyond these basic conceptions to a deeper understanding of the applied nuances of a theory. As we illustrate below, the orderly progression of conventional Eriksonian development

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[1] The other stages were not addressed, as their conventional timing falls outside the period of Flora's life examined here.

does not necessarily map onto people's lived experiences—development of the stages may be more nuanced and intertwined and less time-constrained.

## 3   The Life of Flora Tristan[2]

Flora Tristan was born in Paris on April 7, 1803. Her father was a Peruvian colonel in the Spanish army. Her mother, Therese Laisney, was a lower-middle class French woman. While her parents attempted to marry, the political atmosphere at the time prevented the marriage from being officially sanctioned by the government. Tristan was, therefore, legally illegitimate, a fact that would come back to haunt her frequently throughout her life. Her father, a wealthy man and close personal friend of Simon Bolivar, died in 1808 when Flora was only five. Due to political tensions between Spain and France at this time, Colonel Tristan's estates were seized by the French government, and Flora and her mother were forced to move to a Parisian slum. Flora's maternal uncle, Commandant Laisney, was quite well off with a residence at Versailles, but provided only enough support to keep Flora and her mother out of the worst slums. Flora had wealthy relatives in Peru on her father's side as well, but repeated attempts by her mother to establish contact were ignored.

In 1818, Flora experienced her first adolescent adversity when she met a young man while taking art lessons under the patronage of her uncle. She and the young man sent numerous love letters and decided to marry. His family was agreeable to this union, given Flora's father's connections and her uncle's money. However, before the marriage could take place, the questionable status of Tristan's birth came to light; Flora was shunned by her fiancé's family as a bastard and forced to break off contact with him.

Two years later, Flora was 17 years old and living in Paris. By all reports, she was a beautiful, if melodramatic, woman. She was an avid reader in French, Spanish, and English. In keeping with her artistic interests, when she needed to procure a job, she interviewed as a colorist in the shop of a lithographer, Andre Chazal, younger brother of artist Antonio Chazal. Chazal was immediately smitten with Tristan. He was a small, ugly man with little talent who lived in the shadow of his accomplished older brother. He tried frequently to find his place in society but failed miserably due to his generally obnoxious nature. Flora did not particularly care for him but, as a young woman in the early 1800s, her opinion had little to do with the matter. She was forced to marry him on February 3, 1821 by her mother and uncle, in a proceeding she termed "legitimate prostitution" (Desanti, 1976, p. 12).

Her marriage was a decidedly unhappy one. She genuinely disliked Chazal, mostly due to his repeated attempts to rape her even before their betrothal. She was frequently ill and was often prone to fits of violent temper and melancholy. She

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[2]Life details in this section come from Desanti's (1972/1976) biography of Flora Tristan. A scholarly psychobiography would contain more sources and details.

had her first child, Alexandre, quickly, and lacked any maternal feeling toward him. During this time, the middle class in France was in revolt against the government, but this uprising went relatively unnoticed by Flora.

On June 22, 1824, Flora had her second son, Ernest-Camille, and her depression continued as her life with Chazal deteriorated further. They constantly fought, and her despondent nature sent him out of the house gambling and drinking, leaving him steeped in debt. Tristan felt a prisoner in her marriage and, at the end of 1824, suffered a nervous breakdown. As Chazal's debts mounted, he repeatedly suggested that Tristan prostitute herself to the local apothecary and local doctors to help pay his debt. Flora was, unsurprisingly, outraged but could not leave him: divorce was illegal and leaving would be met with persecution.

Despite the threat of persecution, on March 3, 1825, upon realizing she was pregnant with his third child, Flora left Chazal for her mother's home. Chazal placed the blame for their separation on Tristan and fled Paris under a different name to avoid his ever-mounting debts. At this point, Flora's uncle openly shunned her, calling her "pariah," a name she later embraced, finding strength in fighting as a pariah of society.

Flora was able to find work by calling herself a widow and had her third child; a girl, Aline. Aline's birth changed Flora: she felt, for the first time, true love for another. With these new maternal feelings, Flora realized a desire to change the world so that Aline could grow up in a world with more opportunities for independence. To this end, she began reading about gender equality in intellect and education, ideas that stayed with her throughout her life.

Flora continued to work various menial jobs through 1829, with some time spent in England, where she developed a disdain for the division of classes and genders in British society. Flora spent much of 1830 learning the views of the Saint-Simonians. She spent most of her time listening to ideas without a great deal of active participation in revolutionary action or thought. During this time, she established contact with her rich uncle in Peru, who embraced her as his daughter and gave her a small allowance. 1830 also brought the Glorious Three, a 3-day revolution in France that had a lasting impact on Flora's developing ideology of progress and equality, though little was actually accomplished during the short revolution.

Two years later, Chazal heard about Tristan's new money and re-entered her life by violently attacking her in the streets. Flora was shaken by this event—both from the attack itself and because students in the street who saw the attack did not help, as Chazal was legitimately her husband. Chazal's reappearance in Paris caused Flora to take her uncle's offer to visit Peru and, leaving Aline with an educator friend, Flora headed to Bordeaux. There she met with another relative who facilitated her departure to Peru on her 30th birthday in 1833.

During her trip to Peru, Flora actively hid her marriage to Chazal and the existence of her children to avoid censure. During the voyage, the captain of her ship fell in love with her, but she refused him, displaying a pattern of avoidance of romantic commitment that continued throughout her life. Importantly, the Peru voyage prompted Flora's awareness of slavery, an institution which horrified and shocked her.

Flora blossomed in recently-liberated Peru. She had all she could ask for in friends, family, and goods. Peruvian women were quite independent, and she was influenced by their freedom to feel more powerful herself. She was given some power as an advisor to her cousin, an official in Bolivar's new Peruvian government. She was respected for both her beauty and her family and was constantly admired and adored. She entertained the idea of marriage multiple times, but dismissed it because of the risk of her past being discovered.

Flora returned to Paris in 1835 with a renewed sense of her power over herself and her world, as well as her own beauty and self-confidence. Through witnessing various revolutions in Peru and the independence of women in Lima, she learned to be independent and strong, and to use this strength to improve her surrounding world. With this new attitude, she published her first political pamphlet, *On the necessity for welcoming foreign women* (Tristan, 1835), a short treatise establishing the need to have hostels for foreign women, a dream that would not be realized for over one hundred years.

Her return also marked the beginning of a turbulent time between Chazal and Tristan, where she attempted to establish some form of legitimate separation from him while he continuously persecuted her. During this time, Chazal reappeared and kidnapped Aline, attempting to hold her for ransom. Aline escaped back to Flora but the police sided with Chazal and gave Aline to him. Two years went by and Aline finally escaped to Flora, recounting stories of sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Flora finally gained a modicum of control of Aline's life; Chazal was brought to trial, but was only imprisoned for 4 months.

During this time, Tristan published her first book, *Peregrinations of a Pariah* (Tristan, 1838a), a memoir on her life to that point that brought out the truth of her parents' questionable marriage, her relationship with Chazal, and documented her time in Peru. This resulted in her rich Peruvian uncle cutting off her funds. She also published *Memphis* (Tristan, 1838b), a romantic novel, during this period.

Shortly after his release from prison in 1838, Chazal began to plot Flora's murder. On September 10, 1838, he shot her in the street and seriously wounded her. This gained her both publicity and fame, and her books began to sell well. Chazal's trial was a sensation, and Flora won the hearts of the nation during the proceedings by not only writing a pamphlet on the need for divorce but also one advocating for the abolition of the death penalty. The trial was not all positive, however. The defense fashioned Tristan as something of a harpy, and Chazal was grudgingly sentenced to 20 years in prison. Through this experience, Tristan again felt the oppression of being a woman in her society where she only gained her freedom from her husband and custody of her children after her husband tried to kill her.

In 1840, Tristan traveled to Britain, examining British life in her book, *My Walks Around London* (Tristan, 1840). She could see England from the slums to the richest of houses. She empathized with working class problems and the poor, and their challenges became more central to her ideology. Through 1842, Tristan worked to promote work equality, especially through unionization of the working class. She was seen as something of a prophet at this point reporting numerous mystical experiences. In 1843, she published *Workers Union* (Tristan, 1843), her treatise on

the necessity for the unionization of the common worker. Rarely acknowledged, this essay was quite influential in its time. However, Tristan still had difficulty getting her work accepted, often because men with similar ideas tried to shut her out of the societies that would have accepted her.

In 1844, Flora began traveling around France promoting the ideals in *Workers Union*. She was often opposed by the wives of workers, the church, the government, and her own peers. During this time, she gained disciples and a strengthened sense of her need to bring change to the masses. She was arrested a few times and was still fawned over by men. However, she also began to fall ill, and the stress of constantly working began to take its toll. She was hospitalized in Bordeaux on September 26, 1844 with pseudocholera, typhoid, and a mild stroke, which was most likely associated with advanced intestinal cancer. She died quietly on November 14, 1844 at the age of 41, and her followers paid to have "Freedom, Liberty, and Fraternity" inscribed on her tombstone.

While none of the ideas and ideals Flora worked for came to fruition in her lifetime, Flora Tristan is considered a visionary for change. Her ideas are viewed as instrumental to the 1848 French Revolution and influenced many great thinkers and promoters of social change.

# 4    The Interdependence of Identity and Generativity in the Life of Flora Tristan

Tristan's struggle with identity extended well beyond the time period suggested by Erikson's conventional model of personality development. One of her earliest identity defining experiences came at the late (from the conventional Eriksonian perspective and by the life course standards of the early 1800s) age of 22 when she accepted the label of "pariah" from her uncle.

Tristan's identity is also differentiated from the conventional expectations of the Eriksonian model in that it was intimately connected with her generativity. This is illustrated by the birth of her daughter, Aline, who gave her a sense of purpose in life. She said to Aline, "I swear to you that I will fight for you, to make you a better world." (Desanti, 1976, p. 22). Because of her generative desire to create a better world for Aline, she began to develop her ideology through reading about equality. These are early and critical incidents of the interdependence between Flora's identity and her generativity and the way in which generativity sparked her identity rather than vice versa.

Throughout her life from this point on, many of Flora's actions are indicative of this joint identity/generativity theme. Her attendance at the Saint-Simonian salons aided the development of the generative ideological structure intrinsic to her identity. She established contact with her Peruvian uncle in order to further herself and therefore fight for justice for Aline. However, a consolidated identity was slow in developing. As she writes of her 30-year-old self at the age of 35, "In 1833, I was still

very far from having the ideas that, since, have developed in my mind" (Desanti, 1976, p. 67).

For all that her identity was intrinsically linked to generativity, her concerns became more and more generative with time. One biographer notes of Flora on her return from Peru, "Her own life cannot be enough for her and she must make it radiate outward in works and acts that can influence other lives" (Desanti, 1976, p. 109). As her generative identity solidified, Flora herself wrote of her societal goals for "an organization that allows man, in satisfying all the demands of his nature . . . to find happiness . . . . It is by this exercise of his powers, his passions, and not by their repression, that we claim to bring harmony to humanity" (Desanti, 1976, p. 132).

It is unclear, however, whether Flora ever found peace in this generative identity as her purported dying words speak to her continued sense of oppression, "An Architect in Antiquity cried out: 'What he has said, I will do!' Oh! If courage and dedication were enough, I would be that architect who says little but who acts . . . . But in our unhappy society woman is a pariah by birth, a serf by condition, unhappy by duty, and must almost always choose between hypocrisy and being branded" (Desanti, 1976, p. 270). Thus, while Flora had a strong ideology grounded in her generative nature, she never seemed to gain a full sense of security in this identity, as her society was not the one that could accommodate her desires.

## 5    The Struggle for Intimacy in the Life of Flora Tristan

The story of intimacy in Flora's life is no less tumultuous than that of her development of a generative identity. Tristan's marriage to Chazal was far from the ideal commitment set forth by Erikson. Her concerns for intimacy began early, in terms of the Eriksonian framework (though not if we account for the historic context) with her relations with the young aristocrat which were ultimately shattered by her family situation. The subsequent rape by her future husband to whom she was given in "legitimate prostitution" (Desanti, 1976, p. 12) did little to establish a positive attitude toward intimacy. She found few companions until her daughter, Aline, was born. Her relations with her mother and uncle were strained at best and she had few friends. She was in constant conflict with Chazal, a source of persistent stress throughout most of her life.

Even after escaping her marital prison, she had difficulty establishing healthy romantic relationships. She was accused of frigidity often and, at multiple points, was on the verge of marrying but retreated. While she consistently justified her actions in avoiding bigamy, she was generally presumed to be running from commitment (Desanti, 1976). In 1833, she said to the captain of her ship when breaking off their engagement, "My heart is like that ocean; unhappiness has hollowed out deep abysses in it. It's not human power that can fill it" (Desanti, 1976, p. 67).

Shortly after this incident, Tristan's intimacy concerns began to overlap her identity concerns as she experienced a period of suicidal melancholy. She felt as though she "wasn't living, for to live is to love" (Desanti, 1976, p. 87). Due to her

inability to find romantic love, she felt her life was hopeless. However, during this period, she experienced the Peruvian revolutions and began to see social change in action. One biographer accounts for the re-establishment of her identity through a shift in the orientation of her identity concerns from being focused on intimacy to being focused on generativity: "Between February and March 1834 she pulls out of her crisis by sublimating her desire for love into social passion" (Desanti, 1976, p. 88). This is a compelling demonstration of how exclusion in her intimate life led to a transformed and wider purpose in her public persona, linked by generativity and activism. Flora's generative acts through activism functioned as a productive outlet; certainly, as a way to give back to future generations, but also to possibly re-construct identity, flourish, and thrive despite her early-life experiences of intimate abuse and social exclusion.

Flora had difficulty extricating herself from intimacy concerns and continued to look for a romantic partner with a new agenda: searching for a man she could control to enact social change, again showing the singular purpose of her generativity in other areas of her life. She fled commitment again, however, as she prepared to marry a powerful Peruvian military figure, stating:

> I have the deepest conviction that if I had become his wife I would have been very happy. . . . It required again, this time, all my moral strength not to succumb to the seductiveness of this prospect . . . *I feared myself*, and I judged it prudent to protect myself from this new danger by flight. I therefore resolved to leave at once for Lima (Desanti, 1976, p. 98).

Once again, there was conflict between Flora's intimacy needs and her desire for honesty central to her generative identity. The conflict within her identity between intimacy or generativity continued even in her fictional work as she said things as, "If you are not accessible to glory, do good, love humanity. This lover will never betray you. At twenty as at sixty, you may love it passionately" (Desanti, 1976, p. 121).

Tristan's identity settled into a more generative framework as she became more engaged with activism, saying, "I have only one attitude, its work, the ardent wish to be able to make myself useful, to serve the cause that we love with so much purity" (Desanti, 1976, p. 119). Thus, with time, Tristan concerned herself less and less with intimacy and more with generativity. Throughout the rest of her life, she was proposed to by many men and answered similarly to all men as she did to one of her followers a year before her death, "At this moment, I am not disposed to welcome anyone's love" (Desanti, 1976, p. 235).

As her life neared an end, however, she began to integrate both intimacy and generativity into her identity. In her numerous followers, disciples to her generative ideals, she found love, telling them, on her deathbed, "If I succumb, let everyone who has loved me know that I too loved them immensely, religiously" (Desanti, 1976, p. 262). Thus, toward the end of her life, she began to overcome her previous isolation as she developed her intimacy with others within her generative identity.

## 6 A Richer Understanding of Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

The psychobiography of Flora Tristan above illustrates more than just an analysis of one individual's lived life. It demonstrates how useful psychobiography can be in pedagogy for providing deeper understanding of psychological theories. Tristan's life shows much greater complexity than the commonly taught Eriksonian model, suggesting that rather than explicit stages, the life themes in Erikson's model are intrinsically linked such that identity can be defined by issues within both intimacy *and* generativity themes. The life of Flora Tristan further suggests that the timeline of Erikson's model can be less structured and more fluid in the ways in which stage conflicts are "resolved."

Tristan's life story also illustrates the potential for psychobiography to spark traditional data-driven research to foster concrete hypotheses, suggesting new lines of investigation in an ongoing program of research and providing a forum for real-world application of phenomena observed in laboratory settings or panel studies. As one of the leaders in psychobiographical research, Alan Elms, states, psychobiography "tests the statistically significant against the personally significant" (Elms, 1994, p. 12). In other words, psychobiography can play an integral role in the scientific process. To be clear, it is not the task of psychobiography to simply run through the field of data-driven scientific research with a falsification White-Out pen. Instead, psychobiography can serve as a catalyst for creativity in research. For the first author, this takeaway from the original psychobiography was the catalyst for her work on Eriksonian development with the co-authors of this chapter and others.

The authors' ongoing program of work on Eriksonian psychosocial development shows that, in a 4-cohort, 5-wave, 55+ year cross-sequential study, Eriksonian constructs remain relevant and can exhibit change across adulthood (Lodi-Smith et al., 2018; Whitbourne et al., 2009); identity, rather than a solely critical concern of adolescence and young adulthood, is a pervasive issue throughout the lifespan with specific implications for the roles of both intimacy and generativity in the life of the individual (Mitchell et al., 2021a); identity in emerging adulthood influences the timing and development of subsequent stages (Mitchell et al., 2021b); and generativity is associated with well-being over adulthood (Lodi-Smith et al., 2021). These findings echo Flora's own life course and help to address places Erikson's epigenetic diagram explicitly leaves open for "further study" (Erikson, 1964, p. 273).

The points raised above resonate with Erikson's own writing in other ways as well. Conventional teaching of Erikson's theory often focuses on "that each critical item of psychosocial strength . . . is systematically related to all others, and that they all depend on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item." (Erikson, 1964, p. 271). Flora's life shifts emphasis to an often overlooked part of this framing "that each item exists in some form before its critical time normally arrives" (Erikson, 1964, p. 271) with room for "variations in tempo and intensity"

(Erikson, 1964, p. 271) wherein "identity formation . . . is a lifelong development" (Erikson, 1964, p. 120).

Finally, these findings also echo those documented in other psychobiographies of women (Stewart et al., 1988; Peterson & Stewart, 1990) as well as other marginalized individuals (e.g., Fouché et al., 2019). Erikson's themes serve as valuable structures for understanding defining events. In addition to being useful descriptive tools, these psychobiographies underscore the critical need to move beyond conventional conceptions. Instead, they motivate the thinking of the complex intrinsic interrelations between themes as well as the timeframe in which these themes occur. Thus, psychobiography can help make connections between the complexity of personality development models and the realities of a lived life (see also Anderson & Dunlop, 2019).

## 7 Psychobiography in the Undergraduate Curriculum

While the psychobiography of Flora Tristan came from a graduate course, and our manuscript primarily illustrates the value from that lens and for our program of scholarship, this original graduate psychobiography project also sparked insights into the value of psychobiography in the undergraduate curriculum. All too often, our undergraduate curriculum must present the traditional, simple models of a theory such as the conventional conception of Erikson described above. Nuance and complexity are often too granular for what can be shared in the context of undergraduate classrooms. This is paired with the fact that modern psychological research directs much of its theory testing toward data collection within samples of anonymous undergraduates. When researchers expand beyond the undergraduate population, our research frequently takes the form of bringing the same questionnaires out into the broader population. The unique life of an individual, however, can provide a wealth of information to supplement quantitative evaluations of theory. By supplementing these dominant ways of evaluating theory, psychobiographies can illustrate the complexities of theory and research within the individual experience. This can be delivered either as a project within a disciplinary course or as a standalone psychobiography class.

The single-project design is much like the one that led to this psychobiography. In this project, students choose an individual and work toward the primary goal of understanding that individual better. In doing so, students can gain a better understanding of psychological theory and research. Indeed, in many cases, students also go on to identify potential new avenues of scholarship, just like academic researchers who formally engage in psychobiography. This project is fun, engaging, and lends itself well to flexible, inclusive teaching models. Students can choose a subject who is living or deceased, real or fictional, or even a non-human animal subject—a popular choice for students studying animal behavior. Likewise, students can work in groups or individually, write a paper or prepare a presentation. These projects work well through the semester yoked to specific content areas or as capstone

projects to synthesize across the semester's content. Students can also be challenged to think developmentally about what will happen in the individual's future, what would have happened had the individual lived longer, and/or about the processes, dynamics, and structures at play in the individual's life. Students can also think critically about how data derived from WEIRD samples can generalize to an individual from a more diverse background. This project is well-suited to a variety of psychology courses from personality to developmental to clinical psychology.

Psychobiography can also be offered as a stand-alone upper-level course giving students more opportunity to explore the theoretical, philosophical, and empirical world of psychology within the context of a lived life. At the start of this course, students choose a subject to be the focus of the class discussion during the semester. They then read the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (Schultz, 2005). Students are responsible for choosing a psychological theory to research and share with the class an informative and accessible reading about their theory. The class then discusses the subject from the lens of that theory with the student leading a discussion of their chosen theory. Throughout the semester, students are also developing their own psychobiographical investigations of a different subject from the lens of a select theory or theories that is delivered both as a paper and a summative presentation. As in the single-project approach, students can think critically about the quality of the theory and data-driven evidence, forming new research questions based on the lived experience of the subject of the psychobiography.

One weakness of psychobiography in the classroom is that time resources are limited. The psychobiography here is an example of this—because of limited resources, only one biography provided source material. A scholarly psychobiography would be far more exhaustive, employing multiple sources. Likewise, some subjects are easier to study than others in the context of a semester. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright has enough biographies written about his 90+ year life that each student in a stand-alone course can read a different biography and come to class poised with different views and examples. At this point, there may be *too* much information to readily get to a rich understanding of the man in a manageable way. Actor Robin Williams, on the other hand, was such a private individual that even his closest friends felt they did not know the man well. Both subjects also illustrate potentially easy avenues for students to fall into an overly reductionist approach to a lived life, only looking through one lens or to arm-chair diagnose a person's psychological history. It is, therefore, critical that the application of psychobiography in the classroom also review best practices for psychobiography (e.g., Ponterotto, 2014), have students read accessible examples of psychobiographies, and challenge students to think complexly about the lived life.

## 8   Conclusion

In sum, the psychobiography of Flora Tristan illustrates that Erikson's model is a helpful lens to gain a better understanding of the dynamics that shaped her life. Tristan's life story helps build a more rich and complex understanding of Eriksonian

theory and to catalyze a program of research that builds knowledge about Eriksonian theory. All of this is set within the context of the pedagogical value of psychobiography to help in understanding the lived life, as well as psychological theory and science, and to spark interest in the application of psychology to lives that do not necessarily fit the mold of the traditional subject of psychology research.

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**Jennifer Lodi-Smith** is a personality psychologist who uses a multi-method approach to understand the patterns, mechanism, and outcomes of personality development across the lifespan in normative aging and in the context of autism spectrum disorder. She co-directs the Aging and Autism Study and the Rochester Adult Longitudinal Study. She serves Canisius College as Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs where she focuses on faculty development and support of the student experience. She serves the profession as Secretary/Treasurer for the Association for Research in Personality and associate editor of the Journal of Personality.

**Lauren Mitchell** is an assistant professor of psychology at Emmanuel College in Boston, MA. Her research focuses on identity development across the lifespan, especially in the context of stressful or disruptive life events. Her recent work has examined identity and adaptation among veterans, individuals with spinal cord injury, and older adults coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. She completed her PhD in personality psychology at the University of Minnesota and a postdoctoral fellowship at the Minneapolis VA.

**H. Shellae Versey** is an assistant professor of psychology at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York, and she leads several projects exploring the intersection between race/racism, aging, and health. Shellae earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan. She also holds degrees in public health and epidemiology from Columbia University and the University of Michigan. Her recent research focuses on neighborhoods and older adults, framing housing as an essential component of well-being, and flourishing during later life.

**Nicky J. Newton** is an associate professor of psychology, most recently at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. Her research examines some of the many factors that shape psychosocial development in mid-to-late adulthood: gender, race, class, relationship quality and social support; activity engagement; health and well-being; and the social roles in which people—particularly women—engage, such as marriage, family, and career. Recent projects include an examination of Canadians' experiences of retirement, issues of identity and well-being associated with later-life transitions for women in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, and a co-edited volume of essays from older women academics from the field of psychology.

**Susan K. Whitbourne** is a psychologist whose research covers psychosocial development in adulthood with a focus on mid and later life, serving as a co-director of the Rochester Adult Longitudinal Study. She is a Professor Emerita from the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she also served as Director of the Office of National Scholarship Advisement and Psi Chi Faculty Advisor. Currently, she is a Faculty Fellow at the University of Massachusetts Boston Institute of Gerontology where she is a member of the Age-Friendly University Research team. President-Elect of the Geropsychology Specialy Board of the American Board of Professional Psychology, she has also served as President of the Eastern Psychological Association and Council Representative to the American Psychological Association.

# Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and Learning History

**Ulrich Sollmann**

**Abstract**  While the concept of psychobiography has been largely developed in the West, this chapter demonstrates how it can be applied in China. The author describes and analyses Chinese celebrities with regard to the specific patterns of behaviour, based on the relevance of body language and nonverbal communication in their specific Chinese culture. Insofar as celebrities embody elements of typical cultural patterns, these celebrities are role models in terms of important social and cultural functions. Because the author is not experienced in the Chinese language he favours a transcultural and ethno-analytical approach. The chapter also illustrates the specific concept and methodology of adult observation. In contrast to infant observation, this method relates to people in their real-life situations. The psychobiographical analysis of "virtual persons" in relation to the background of personal patterns of behaviour and cultural impact is presented as a form of "learning history".

**Keywords**  Body language · Transcultural communication · China · Learning history · Adult observation

## 1  Psychobiography and Learning History

This chapter deals with the psychobiographical research perspective as applied to the analysis of two Chinese celebrities. So far I have not found any specific literature which could guide psychobiographical research in China as a non-WEIRD-context. Therefore, I describe and discuss my methodology, approach and research process as

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U. Sollmann (✉)
Shanghai University of Political Science and Law (SHUPL), Sino-German Academy of Psychotherapy (DCAP), Bochum, Germany
e-mail: sollmann@sollmann-online.de

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a meaningful part of the research design. I understand my approach as a "further step in the development of new trends in psychobiography" (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019).

Using the examples of two Chinese celebrities, I will shed light on some aspects of the cultural context of China. The hermeneutic approach informs my professional experience in a foreign cultural context.

A lot of psychotherapeutic research is usually concerned with the life history of clients. In addition, psychobiographical research explores the life of artists, politicians or other famous people who are no longer alive (Holm-Hadulla, 2019). In the German-speaking world, there were occasional psychobiographical analyses by psychoanalysts of still-living persons until the end of the last century. Sigmund Freud, for example, wrote about the American president Thomas Woodrow Wilson (Freud & Bullitt, 2007). In my book *Schaulauf der Mächtigen*, I psychobiographically trace behavioural and impact patterns of German government politicians in the context of media scenarios (Sollmann, 1999). A psychobiographical reference to public persons is not infrequently based on (psycho)analytical models of understanding. This can be elicited in different ways. The psychoanalyst and body psychotherapist Alexander Lowen expanded these concepts in the 70s and 80s to the extent that he clearly refers to the role and function of human corporeality (Lowen, 1981). Life experience is thus, and this is an essential insight, also expressed in body language (facial expressions, posture, movement patterns, etc.). On the one hand, life history shapes a person's physicality, but also vice versa. The analysis of nonverbal and para-verbal expression can enable differentiated conclusions to be drawn about biographical experiences and related patterns of behaviour, experience and expression. Building on this, I have applied this concept to the psychobiographical analysis of public persons since 1995 (e.g. Sollmann, 1995, 1999). Similarly, in this chapter I will trace my own experience and learning process in the sense of a "learning history". This serves, on the one hand, to illuminate my research design and methodology, which is mainly characterised by an action research approach. On the other hand, it illustrates and explains my analysis of Chinese celebrities.

A learning history is a process of documenting my own development, learning and analytic efforts to increase self-awareness. It presents my own understanding of and relationship to a new field of experience, including reports of actions and findings. It shows how my learning is an approach to become familiar with what I do, where I do it and with whom I do it. It also illustrates how I achieved my results (Roth & Kleiner, n.d.) www.thesystemthinker.com. In the learning history, I describe learning methods and the design of interventions, as well as my underlying assumptions and reasoning, which in this case help me to do psychobiographic analysis in an unfamiliar context. It serves as a critical element in developing my own research structure (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, n.d.).

My leading questions in this research were:

- How can I judge the success of my psychobiographical analysis in terms of improved understanding?
- How can readers and/or colleagues benefit from this experience?
- What type of personal behaviour patterns (of the subjects) helps me to understand the individuals' typical approach to their own life?

- What characteristics help to better understand this as a function in and of the cultural context?

## 2  My First Psychobiographical Analysis

In 1995 I was commissioned by *Der Spiegel*[1] to analyse the relationship pattern between the German tennis player, Steffi Graf,[2] and her father, as reflected in the media (Sollmann, 1995). The most famous features writer from *Der Spiegel* at the time (Jürgen Leinemann) refused to make such an analysis, since he knew neither Steffi Graf nor her father, nor had he ever spoken to them. According to Leinemann, it was part of a journalist's code of ethics to write only about those people with whom one had spoken.[3]

At that time, the editors-in-chief of *Der Spiegel* approached me because I had already published work dealing with the analysis of body language, expression and behaviour. Unlike Leinemann, these editors believed that one could draw conclusions about the person to be analysed from their visible expressive behaviour as noted by and reflected in the media. Since I had never spoken with Steffi Graf or her father, I could not make any statements about them apart from their relationship as it had been presented by the media (Sollmann, 1995). So I focussed not only on the real people but also on their virtuality. This integrates the awareness of the real people, their impact on the world, and the way in which the media mirror this, which can be termed the *media scenario*. The more this is focussed by observation, one could say that the main object of the study is a *virtual person*.

At that time, to the best of my knowledge, there was no known or differentiated methodology in Germany to make such an analysis of famous or public personalities. I therefore relied on the effect and analysis of body language and nonverbal communication, as I had done in my practice as a body psychotherapist and executive coach. As part of my body psychotherapy training, I was also familiar with personal life analysis. In addition, I expanded on concepts of observing infants (Trunkenpolz & Hover-Reisner, 2008) in non-therapeutic settings (Sollmann, 2006, 2018). Infant observation aims to learn more about relational behaviour as a whole by observing and analysing babies' development, especially in relation to their mothers. Adult observation, on the other hand, attempts to both elaborate typical patterns of behaviour, expression and action of the observed person and to draw conclusions about relevant biographical developmental experiences in this regard as well as formative experiential incidents (Sollmann, 2018).

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[1] *Der Spiegel* is the oldest and best-known German weekly political magazine.

[2] World's best female tennis player for many years.

[3] Jürgen Leinemann, Portaitist of "Der Spiegel" at the press conference at the Federal Press Conference, 04.08.1999, to the book presentation from Ulrich Sollmann "Schaulauf der Mächtigen—Was uns die Körpersprache der Politiker verrät"

# 3 Media Scenarios as a Seduction to Emotional (Partial) Identification

Media scenarios show the impact of public figures and often offer insights into the private lives of these public figures through home stories. However, a media scenario is something more than and different to factual reporting about public personalities or home stories. A media scenario offers itself as a mediator to enable media consumers to partially identify with public persons (Peters, 1996). A media scenario therefore acts as a projection surface for emotional milieus (Sollmann, 2011a, b). In so doing, the media scenario represents a transitional space in which public figure, emotional environment and society/culture meet (Ciompi & Endert, 2011).

Media work usually refer to the behaviour of a public person in relation to the situation in question and discuss the significance of this behaviour for the particular occasion or subject (Sollmann & Mayer, 2021). As a rule, however, this cannot identify this as a typical pattern for the person and the particular life story, nor can this usually view or even evaluate the specific occasion from this special perspective.

A more detailed analysis of media coverage, which I undertook when writing my book on politics revealed that different media took different reporting perspectives regarding public figures. My analysis at the time showed that the sum of the different perspectives produced a plausible overall picture of the individual public figure and reflected typical patterns of behaviour and impact that were biographically shaped and relevant for the entire life of that person (Sollmann, 1999, 2020b).

Accordingly, some media reported more intensively on an aspect A, others on aspect B, others again on aspect C. This subliminally aroused the interest of media consumers who favoured a particular medium. The more space this partial coverage was given, the more likely a reader could partially identify with aspect A or aspect B. This subset of the population can be called the emotional milieu, which I refer to as circular emotional self-affirmation. The aspect A or B favoured in this medium became more concise and meaningful the more it was enacted. This vitalised the emotionality of the subpopulation (Sollmann, 2000).

Conversely, the importance of specific, personal patterns of expression and effect were reinforced. The interaction of specific media scenarios with the partial identification by the media consumers promotes projections on the part of the latter. This leads to a strengthening of the virtual relationship between public person or celebrity and the audience. The celebrity, audience, and media scenario merge into a virtual entity, fed by the personality traits of the public person or celebrity and by basic social or cultural attitudes.

A reciprocal resonance then occurs. Celebrities serve social and cultural needs, especially through their nonverbal patterns of expression and impact. In this case, the media act as mediators and amplifiers of the mutual resonances. Put simply, celebrities in Germany or the USA are more likely to have a meaningful impact and successful career in their own cultural sphere. A well-known politician may be perceived as charismatic in one country, but not in another (Günter, 2005).

## 4 Between Confirmation and Ethical Controversy

My analysis in *Der Spiegel* caused a broad social and media response.[4] There were hostilities, accusations and even a complaint to the ethics commission by professional colleagues.[5] The accusation was that I should not have used psychotherapy concepts and methods to analyse people I had never seen or spoken to. I should have asked Steffi Graf and her father for permission first. I took these responses and reactions personally and professionally very much to heart. Consequently, over the next 2 years, I dealt with the questions:

- Was I allowed to write like this?
- Who or what was the subject of my analysis?
- What are the ethical considerations in the psychobiographical analysis of public persons?

The collegial exchanges which followed finally encouraged me to embrace the view that a psychotherapist has a social obligation to write about specific relationship patterns of public figures, if they have any social relevance (Kant, 2018).[6] Such an approach to the fundamental ethic assessment and pragmatics of ethics can be well illustrated by the example of the corresponding discourse in the USA. On the one hand, there is the ethical requirement not to comment on a public figure from a professional point of view. On the other hand, there is the so-called Tarasoff Doctrine, from which the necessity can even be derived to even have to speak out as a psychological and psychotherapeutic expert if there may be potentially dangerous consequences of the behaviour (Ewing, 2005). In the case of the relationship of Steffi Graf and her father, there was clear relevance in that the relational abuse pattern was frequently found in the lives of top female tennis players (e.g. Monica Seles). Two years later, the German Tennis Federation took up some of my thoughts and proposals in one of its magazine editorials (Sollmann, 2022a, b, c), in order to stipulate conditions for working with girls in top tennis. I refer to this experience to emphasise that a flexible, ethical method is needed to solve moral problems by a recourse to practical wisdom (Gordon, 2019), in contrast to the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant (2018).

After all, the ethical and "moral universe" is too complex for all problems to be solved by a master principle alone. "Rather, a flexible, ethical method is needed that solves our moral problems by recourse to practical wisdom " (Sollmann, 2022b, p. 68, referring to Gordon, 2019). According to Gordon, ethics must also be understood as thinking about questions of the "good life" (ethics). In consequence,

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[4]Letter to the editor by psychology professor Tausch in "Der Spiegel", No. 33, 1995.

[5]Complaint to the Ethics Committee of the Professional Association of Bioenergetic Analysis (DVBA), End of August 1995 by the psychologist Richard Redl.

[6]The practical experience and the media echo as well as basic ethical reference helped me to develop more self-trust in this approach as well as a deeper, professional reference (e.g. Kant, 2018).

ethics can never be seen without the aspect of "ethics as a method". This makes it possible then to select the right aspect for the respective situation as determining under the essential aspects of morality. (Sollmann, 2022b, p. 81, referring to Gordon, 2019; Sollmann 2019).

Encouraged by this experience, and by positive feedback from people I had previously analysed (Sollmann, 2017), I also endeavoured to analyse public figures and celebrities in other cultural contexts (Sollmann, 2000, 2004, 2020a, 2022a, b, c). In 2014/2015, as part of my professional work in China, I was asked to do similar analyses of Chinese celebrities for Internet TV. This request confronted me with an extraordinary challenge since I did not know the Chinese language, nor was I familiar with the Chinese media scenarios. For the first time in my life I stepped into a cultural sphere that had hitherto been completely foreign to me.

## 5 Analysis of Chinese Celebrities

In 2015, the operators of the internet platform www.iepsy.com[7] asked me to make analyses of Fan Bing Bing (actress), Faye Wong (singer), Jin Xin (transgender talkmaster), Zhou Li Bo (stand-up comedian) and Ma Yun, the founder of the Alibaba company, among others. I received minimal information regarding age, profession and the type of activity the celebrities were involved in. A Chinese colleague who was an excellent translator helped me to search for any videos available on the Chinese Internet. These were videos regarding professional activities and concerning the celebrities' lives (Sollmann, 2015a, b). Following my analyses, I was asked in an on-camera interview for my assessment, and for recommendations, as a life coach, to achieve even more success or greater wealth.

Initially I was relieved to refer only to the effect of body language and nonverbal expressive behaviour. On the other hand, however, I was faced with the great difficulty of relating my impressions to the cultural context, without having learned more about the life and work of the celebrities in the Chinese environment.

In the course of my professional work and ethnological research in China, I was concerned with the practical, everyday behaviour of the Chinese people. In addition, I tried to relate typical patterns of behaviour and action to the particular social situation and the cultural and historical influences in China (Sollmann, 2015a, b, 2018). In this respect, related experiences as well as hypotheses from my ethnological research in China served as a frame of reference.

As previously noted, the analyses of Chinese celebrities took place in a cultural habitat that was previously foreign to me. The experience, knowledge and perspective with which I was quite familiar in the West were largely lacking in China. Nonetheless, I wanted to harness my unusual transcultural perspective to be able to analyse the celebrities and vividly describe the media consumer experience. Since I

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[7]The videos can be found via the website and the search function.

was interested in gaining in-depth insights in a relatively foreign context, my intention in these analyses was to understand the expressive behaviour as meaningful, culturally appropriate behaviour and as an expression of patterns of expression. Therefore, to analyse in a meaningful way, I needed to analyse the person coherently (of course only perceived from my perspective) and at the same time demonstrate a sufficient fit with the audience and the fans in an accessible way. In this respect, I thought I could sufficiently relate person to culture for my purposes. In addition, I placed great emphasis on, transculturally speaking, my resonance (including emotional resonance) when viewing the videos. This resonance served me for professional partial identification, for emotional co-experience, and for the necessary critical distance. One may call this transcultural communication (Krämer & Nazarkiewicz, 2012).

## 6   Basic Questions

I agree with Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) that psychobiography is a method of deeper re-understanding and re-interpreting the lives of individuals. In terms of the Chinese cultural context, I had very little basic information available regarding celebrity biographies. Therefore, I had decided to refer to the celebrities' perception, assessment and analysis of central patterns of behaviour and effects. After all, these are actually visible and perceptible in the here-and-now. In this way, the perception and assessment of nonverbal expression and effect offer a door into a life story that needs to be opened. Some helpful questions to ask in the process of understanding a learning history are the following:

- How do I find a suitable key to be able to open a door into a biography that is completely foreign to me?
- Are there other doors of participant observation and understanding?
- What is the appropriate perspective that opens up for me to see biography in a cultural space that is foreign to me?
- Which basic methodological understanding is suitable and meaningful for such an approach?
- Which methods correspond best to the psychobiographical approach I have chosen?
- How can a possible interplay between the effect of the public persona, media scenario and emotional (partial) identification of the media consumers be determined in more detail?
- Are there any emotional and cultural projections that might be at work here?
- If so, does a celebrity embody a social-cultural function?

Psychobiography is characterised as a process of understanding from a distance. Research therefore integrates the object of research (the person to be analysed) and the subject (the researcher himself). Questioning helps to find a way of better understanding this relationship.

# 7   Body Language as Nonverbal Communication Is Always a Process

Body language and nonverbal effect are always an interplay of personal expression of the acting person and personal impression by the counterpart. They are an effective part of the current relationship situation. The interplay of expression and impression characterises not only the relationship scenario but also lives from the individuality and particularity of the people involved. The body and body language behaviour are source, representation, control of communication and interaction. In this respect, people often react unconsciously to these patterns of movement and behaviour. Often they do not reflect on this and therefore cannot cognitively grasp, describe or consciously react to their own behavioural patterns let alone those of their counterparts. This is not the case for experts, however. Studies have shown that experts are superior to non-experts in the accuracy of their judgements regarding adult observation. They differ significantly from the random level. Bioenergetic analysts, for example, assign depicted or self-observed people to typical behavioural structures with relatively high agreement (Koemeda-Lutz & Peter, 2001).

The analysis of movement, reaction, behaviour patterns allows an interactive access to the body image of the counterpart, which in turn allows conclusions to be drawn about the subjective organisation of experience in the counterpart, their self-perception, orientation to and behaviour in the world. Body experience and body expression thus combine in a person's outward effect and as part of the communicative event with the counterpart. Body language is characterised and shaped by photographic elements, the outward quality of effect, the dialogic potential and the response of the counterpart. It therefore constitutes a central space of personal experience, of communicative events and of human development in general. It acts as a consciously difficult-to-control interplay of general human characteristics, experience, personal peculiarities, behavioural patterns and so on.

The body expression shows how someone stands in the world, how they react to their life circumstances and have formed their personality. In the personality structure, central historical experiences and conflicts are conserved to a certain extent and become visible later in life. However, a personality model is not an image of a person, but a description of recurring experiences and patterns of action of real people in specific social and cultural contexts. Especially when under stress or emotional strain, in conflict and in crises, one unconsciously falls back on the early experiences patterns of action from one's life history. These then serve as the best possible pattern in the sense of a survival mechanism (Lowen, 1981). Outsiders can often semi-consciously recognise these patterns, while it is usually difficult to do so for oneself. In stressful and strained conditions, and also when one is in love, recurring, typical patterns of expression and action are more likely to be recognised. They usually function automatically, as if by themselves (Lowen, 1981). They are to be understood more in the sense of a stress reaction, less as individual responses, owing to the particularity of the relationship.

To that extent, these reactivated patterns reflect the essence of central biographical experiences. Understanding this essence helps one to develop more knowledge about specific characteristics of the individual. It also allows conclusions to be drawn about relationship situations when they are experienced at the time as distress or crisis. Such situations certainly also reflect societal and cultural influences that were significant at the time. After all, the conditions experienced by the individual as emotional distress are also an expression of surrounding and formative culture. These acquired patterns of behaviour and action then correspond to an emotional survival mode in the respective culture.

With this in mind, my purpose in analysing the Chinese celebrities was not to gain more insight into the life histories of the celebrities. Instead, my interest was in gaining a better understanding of the behavioural and expressive structure of the individuals and their impact and meaning in the Chinese cultural context.

## 8 Concept of Adult Observation

*Adult observation* (Sollmann, 2006) is a concept and an instrument to systematically conceive the interplay of person and behaviour/behavioural patterns in a public space or professional context, to analyse it in a process-like manner, to relate it to its context and to identify implications for impact. It deals with the interplay of nonverbal impact, body language, personality and behavioural patterns in a specific context.

In a culturally foreign context, I find the concept of adult observation helpful in relating to the visible expressive behaviour, nonverbal effect and corresponding communication/effect on me as an observer. My previous analyses in China confirm the sense and usefulness of such a methodological approach in a culturally foreign environment (Ekman, 2016).

For the thinking model of adult observation, movement means lively exchange, interaction with others and recognition by others. Movement patterns contain information about the identity of the actor, their age and gender, about their intentions and their state of mind, health and inner emotional state. The human perceptual system is excellently equipped to recognise these complex motion sequences. For example, in a crowd of people, one can recognise a friend even that friend is wearing new clothes and has an unfamiliar haircut, even if one cannot see the friend's whole body. Movement patterns play a central role here. Moreover, only a few characteristics or distinctive points are enough for the brain to convey certainty that this is the person (Lischke, 2000). Bioenergetic analysis (Lowen, 1981) and analytical movement models (Lischke, 2000; Rick, 1989; Trautmann-Voigt & Voigt, 2009) offer ways to understand the personality from the body, the movement patterns and the energetic processes.[8]

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[8]At this point, no further reference can be made to the description and discussion regarding other, similar models. No further reference is possible because of the space of this chapter.

Adult observation in the non-pathological field makes use of the so-called *affect modes* (Krause, 2017; Ciompi, 1998; Ciompi & Endert, 2011). These are a matter of identifying and analysing situationally related feelings, perceptions and behaviour, which are connected in memory to form functional units in the sense of integrated feeling, thinking and embodied behavioural programmes which become visible in behaviour and structure (Ciompi, 1998). The procedure of adult observation of public persons in the context of media scenarios could be understood as an operationalisation of body language and nonverbal communication as a meaningful and essential focus.

## 9 Personification, Role and Public Relations Competence

Public celebrities gain competence by mastering the interplay between nonverbal effects, body language, personality and behavioural patterns in a given context. They learn the art of "being myself" (as a personality), "being different" (distinguishable in role behaviour), "being common" (by serving unconscious fantasies and projections of the audience) and "being public" (in terms of public-speaking skills). Then they know their job. They are media competent, familiar on the public stage. Through their "lead" they influence by offering a direction for partial identification. They have learned to hold tensions in abeyance in such a way that curiosity on the part of the audience is not only served, but also grows steadily. At the same time, this serves to increase notoriety, fame, popularity and wealth, while they have the courage to make important decisions. In this way, they embody a role model function and unconsciously act vicariously for their fans.

The more sensitive and aware these celebrities are of their behavioural patterns and of themselves, the more easily the audience connects with them in their respective contexts. They are less influenced by a socially determined code of good behaviour and are instead convincing as an individual type in their special habitus. The more credible and consistent the particular type is perceived to be, the higher its personal effectiveness in the public field. In this case, being effective means subtly attracting partial identification. In this way, celebrities invite their fans to identify with them and to project themselves onto the celebrities. Fans then feel close to these celebrities, as if they were friends, personal companions, providing hope in times of need, and encouragement through difficulties.

## 10 Analysis of Two Chinese Celebrities

In the following, I will use two examples to illustrate typical behavioural and impact patterns of Chinese celebrities. I then relate this to the effect these behaviours have as interpreted by public media, in order to finally derive from this a specific function in the Chinese cultural context.

## 10.1  Fan Bing Bing

*Preliminary information provided by client: Fan Bing Bing is a Chinese actress and singer. A few years ago, she topped the Forbes list of the highest-paid celebrities in China. She graduated from Shanghai Normal University Xie Jin Film and Television Art Academy. She made her debut in a famous Chinese teledrama at the age of 15. She became famous from 2001 on and this led to her taking on various leading roles, including in the US. In 2013, she was named International Artist of the Year (The Hollywood Reporter).*

Chinese actress Fan Bing Bing impresses with two nonverbal expressive qualities. On the one hand, she captivates with her actual beauty, elegance of movement, and a shy, coy, mysterious and attractive smile. On the other hand, she convinces with full body movements that she is not too shy to figuratively "roll in the dirt", to wrestle with men, to fight physically and never to hide her sense of lusty fun. She always moves naturally and flowingly, which she herself seems to enjoy when playing her role, while at the same time performing in a highly concentrated manner, with all her strength and personal commitment. One sees this on her face and feels directly addressed by the sound of her voice. During a fight in the mire with several men, for example, one feels her liveliness and is surprised by the variety of her reactions.

In one scene, she throws kisses with her hand into the crowd, unobtrusively, elegantly, attractively and perfectly like a queen. In another, when playing in the morass, one senses the quick-wittedness and punch of her subtle aggressiveness. This underlines her need for independence and autonomy, without being hurtful or destructive.

She seems to be in close and easy contact with her counterpart, which she often seems to express through her head position, the gaze directed at the counterpart, and in the variety of her facial expressions. One can get the impression that she has mastered the art of "Talking by Moving" (in the sense how she talks nonverbally by bodily expression). At the same time, she never loses the charisma of being the "girl from the neighbourhood".

Fan Bing Bing masters the habitus of a perfect, beautiful, attractive "queen", and the independence, self-reliance and tomboyishness of a pubescent teenager who has once again arranged a new prank or a scuffle with the neighbourhood boys. It seems that just then one can "do anything" with her. She is not too shy for any outrage. She enjoys every moment, every touch, every look and convinces in a language without words. Especially in this ensemble of nonverbal expressions she persuades and unconsciously offers emotionally rich identification.

Fan Bing Bing seems to have major cultural significance as a "role model" in China. She offers herself as a mirror for the projection of being able to feel independent and autonomous, but also pleasurable in one's own physicality. At the same time, one can see the social–cultural shyness and shame inherent in the role of women in today's China.

She also shows herself to be feisty and not afraid to take risks. For example in real life, she happened to see a car accident in which a boy was injured. She stopped her cab, carried the boy to the cab and drove him and his mother to a hospital. There she took care of the treatment and still gave the mother money for the medicine. On the one hand, she was celebrated on social media for this act; on the other hand, she was showered with an enormous shitstorm on the other hand, she evoked a chaotic and violent response. This rather expressed the cultural perspective on this event. After all, in China it is dangerous to do such a thing. As a rule, people in China do not care about such things. Otherwise, one could be in danger, without any reason, of being held responsible later for possible treatment errors or compensation for pain and suffering. Even though this seems to be completely foreign to Western culture, this example also shows that Fan Bing Bing not only shows full commitment, but also appears to take risks herself.

During the production in the studio, I heard about a statement made by the actress that could not be more apt: "*The more slanders one can take, the higher praises one should deserve*".

## 10.2   Zhou Libo

*Preliminary information provided by client: Zhou Libo is a Chinese stand-up comedian. As the founder of Shanghai Style Talk Show, he experienced enormous nationwide success. In 2009, he was named "The most influential figure of Asia" by CNN. A year later, the China Charity Federation gave him an award as "The most generous philanthropist".*

His professional career has taken him through ups and downs, including time in jail for what is described as "wounding with intent". In his role as stand-up comedian and businessman, he is very controversial.

When Zhou Libo enters the stage, he is there. He is present with words and body expression and convinces in a split second. This is what distinguishes him as a stand-up comedian, and as an audience member, one can expect the same from him. His body expression conveys that he is level-headed, deliberate and impressive in his first steps. When he starts to speak, he brilliantly plays the choreography of the subtly exaggerated, striking, nonverbal expression. I, as someone who does not know the Chinese language, could not avert my gaze, already completely fascinated by him. He moves with full body language and yet his movement is only conditionally spontaneous. He masters the metier of being in direct, unmistakable contact with his audience. He acts in a state of readiness that enables him to place a specific message in a targeted manner. It is precisely in this way that he binds the audience to himself, and does not release them from his spell. His subtle, barely noticeable ability to place "pause" without interruption seems to be in the service of his self-assurance. The ensemble of unerring verbal expression and the competence of self-assurance form essential expressive elements of his art of communication. He has people in his grasp.

One either loves him or rejects him completely. Having friends and enemies seems to be part of his formula of irony and sarcasm. By exaggerating, but without losing himself in this exaggeration, he does justice to his role as a stand-up comedian. And yet his expressive movements and facial expressions reflect a language of their own. They emphasise the intended dramaturgy while reflecting his subtle competence in maintaining the necessary self-assurance that protects him from hurting his counterpart through provocation, irony and sarcasm.

But he can also do quite the opposite! In one lengthy interview, I saw an emotionally collected, introspective, smirking man with calm gestures and pleasant voice make confident contact with his counterpart in a meaningful way. His attention seems to be turned towards the interviewer, and through this, he embodied the seriousness and respect of his counterpart.

He is also a clown, an artificial character who is proud of himself and wants to be seen as a flâneur (Not doing anything in particular. Just walking around, watching people.). I think of stand-up comedians I know from television in Germany, only a few of whom know how to embody irony, sarcasm and respect effectively and credibly in this way without offending the audience. Perhaps this gives him an important cultural function. In China, it is not necessarily customary to "call a spade a spade", to "put one's finger in the wound", or to dare a possible conflict in communication. Of course, the Chinese can also be very emotionally confrontational and offensive. However, this seems to be primarily more likely when someone feels emotionally cornered or is in great distress. Chinese seem to be either moderate or too impulsive and expressive.

Listening to Zhou Libo, eavesdropping on him, and putting oneself in his place through partial identification, could then be like a socially accepted transitional space where, by participating in Zhou Libo's programme, one can unconsciously relieve oneself internally through emotional rehearsal. Spectators, it seems to me, enjoy his wit and irony. Spectators also leave his stage performance inwardly relaxed and emotionally well-tempered.

During the TV production, I learned of a central slogan of the artist: "*It is redneck-like to eat garlic and aristocracy-like to drink coffee*". (Comment from my Chinese interpreter, Peking, 14.06.2015)

# 11  Conclusion

This approach is appropriate to psychobiography in a non-WEIRD context insofar as it refers to the nonverbal expression of specific behaviour patterns, which were developed in the personal biography of the public person. These patterns embody aspects of the psychological state of the person and implicitly offer structural information about the life history.

This approach is a first and helpful methodological choice in a strange cultural context,

- because it supports a basic transcultural understanding.
- It relies on the hermeneutic perception in the here-and-now,
- acknowledging virtuality as a relevant transition space.
- Its procedural architecture satisfies the need of action research, and

the concept of "learning history" seems to be an appropriate approach to open learning.

Of course, this approach needs further deeper conceptual and methodological discussion in the field of psychobiography which could not be possible in this first step of research.

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**Ulrich Sollmann** (Dipl. rer. soc.) Social Scientist, body psychotherapist, executive coach in management and politics, publicist, blogger. Guest Professor at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law (SHUPL), Senior Fellow at Universität Witten/Herdecke. He is especially engaged in the field of transcultural communication and ethnology (especially in China), infant observation, person and systemic centered concepts of leadership and coaching, health behaviour, shame.

# Part III
# US-American Contexts

# Oprah Gail Winfrey in Psychobiographical Perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy

**Claude-Hélène Mayer**

**Abstract** The meaning of life has been studied all over the world ever since the beginnings of philosophy and psychology. Western theories are often used in psychobiography to explore the meaning of life for extraordinary individuals. These theories are anchored in existentialism, existential philosophy, and in existential (positive) psychology. African philosophies on existentialism and life have very seldom been considered in psychobiography. This psychobiography explores the life of Oprah Gail Winfrey, a female African American talk-show host who comes from a partially non-WEIRD background and became the first female African American billionaire. This life exploration is based on selected Western and African psycho-philosophical perspectives which are anchored in European and African existentialism. The psychobiography accordingly expands previous psychobiographical research by contributing to: (1) research on female celebrities and billionaires, (2) research on African American citizens, (3) differentiated discourse on the concept of WEIRD/non-WEIRD samples, (4) exploration of existentialism and meaning in life in European and African philosophical perspectives, (5) the expansion of psychobiography as a transcultural and transdisciplinary study (psycho-philosophy), and (6) research from an existential, positive transdisciplinary perspective.

**Keywords** Meaning of life · African psycho-philosophy · Existentialism · Transculture · Psychobiography · Gender · WEIRD · Non-WEIRD · American Black female · Oprah Gail Winfrey

C.-H. Mayer (✉)
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

# 1    Introduction

Discourses on the meaning of life which explore the human existence have a long-standing tradition across eras, cultures, and contexts (Attoe, 2020a, b, 2022; Frankl, 1985, 2014; Sheldon et al., 2004; Wong, 2014). The meaning of life is often connected with having a purpose in life and the development of life goals (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Having a sense of purpose and following an organised goal structure is central to developing a person's identity (Emmons, 1999). Individuals who fail to find meaning and purpose in life are often unhappy or dissatisfied with their life and their relationships (Steger et al., 2009). Self-endorsed goals in life, combined with one's own values and passion, can lead to an increased meaning in life (McGregor & Little, 1998) and subjective well-being (Sheldon, 2002).

During the past decades, researchers have explored the meaning of life and how it is defined in psychobiography (Mayer, 2021a, b; Mayer & Kelley, 2021; Mayer et al., 2021a). In so doing, they have touched on meaning-making in the context of mental health and well-being, creativity, and identity development. However, the attempts to address meaning in psychobiographical accounts are still limited to date (Mayer et al., 2021b).

Oprah Gail Winfrey, who was born on 29 January 1954, is a US talk-show host, celebrity, actress, author, and the first African American female billionaire (Academy of Achievement, 2022). She has been presented as one of the most influential individuals in the world (Garson, 2011). Her childhood and upbringing were characterised by poverty, and by repeated abuse and violence (Winfrey, 2014). At the age of 14, she became pregnant and lost her child (Kelley, 2010; Winfrey, 2014). From childhood onwards, Winfrey had to face immense challenges, but they did not hold her back from achieving extraordinary fame and success (Illouz, 2003). In fact, some authors believe that her struggles actually contributed to her outstanding career (Illouz, 2003). Based on her own critical and challenging experiences and traumas, she became particularly empathetic and managed to connect easily to her talk-show guests and to discuss difficult topics with insight (Oosthuysen, 2019).

This psychobiographical account explores the life of Oprah Gail Winfrey from two theoretical backgrounds: one is that of selected European existential philosophy and positive psychologies (Yalom, 1980; Wong, 2011, 2020a, b); the other is that of African psycho-philosophical stances (Attoe, 2020a, b). Basic concepts of meaning-making from European concepts of existential positive psychology are applied to this psychobiography, together with four African philosophies of life. Attoe (2020a) identifies these as the African God-purpose theory of meaning, the African vital force theory of meaning, the communal normative function theory of meaning, and consolationism (defined as the comfort received by a person after loss or disappointment) and meaning.

Although the theoretical discourses can only be discussed from a selected viewpoint, this psychobiography expands previous psychobiographical research by contributing to:

1. Research on female celebrities and billionaires
2. Research on non-WEIRD, African American women
3. Research on differentiated discourse on the concept of WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples
4. Exploration of existentialism and meaning in life in European and African philosophical perspectives
5. Expansion of psychobiography as a transcultural and transdisciplinary study (psycho-philosophy) and
6. Deeper understanding and use of existential, positive transdisciplinary perspectives in psychobiography

## 2  Meaning in Life from Existential European Perspectives

European philosophical thought on existentialism is anchored in attempts of existential philosophers to explore concepts of existence, personal freedom, suffering, the pursuit of meaning and purpose, life and death (Heidegger, 1962; Yalom, 1980). Consequently, discourses on existentialism focus on one's experience and understanding of self (Ownsworth & Nash, 2015). Existential issues are often considered when someone faces illness, death, or life-challenging situations in which their existence is threatened. Under these circumstances, individuals are provided with the opportunity to fundamentally reconsider life values and the meaning of their existence (Spiegel & Classen, 2000; Yalom, 1980). Greening (1992) points out that life's givens, which are part of all human existential experience, include life/death, community/isolation, freedom/determinism, and meaning/absurdity. The four existential certainties are defined by Greening (1992, p. 1) as follows:

1. *Life (and death). We are alive but we will die, and we live a world that both supports and negates life.*
2. *Meaning (and absurdity). We have a conscious capacity and desire for meaning, but we live in a confusing and sometimes chaotic world that offers many meaning systems and also denies meaning.*
3. *Freedom (and determinism). We are free and determined, and we live in a world that allows and constricts our freedom.*
4. *Community (and aloneness). Human desire and capacity for authentic relatedness are countered by inauthenticity, alienation, and loneliness.*

These givens affect the way in which individuals deal with matters of the self, others, and the world, and can be related to the experience of existential anxiety (Temple & Gall, 2016). Wong (2020b) has developed Greening's (Greening, 1992) perspectives, including them in his existential positive psychology (EPP) approaches which highlight that the existential givens need to be addressed through acceptance, humbleness, and creativity. According to Wong (2011), humans need to accept that life is full of pain, suffering, and negativities which need to be acknowledged, accepted, and then transformed into a positive force. They can then become catalysts

for positive transformation in the lives of other individuals (Hogan, 2020). These positive integrations are built on the four major pillars of virtue, meaning, resilience, and well-being (Wong, 2011), where meaning is seen as an important aspect of well-being, happiness, and a good life (Wong, 2015, 2020a, b). Meaning is further expanded in creating one's own life, which relates to the concept of freedom in Sartre's (Sartre, 1962) existentialist premise in which freedom of choice is the individual's responsibility—not only to create one's life and being, but also one's own identity (Mittal, 2017).

For Sartre, every individual has the freedom of choice which should consider the individual's responsibility and the freedom from identification from other individuals and from ego (Sartre, 1962). Each choice that an individual makes is a choice of self-definition affecting own identity (Mittal, 2017). Suffering is part of experiencing meaning in life, and the experiences of pain and suffering are seen as useful for developing sensitivity, refining, deepening, and purifying meaning. Meaning-making is therefore extremely important when confronting highly stressful life experiences and when restoring meaning after the experience of stressful life situations (Park, 2010).

## 3    Meaning in Life from African Perspectives

Although African perspectives on meaning of life have often been unacknowledged in Western philosophical literature, more recently some have been explored and described in depth (Metz, 2017, 2020). Attoe (2020a) emphasises that research on African philosophies needs to focus even more on meaning in life from African perspectives. Four different African approaches to defining the meaning in life are:

1. The African God-purpose theory of meaning (meaning is created through God's purpose and destiny)
2. The vital-force theory of meaning (increasing meaning through focus on what makes vital forces stronger)
3. The communal normative function theory of meaning (meaning-making through harmonious interaction with one's own community) and
4. The consolationist theory of meaning (striving for perfection in life as a meaning-making process) (Attoe, 2020a)

Meaning in life is connected to vitality and community (Metz, 2020), being alive and creativity. In African thought, vitality is connected to meaning through the existence of a supreme being (Agada, 2019). Vitality is inherent in a life that is anchored in God, and in the understanding that humans develop during their lives into whole persons (Molefe, 2020). The concept of personhood is further based on the idea that a person behaves in an ethically correct manner; meaning in life can only be experienced when behaviour is morally justified. This moral behaviour is strongly connected to a collectivistic and communal worldview which is determined by the idea that an individual should harmonise own norms and values with those of

the society (Mayer, 2021a, b). Accordingly, the struggle for justice and self-determination in African philosophy is extremely important to creating a meaningful life (Mungwini, 2020). Finally, meaningfulness is created by leading an energetic life which includes a vital force that is strengthened by community experiences and the acceptance of moral obligations, creative power, and spirituality (Attoe, 2020a, b, 2022).

# 4    Research Methodology

Psychobiography uses a person-centred research approach which takes the individual's life history into the focus of attention (Elms, 1994; Mayer, 2023). It can be defined as "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, 2015, p. 379). For this reason, psychobiographical research focuses on the inner psychological drivers and motivations of individuals with special regard to exploring their thinking, feeling, and behaviour across their lifetime (Ponterotto, 2018).

## 4.1    Research Paradigm and Approach

Psychobiography involves the use of a highly qualitative research approach which explores specific life events during the lifespan (Schultz, 2005). The life events in this case refer to the construction of meaning. The study uses a phenomenological research paradigm (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Kőváry, 2011) in exploring and interpreting the life of a selected, extraordinary US woman.

Phenomenology explores constructed meaning in the world on a daily basis (Lock & Strong, 2010), taking the richness of experiences of human beings into consideration, as expressed through language (Husserl 1913/1980). Because the current psychobiography is anchored in phenomenology (Mayer & Maree, 2018), it emphasises the relation between the individual (Oprah Gail Winfrey) and her lived experiences in the "lived world" (*Lebenswelt*) (Husserl 1913/1980). The inner world of the individual is explored by bringing phenomenology and psychology together (Husserl, 1977; Gutland, 2018; du Plessis & du Plessis, 2018).

## 4.2    Sample and Sampling

This psychobiography makes the person Oprah Gail Winfrey the "focus of attention" (Perry, 2012, p. 134). The subject was purposefully sampled (Oliver, 2006; Palinkas et al., 2015), based on the researcher's interest in the lives of extraordinary women,

together with a desire to explore the lives of individuals from non-WEIRD backgrounds. The researcher accordingly ensured the availability of richness of data. Winfrey can be classified as non-WEIRD, since she comes from an African American family background with limited access to education, wealth, and resources (Oosthuysen, 2019). However, she grew up in an industrialised and democratic society, that of the US (van Noort, 2021).

## 4.3 Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation, and Report

For this psychobiography, data were collected from first- and third-person documentation (Allport, 1961). The first-person data documents included autobiographical manuscripts, such as Winfrey's, 2014 autobiography. Further, third-person documents were included in this psychobiography which focus on the life and work of the subject (e.g. Garson, 2011; Illouz, 2003; Kelley, 2010; Saunders, 2012). The researcher located one other psychobiography of Oprah Winfrey, written by Yolandé Oosthuysen in 2019, as part of a master's degree at the Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha, South Africa. However, that psychobiography focuses on the post-traumatic growth of the subject and does not take her meaning-making in life into particular account. Nonetheless, it is referred to in this research work as an important previously published manuscript on the subject's life.

The collected material about the subject's life was analysed through the five-step content analysis process, described by Terre Blanche et al. (2006, pp. 322–326). The five steps are familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, and finally interpretation and checking. During these steps of analysis, the researcher explored the meaning-making of the subject across her lifetime. The psychobiographical findings are reported in an analytic and narrative qualitative reporting style (Perry, 2012; Van Niekerk et al., 2015), while being matched with the usual qualitative research quality criteria of trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Sinkovics et al., 2008).

## 4.4 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical aspects which need to be considered when doing research from a psychological and psychobiographical perspective (Acklin, 2020; APA, 2010; Mayer, 2017; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Rudden, 2005). Elms (1994) mentions treating details of the researched person with respect. Non-maleficence is very important, particularly since in this case, the subject of the research is still alive (Elms, 1994). Only data available in the public domain were analysed; therefore, no secret or private information was used for analysis. Furthermore, the researcher used self-reflection to apply ethical standards to this psychobiography (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017, 2019).

## 4.5  Limitations

This study is limited by its theoretical framework and the discourses on meaning, the psychobiographical research methodology, and its application to the researched subject (Schultz, 2005). It is further impacted by the researcher and her potential bias towards the subject of research, the theories and methodology (Van Niekerk, 2021). Finally, the study is limited by the typical restrictions of psychobiographical research which include a limited opportunity to verify biographical data with sources close to the researched subject, the risk of reductionism, and limited reference to the context. For a more in-depth discussion of general limitations, see Schultz (2005) and van Niekerk (2021).

## 5  Meaning-Making in the Life of Oprah Gail Winfrey: Findings and Discussion

In the following sections of this chapter, meaning-making in the life of Oprah Winfrey is explored throughout her lifetime and discussed within the context of European and African existential philosophies on meaning-making. Generally, it can be concluded that Winfrey's life began with stressful experiences (Garson, 2011; Kelley, 2010) and it can be assumed that stressful key events in her childhood and adolescence led to important aspects of meaning-making during her lifetime, as explained in Park (2010).

### 5.1  Childhood (1954–1967) and Adolescence (1968–1972)

Oprah Gail Winfrey was born to Vernita Lee and Vernon Winfrey out of wedlock on 29 January 1954. For the first 6 years of her life, she grew up with her maternal grandparents (Garson, 2011). She spent her childhood travelling between her grandparents, her mother and father, across different US states (Kelley, 2010). Winfrey herself notes that she was scared of her grandfather, but often watched her grandmother doing the household chores, and knew very early in her life that she would be doing "more than hanging clothes on a line" (Winfrey, 2022). Already early in her life, Winfrey had realised that there was a "divine assurance" guiding her through difficult moments during her upbringing (Winfrey, 2022). This early experience is strongly connected to a God-purpose theory of meaning (Attoe, 2020a) in which meaning is created through a supreme being's assumed existence (as in Agada, 2019). God is seen as an important force in supporting the individual to become a whole person (Molefe, 2020). It might be assumed that this spiritual, God-related experience gave Winfrey strength and supported her with a vital force throughout her life to make her existence meaningful (see Metz, 2020).

Winfrey (2014) describes the poverty she lived in during childhood, although family members often contend that this was not true and is an exaggerated description of her life circumstances (Garson, 2011; Kelley, 2010). However, in her experience and memory, this poverty-ridden situation might be a strong key to meaning-making in the way that she suffered and experienced pain and stress during the years of her childhood and adolescence. These experiences might have led her to restore meaning consciously and with effort, as described by Park (2010).

Oosthuysen (2019) notes an apparent split between Winfrey and other family members with regard to perceptions of life. Winfrey (2014) herself writes that she felt closest to her father, while her relationship with other family members was and continues to be complicated and strained. The relationship with her mother was extremely disturbed, particularly after Winfrey was raped by her cousin when she was 9 years old and had to share a bed with him (Illouz, 2003). That was the beginning of a series of rapes and sexual molestation by relatives until she was 14 years old (Saunders, 2012). Although Winfrey told her mother about it, her mother did not protect her, and sections of her family still do not believe the entire narration of molestation (Garson, 2011). According to Oosthuysen (2019), Winfrey's childhood and adolescence was traumatic and may have strongly influenced her values of ethical behaviour, morals, and justice, also described as important in African philosophy and meaning-making (Mayer, 2021a, b). She may also have become very self-determined later in her life to make up for her experienced injustice and infringed ethics and morals, all of which are significant values in African meaning-making (Mungwini, 2020).

Winfrey, however, managed to overcome the trauma through resilience and healing, which she describes together with Bruce Perry in a recent book (Perry & Winfrey, 2021). This leads to the assumption that she worked very hard to overcome her trauma (see also Oosthuysen, 2019) and grow through the painful experiences, thereby creating strengths and meaning during her life (Mittal, 2017; Park, 2010). This trauma may also have guided her to become extremely empathetic and able to connect, as described by Oosthuysen (2019). This ability became one of her major strengths in her later career as a talk-show host. This supports the view of Mittal (2017) that suffering can foster sensitivity, refining, deepening, and purifying an individual's sense of meaning. The experience might also have strengthened her communal normative function as well as her vital forces and spirituality (as described by Attoe, 2020a, b).

During her adolescence she was molested by her father's brother while on a trip visiting her father, and again the family did not believe her (Kelley, 2010). She became extremely rebellious and her mother was overwhelmed with her behaviour. Aged 14, Winfrey became pregnant, but lost her son shortly after his birth (Winfrey, 2014). This experience marked a turning point in her life, in particular since her father felt that this experience was a sign of God to grant Winfrey a second chance (Kelley, 2010). She moved to live with her father in Nashville, Tennessee. As a result of his strict rules, she was able to focus on education, earned awards for dramatic plays at the age of 17 and also became "Miss Black Tennessee" (Mimaroglu, 2021). She represented her school in various contests, which opened

the door to employment at a radio station and to her future career (Oosthuysen, 2019). At this stage in her life, Winfrey aimed at being perfect (as described by Attoe, 2020a, b, in consolationist theory) and creating meaning through acting and becoming an actress. Her communal normative function was evident in striving for harmonious interaction between her father and stepmother (Attoe, 2020a, b,). She also showed creative power and spiritual thought in her approach to a meaningful life, which had an impact on her social contexts, as presented by Attoe (2020a, b).

It can be assumed that Winfrey's meaning in life during her childhood and early adolescence, was strongly influenced by living in a confusing and sometimes chaotic world which might not have appeared to be meaningful (as described in the four givens by Greening, 1992). She was confronted early on with the experience of death when, aged 14, she lost her son. It might therefore be assumed that the experience of the two givens (as in Greening, 1992) of life/death and meaning/absurdity created two major markers in her life experience during her first years of life. Such critical threatening experiences may have led her to reconsider her core values of existence, personal freedom, meaning, and purpose in life, as described in Heidegger (1962) and Yalom (1980). She managed, through these experiences, to focus on her life and build an in-depth understanding of herself (see Ownsworth & Nash, 2015), creating a strengthened identity in relation to self, others, and the world (Temple & Gall, 2016; Mittal, 2017). In this way, she contributed positively to the communal normative function theory of meaning and vital-force theory of meaning (Attoe, 2020a).

## 5.2   Early Career (1973–1988)

After working at the radio station, Winfrey became the first African American reporter at a television station, which was an outstanding achievement at that time for a woman of colour (Garson, 2011). Although she had been awarded a sponsorship to study communication at the Tennessee State University, she left her studies and accepted a position in Baltimore, Maryland, as a reporter for a news TV channel. However, her strengths were not anchored in reporting news and she was soon offered a co-host position in a morning talk show, *People are Talking*, where she remained for 6 years (Kelley, 2010). Umoh (2018) reports:

> "I felt like this is what I'm supposed to do. All these years I'd been misplaced in news because I couldn't relate," says Winfrey. "The moment I did that talk-show I felt like, 'Oh, I can be myself' and . . . that was the beginning of fulfilling the calling."

The change from the news channel to the TV show marked a major change in Winfrey's life and career. The change was meaningful, because she took the liberty of becoming part of a community she fitted into, described as two major givens by Greening (1992). She could relate authentically to her audience and to her interviewees (Oosthuysen, 2019) and consequently may have overcome the loneliness she felt in her family of upbringing (Kelley, 2010) and at the news channel. Her

desire for meaning (Greening, 1992) began to fulfil itself as she became aware of her own calling (Spiegel & Classen, 2000; Yalom, 1980), which is also reflected in the African God-purpose theory of meaning (Attoe, 2020a, b).

From there, her career took off, and she moved to Chicago in 1984 where she hosted the show *AM Chicago* which was renamed *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Garson, 2011). She became the first African American female to host a national talk show and was shortly afterwards recruited for her first film role and then opened her own film company, Harpo Productions (Kelley, 2010). Fulfilment of meaning and purpose had begun to evolve (Heidegger, 1962; Yalom, 1980) and positive and transformational forces showed their impact in Winfrey's life (as described in Hogan, 2020; Wong, 2011, 2020a, b), complying with the vital-force theory of meaning (Attoe, 2020b).

## 5.3   Middle to Late Career (1988–2004)

During her mid-career years, Oprah Winfrey received several prestigious awards and became the first African American female owner of a studio and production company, listed by Forbes, and the first African American female billionaire (Garson, 2011). She also spoke out against child abuse and worked with the US Senate Judiciary Committee to make the sentencing of perpetrators of child abuse mandatory (Kelley, 2010), thereby creating meaning by fostering justice (as described by Mungwini, 2020 and Attoe, 2020a, b). She spoke for the community of abused children, referring to individuals she could relate to as a result of her own experiences, as described by Greening (1992). On a personal note, she lost some close friends and family to AIDS and drug abuse during this stage of her life (Garson, 2011), but also transformed these traumas into vital forces (Attoe, 2020b), dealing with life and death as existential givens (Greening, 1992).

During her later career, from 2005 onwards, she was classified for 5 consecutive years as one of the most influential people in the twenty-first century (Garson, 2011). From this point onwards, Winfrey initiated other activities: she supported the political career of Barak Obama (in 2006, 2008), engaged in religious and spiritual New Age movements, and wrote a book on finding purpose in life (Winfrey, 2014). In the following years, she campaigned for Hillary Clinton (McCaskill, 2016) and Joe Biden (ABC News, 2020).

Winfrey expanded her impact in political and spiritual affairs and reconsidered and enforced her life values and approaches to meaning (Spiegel, 2010; Yalom, 1980). In this way, she became a force of positive societal transformation (Hogan, 2020) and was able to choose her individual responsibilities, constructing herself in terms of her own chosen identity (Mittal, 2017; Sartre, 1962).

In 2010, she closed her TV show after 25 years and began a new show in 2012, called *Oprah's Next Chapter* (Oosthuysen, 2019). Her impact on consumers and readers has been recognised as extraordinary—termed "the Oprah effect"—in reaching approximately 44 million people per week (Quintanilla, 2011). In the

1990s, she had already created a social charity called "Oprah's Angel Network" which supported charitable projects around the world until the end of her show in 2010 (Huffpost, 2010). In 2004 and 2010, she ranked among the 50 most generous Americans (Top 50, 2010), and in 2012 she donated approximately 400 million US dollars to educational causes (O'Connor, 2012).

During the past two decades, Winfrey has been involved in various international social projects, such as building a girl's educational school in South Africa (McLaren, 2007). By helping others, she has learned that to make a difference in others' lives, one needs to change the way people think, thereby creating a meaningful approach to life (Mimaroglu, 2021). Furthermore, she believes that meaning in life is created in service to others, not by focusing on life's circumstances, but rather on life's possibilities, thereby developing a vision and building one's own identity, the own authentic self (Winfrey, 2019). She believes that people cannot be defeated when they are aware of their true identity (Winfrey, 2014). When individual intentions and brand intentions are aligned with the path of life of an individual—as in the case of Winfrey—the individual identity is built and developed (Winfrey, 2020; Mittal, 2022).

Particularly during the past decade, Winfrey has become a symbol of wisdom and resilience. Morris (2022) quotes her:

> It doesn't matter how far you might rise. At some point, you are bound to stumble. If you're constantly pushing yourself higher and higher, the law of averages predicts that you will at some point fall. And when you do, I want you to remember this: There is no such thing as failure. Failure is just life trying to move us in another direction.

With her approach of learning from life's failures, pain, and suffering by transforming it into learning and wisdom, Winfrey has attracted not only the attention, but also the hearts of people across the world. Her core values for meaning-making in life are based on the understanding that people must individually define their own lives and not allow others to do so (as noted by Greening, 1992). She believes that one must learn that there will always be hardships in life, but their value lies in accepting them as learning experiences and turning them into meaningful growth through gratitude and forgiveness (Morris, 2022). Acceptance, humility, and a creative approach to overcome pain and suffering, as highlighted by Wong (2011, 2020a, b), are part of Winfrey's approach to life and meaning. She can therefore be described as a person who builds positive integration in terms of Wong's (Wong, 2011, 2015) four positive pillars of virtue, meaning, resilience, and well-being. This is repeatedly demonstrated in her words and her approaches to life. Mimaroglu (2021) highlights that Winfrey lives by five lessons and bases her success and resilience on these principles:

1. Your past does not define you
2. Education is the key to progress
3. Do not be afraid to try something new
4. Be authentic and intentional and
5. Success through service

Through this purpose, by finding flow, embodying the most authentic self and having meaningful intentions, life becomes meaningful.

Winfrey believes that every person is born with a purpose which they need to discover and fulfil during their lifetime (Winfrey, 2014). This approach clearly integrates the African meaning-making approaches based on the African God-purpose theory of meaning, which highlights that there is a given purpose and destiny in life that needs to be explored (Attoe, 2020a, b). Winfrey accepts that life can be a struggle which individuals need to turn into strength, thereby gaining wisdom from dealing with the wounds, suffering, and pain experienced in life (Winfrey, 2014), as referred to in the EPP of Wong (2011, 2015, 2020a, b).

# 6 Conclusion

This psychobiography explores the life of Oprah Gail Winfrey based on the perspectives of meaning and meaning-making in life from European existential and African psychological and philosophical perspectives. It thereby contributes to the research on women celebrities and billionaires from a non-WEIRD perspective anchored in the African American cultural context. This research shows that the concept of non-WEIRD research needs to be based on a differentiated view of what WEIRD and non-WEIRD means, in that the categories might be far too broad to classify individuals accordingly. In this case, Winfrey is a person who fulfils the criteria of coming from a poor, fairly uneducated African American background, which is however influenced to a certain degree by the rich, industrialised Western US context of the broader society. Therefore, it can be assumed that the subject researched cannot be exclusively classified as non-WEIRD, but needs a more exact, differentiated view in psychobiography to describe her background more accurately. Further, the psychobiography shows that throughout the life of Oprah Winfrey, selected aspects of European and African psychological and philosophical perspectives come into play, as described in the findings and discussion section of this study.

During her childhood and adolescence, it can be seen that the two existential givens of Greening (1992) of life/death and meaning/absurdity played a role in Winfrey's life, in combination with her experience of suffering, pain, and loss. It can also be highlighted that up to the point of losing her child, Winfrey had probably experienced her own restrictions and determinism in life, in addition to aloneness rather than community, based on the experience of restricted community and family support.

The loss of her child and the move from her mother's family marked a turning point during adolescence. From there onwards, Winfrey began to construct a meaningful life with regard to building her purpose and meaning more consciously, experiencing more freedom of choice and referring to her own calling. This calling became very clear when she entered the TV-show business early in her career. Through her TV show, she developed a stronger African-God theory of meaning and spirituality, but she also developed more vital forces, a connection through the

communal normative function theory, and a consolationist theory of meaning. It appears that the meaning in her life, as observed through African theory approaches, increased during her adulthood, from her early career towards her later career years. Additionally, she increased her emphasis on the values of creativity, justice, harmonious relationships and support for others.

It may be concluded that as Winfrey increased her focus on existential values, the meaning in her life increased. Significant turning points can be identified in her life: the move away from her mother, the death of her own child, and her identification with her work role as a TV talk-show host. In addition, Winfrey managed to transform her negative, painful, and suffering experiences into transformational growth and positivity, thereby demonstrating strong values as presented in the EPP approach of Wong (2011).

On a metalevel, this research suggests that the use of transcultural (European and African), as well as transdisciplinary (philosophical and psychological) approaches is very useful to explore the life and the life development of this African American celebrity within the context of research of non-WEIRD samples. Two cultural and disciplinary lenses helped to explore the life holistically and from different perspectives.

For future research in psychobiography, it is proposed that transcultural and transdisciplinary approaches should be employed in more depth when exploring the lives of non-WEIRD but also transcultural individuals. On a practical note, this might also be helpful in providing practitioners in counselling, coaching, and therapy across cultures, with empirical insights into the lives of individuals and the marking of turning points in their lives, to see how they have managed to transform pain and suffering into personal growth and development.

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**Claude-Hélène Mayer** is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

# In Search of a Calling: A Careerography of James Baldwin

**Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi), Nicole T. Maleh, and Simonleigh P. Miller**

> *For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we triumph is never new, it always must be heard.*
> *James Baldwin (1965, p. 139) in* Sonny's Blues

**Abstract** This study presents a careerography of James Baldwin (1924–1987), a prolific non-heterosexual African American writer and activist. The authors present a case study profile of James Baldwin applying *Work as a Calling Theory* to conceptualize the work of Baldwin and explore the interplay between his intersectional identities and the trajectory of his work. Baldwin's writing centred on race, sexuality, and religion. His exemplary work as a writer facilitated his growth as an activist, as he parlayed his notoriety as an artist to establish and bolster his influence as a Civil Rights leader. Baldwin used his platforms as a notable author and activist to live out his calling as an agent of positive social change. The present study considers Baldwin's fulfilment of his calling as a writer, specifically the overall purpose of his work, his contribution to the common good, and the internal and external factors that motivated him towards his work focused on race relations in the USA and his ensuing involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Utilizing psychobiographical methods, the researchers immersed themselves in the life space of Baldwin and conducted an idiographic study exploring how his transcultural identity, personal values, and context influenced his reality and subsequent calling. Topics to be addressed include meanings of purpose within social justice-oriented work, career

J. D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi) (✉)
Department of Counseling Psychology, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA
e-mail: jreynolds6@usfca.edu

N. T. Maleh · S. P. Miller
Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, USA
e-mail: nicole.maleh@student.shu.edu; simonleigh.miller@student.shu.edu

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decision-making, and the impact of Baldwin's identities as a non-heterosexual African American and expatriate on his career decision-making.

**Keywords** James Baldwin · Careerography · Psychobiography · African American · Activist · Work as a Calling Theory

## 1 Introduction

Historically, western psychobiographies have been written about public figures including artists, famous psychologists, and world leaders, most of whom have been White, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD). With its recent attention to qualitative research, psychology as a field has shifted its focus to sharing the voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), as well as other individuals from disenfranchised communities, and so too must psychobiography and careerography (Park-Taylor et al., 2019). The present study focuses on the life of James Baldwin, a non-heterosexual African American man famous for his writing and activism aimed at dismantling systemic racism and discrimination. The authors discuss the emergent career-related research questions related to Baldwin's life, specifically his path to becoming a writer, activist, and social change agent, and provide the method, anchoring theories and application, and discussion of the study.

The standard version of United States history does not hold White Americans responsible for the unjust laws and actions that, from the nation's founding up to the present, have systemically upheld racial inequality (Coates, 2014). It continues to uphold this legacy through minimizing, dismissing, and "historical gaslighting" (p. 46) the trauma that the Black community and communities of colour have endured over the course of history (Glaude Jr., 2020). James Baldwin was one of many artists of colour during the mid-twentieth century who have shared their truth, creativity, and pain through their personal and professional mediums. In *Another Country*, Baldwin (1962) allowed us to peek into New York City's streets through the eyes of young artists moving through the heterosexist, materialistic society in which they lived. In *Going to Meet the Man*, Baldwin (1965) forced us, with his descriptive visuals and matter-of-fact perspective, to imagine the naked body of a Black man ravaged during a public hanging and to further consider the manner in which that image is impressed on the psyches of Americans. Baldwin's calling, in its most essential form, was to share himself and the atrocities of racism in America with the world, in an act of love and revolution, through his writings so that he may reveal the truth about the darkest parts of this country to those refusing to believe in order to create social and political change (Baldwin, 1985).

## 2 Initial Research Questions

1. What salient life circumstances led to Baldwin's decision to become a writer?
2. How did Baldwin's career as a writer expand to one of activist and public figure?

# 3   Method

## 3.1   Procedure

### 3.1.1   Choosing the Subject

Schultz (2005) emphasized the need to explore reasons for choosing a psychobiographical subject, as there are potential biases that could impact the ways in which the analysis and interpretations of the subject unfold in an effort to avoid hagiography and pathography (Ponterotto et al., 2015). The team arrived at a consensus to study James Baldwin given its interest in Baldwin's unique intersecting identities, fascination with his life path and talents as a writer, and desire to understand more about his departure from America to live abroad. The team immersed themselves in Baldwin's life by reading biographies, Baldwin's works, as well as watching interviews and films, from first-person, secondary, and tertiary sources. Next, the team developed the initial research questions, constructed the life space of James Baldwin, and analysed the data based on a chosen theory.

### 3.1.2   Reflexivity and Bracketing Biases

Prior to this study, the researchers did not have experience studying the life of James Baldwin. The first author, an Asian American cis-heterosexual man and assistant professor of counselling psychology, has prior experience conducting psychobiographical research. The second and third authors, a cis-pansexual White American of Moroccan and Jewish descent and a cis-heterosexual Black Bahamian man, both fifth-year doctoral students studying counselling psychology, were novice psychobiographers prior to this project. The team spent significant time throughout the study positioning themselves and engaging in a continuous process of self-reflection as they were impacted by Baldwin's work and other material written about Baldwin.

## 3.2   Anchoring Theory

In order to deepen the team's understanding of Baldwin's life and choice to become a writer and activist, the team chose a theory that centred upon vocational choice. This theory was specifically chosen to help answer the research questions and to deepen the theoretical and conceptual understanding of Baldwin's life and career choices.

### 3.2.1  Work as a Calling Theory

What does it mean to have a calling? This was first explored by Bellah et al. in 1986. Bellah and his collaborators differentiated a *calling* from a *job* or *career*. Whereas a job is a means to sustenance and material benefits, and a career is a means to greater achievement in a field or organization, Bellah and his colleagues defined a calling as an occupation that fulfilled not only personal and professional needs, but also addressed wider social problems (Bellah et al., 1986; Duffy et al., 2018a). The Work as Calling Theory (WCT) defines a calling as an orientation towards work that comprises "(a) finding individual meaning and overall purpose, (b) helping others or contributing to the common good, and (c) feeling a sense of being compelled (either internally or externally) toward that work" (Duffy et al., 2019, p. 328). The summoning force described in the third characteristic of a calling is characterized by external forces such as "a higher power, the needs of society, [or] a family legacy" (Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429). Internal forces that may entice someone into a field of work include personal interests, skills, values, and passions (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Overall, the "calling" that Duffy and his colleagues are referring to is related to an "inner drive toward self-fulfilment or personal happiness" (Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429). Discovery is a process, not an all-or-nothing endorsement, and one's calling can change over time (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

The concept of a calling has been spoken about for centuries by theologians and philosophers (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Certain components of the WCT may be more relevant for some cultural groups than others (Duffy et al., 2018a). For example, the summoning component may speak more to individuals who value religion, faith, or spirituality in their lives. Individualistic cultural groups may value the meaning and purpose component of this theory. Alternatively, more collectivistic cultural groups may value the component of WCT that emphasizes prosocial goals (Duffy et al., 2018a).

The majority of extant WCT research has focused on predominantly White participants living in North America who are either working or in college (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Although the WCT may be narrowly applicable to Western cultures, the researchers emphasize an aim of the WCT to account for the experiences of all individuals in their process of living out a calling, not solely accommodating educated individuals with higher socioeconomic status, and whom identify with majority cultures (Duffy et al., 2019). Still, more research on cross-cultural relevance, and with individuals from non-dominant racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, is needed (Duffy & Dik, 2013).

## 4  The Life Space of James Baldwin

James Baldwin lived between August 2nd, 1924 and December 1st, 1987, though his life force has reverberated in American society after his death (Field, 2011). He was born in Harlem New York and raised there by his birth mother, Emma Berdis Jones,

and his stepfather, David Baldwin who was a Baptist preacher. The two married when James was 3 years old and went on to have eight more children (Field, 2011). Baldwin's stepfather would have an indelible impact on Baldwin's sense of self as a Black male and his ideas about religion, race, and work (Field, 2011).

## 4.1  The Learner and Witness

Baldwin spent his youth entangled in two worlds: academics and religion—in books from his neighbourhood library and scripture from church (Campbell, 2002; Tackbach, 2017). A standout as an elementary student at P.S. 24 in Harlem, Young James caught the eye of Orilla "Bill" Miller. Miller, a young White teacher from the Midwest, was instrumental in Baldwin's identity development. Baldwin recalled having an adoration for Miller that was akin to a "child's love" (Leeming, 1994, p. 14), and considered her to be the reason he "never really managed to hate white people" (Baldwin & Peck, 2017, p. 19). Miller was Baldwin's earliest champion; she encouraged him to write and produce his first play, and introduced him to advanced literature, film, and theatre, to the chagrin of his stepfather. Baldwin and Miller's teacher–student dynamic would blossom into a lifelong friendship that facilitated Baldwin's edification as an intellectual and his cross-racial understanding.

Miller exposed Baldwin to diverse aspects of American culture, most notably related to race and gender (Leeming, 1994). Baldwin's beliefs were further stoked when he attended the prestigious all-boys, DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, an opportunity facilitated by another of Baldwin's academic champions, Countee Cullen. Cullen made the acquaintance of Baldwin as his teacher at Frederick Douglass Junior High. Seeking a constructive Black male role model, Baldwin latched onto Cullen. A Harvard graduate and DeWitt alumni, Cullen had emerged as a notable poet during the Harlem renaissance. Additionally, Cullen had an affinity for French culture, and was Baldwin's French teacher while at Frederick Douglass. Baldwin credited Cullen for inspiring him to immigrate to France (Leeming, 1994).

Baldwin's experience at DeWitt was a drastic cultural shift from what he was accustomed to in Harlem and had a veritable impact on his abilities and calling as a writer (Mullen, 2019). It was at DeWitt where Baldwin was able to measure himself against the best White middle class contemporaries to whom he had access. This experience helped him crystallize his understanding that as a Black boy, he was fully capable of anything his White counterparts were capable of and more, because of what he had to overcome in order to meet their mark. In *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Baldwin commented about his early teenage years, "school began to reveal itself as a child's game that one could not win" (p. 30). While Baldwin could not conceive of the idea that school would create any occupational opportunity for him, he remained dedicated to reading. Books served as both an escape from Baldwin's oppressive life and a reflection of suffering he shared with others throughout history (110 Congressional Record, 1964).

Baldwin recalled that at an early age he had a critical awareness of his Blackness and the meaning associated with that reality (Campbell, 2002; McWilliams, 2018). His earliest conceptualization came through the eyes of his stepfather, David Baldwin. James witnessed the psychological trauma that David endured, and the related sequelae that resulted from his stepfather traversing a racist and oppressive White dominant context (110 Congressional Record, 1964, p. 12644). James would recall how American racism tormented his stepfather to the point where David had not only disdain towards those who imposed on his existence, but towards himself and his family, who depended on him (Baldwin & Giovanni, 1973). Baldwin said of his father: "he knew he was Black but did not know he was beautiful" (Baldwin, 1955, p. 89). David Baldwin's Blackness had been the cause of "much humiliation", which caused him to affix "boundaries" (Baldwin, 1955, p. 89) around his life, which kept his children out, and left him bitter and resentful to the point of mental ruin (Leeming, 1994).

## 4.2   The Minister

The church community provided Baldwin with a sense of belonging. In addition to finding some solace through exploring the wider world provided to him in books, Baldwin sought sanctuary in the church, as so many Black Americans have historically done (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Poole, 2017). Within this sub-community, young Baldwin would experience his first career calling, becoming a Christian minister at the age of 14 at the Fireside Pentecostal Assembly. This experience was pivotal for Baldwin in his evolution into the revolutionary activist that he is recognized as today. Baldwin's ministerial work forced him to confront difficult and conflicting aspects of his identity (Baldwin, 1955, 2018), namely his burgeoning sexuality, religiosity, and career aspirations, as well as the complex and sometimes opposing intersections of his Black American, Christian, and sexual minority identities (Quinn & Dickson-Gomez, 2016). Baldwin would confess to his high school friend Emile Capouya that "the pulpit was killing him", as he was "living a lie" (Young, 2014, p. 56). Though his ministerial position was fleeting, the time and energy invested taught Baldwin the invaluable lesson of reconciling with his convictions—likely the impetus that became a driving force behind his devout and zealous fight for social justice and equality in America (Campbell, 2002).

Sensing Baldwin's conflict, Emile introduced James to his guiding light, Beauford Delaney (Leeming, 1994). Delaney was a Black painter, with whom Baldwin would develop a strong and fast kinship, as he became Baldwin's paragon of a Black artist (Leeming, 1994). Like Baldwin, Delaney was a minister's son. In him, Baldwin found more than just a mentor and father figure; Baldwin found understanding. Delaney, a gay man, would assist Baldwin in reckoning with his own complex sexuality (Leeming, 1994). Baldwin considered Delaney to be his "principal witness" (Leeming, 1994, p. 35), a powerful statement from a man who bore "witness" (Baldwin & Peck, 2017; Campbell, 2002, p. 298) for so many others.

Delaney reflected to Baldwin everything he could not see in himself. Delaney aided James in seeing his value and his beauty (Baldwin, 1985) and helped him reconcile the conflicts between his intellect, sexuality, art, and spirituality. A year after meeting Delaney, Baldwin would preach his final sermon, no longer lost, but aware of himself and aware of what his art demanded of him (Leeming, 1994).

## 4.3  The Writer

At 20, Baldwin would form a strong and tumultuous bond with another father figure, writer Richard Wright. Referring to him as: "my ally and my witness, and alas! my father" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 274). Wright would provide James with the validation and fatherly nurturing he desperately sought (Baldwin, 1985). Wright's influence became the enriching and crystallizing catalyst that empowered and emboldened Baldwin to believe in his ability to thrive as a writer despite his race. Wright assisted Baldwin in achieving the writing fellowship that would jump-start his career as an author and enable him to travel to Paris (Leeming, 1994; National Museum of African History and Culture, n.d.)

Baldwin's search for understanding of his complex identity as a Black American author was accelerated by his first trip to Paris when he was 24. There, Baldwin was purposeful in viewing his identities outside of the cultural context in which he matured. Baldwin's exploration of self was also opened to the realm of sexuality given the more accepting spaces in the Bohemian artistic community of Paris in the late 1940s (Leeming, 1994). From ages 24 to 34 years old, ages where many Americans are negotiating life, career, family, and identity, Baldwin escaped to France and Switzerland to dedicate himself to writing and identity exploration (Leeming, 1994). Much of Baldwin's most important writing happened when he was living in France and later in Turkey. As all humans, Baldwin had his idiosyncrasies and downfalls; he experienced financial instability and at time failed to meet professional expectations like writing deadlines (Leeming, 1994). Raza (2008) commented on Baldwin's unique personality:

> His was a fascinating personality: gregarious, mercurial, witty, alcoholic, confrontational, intimate-legendary for his parties, his unreliability with appointments; his personal grace and magnetism, his story rages and his gracious apologies. Through it all, though, he always came across as real (para. 3).

## 4.4  The Activist

Baldwin immigrated to France in pursuit of social liberty and career success as a writer, but his experiences in Harlem were crucial as they not only propelled him to literary success, but were foundational in Baldwin's development as an activist. His first documented foray into public activism in the U.S. came in 1957, when he took

his first trip to the American South to protest with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, and other members of the Civil Rights Movement (Campbell, 2002). In addition to his efforts in engaging and organizing protests, Baldwin would use his literary prowess and skilful oratory abilities to convey the dire nature of the race problem in the USA. In 1963, Baldwin's activism efforts reached a zenith, as did his popularity. During that year, Baldwin would join several other Black luminaries to meet with then U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to discuss race relations in America (Dyson, 2018). The year 1963 also saw Baldwin participating in the March on Washington, leading a civil rights protest in Paris, and experiencing increased notoriety as he was placed on the cover of Time Magazine. His growing renown brought with it both privilege and detriment. Under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, as well as Robert F. Kennedy, the FBI kept tabs on Baldwin, as they were doing to several other civil rights figures at the time (Angela Y. Davis, Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr.). Baldwin was perceived to be a national security threat due to his open criticism of the U.S. government and society (Glaude Jr., 2020; Maxwell, 2017).

Despite his fame, social capital, and notable efforts within the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin continuously felt like an outsider, particularly in comparison to Malcom and Martin. According to Glaude Jr. (2020), Martin Luther King Jr. was suspicious and uncomfortable in the presence of Baldwin. Baldwin considered that this may be due to his living abroad and his openness about his identity as a sexual minority (Field, 2011; Baldwin, 1998). Despite the marginalization he experienced within the movement and the American Black community as a whole, Baldwin remained unwavering in his protest for the equality of Black Americans. His resolve has made Baldwin an enduring figure in the ongoing struggle for social justice in the USA, particularly in present day where he is a symbol of revolution and social change for Black Americans, sexual minorities, and other marginalized people who have had the privilege of receiving his words. His revolutionary voice can still be heard in recordings and the volumes of his literary works, chief among them *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), both of which contain unadulterated critiques on the shortcomings of American society and its ugly relationship with race (Campbell, 2002).

## 5   Theory Application

Our goal in applying a career theory to Baldwin's life, specifically Work as a Calling Theory, is to understand how his life trajectory was different from most Black Americans at the time, and even most famous Black activists. Baldwin was raised in a family without financial means. Jobs, let alone careers, were not easy to come by as a Black man in America during the 1960s. How was Baldwin's life trajectory different in that it led him to a career as a writer, activist, and public figure?

To reiterate, the three components of the WCT are, generally: (1) summons, (2) meaning/purpose, and (3) prosocial motivation. For Baldwin, his work as a

preacher can be understood in the context of being summoned by two powerful external sources: a Higher Power and the family legacy from his stepfather, the Baptist preacher who raised him (Field, 2011). This summons may have been a by-product from the racist, White America at the time and preaching acted as a means of survival. As Baldwin once stated:

> Every Negro boy—in my situation during those years, at least—who reaches this point realizes, at once profoundly, because he wants to live, that he stands in great peril and must find, with speed, a "thing", a gimmick, to lift him out, to start him on his way (Baldwin, 1963, p. 35).

That time provided for Baldwin a refuge from what he understood as the sin and depravity that accompanied his sexuality (Baldwin, 1998; Field, 2011). Through maturation, education in the New York City public school system, mentorship, and avid reading, Baldwin valued the role of the church in the lives of Black Americans less and less (Field, 2011; Leeming, 1994). He came to believe that the Christian church played a role in creating "Black self-loathing" (Field, 2011, p. 82), and thus could not coexist with the belief that preaching was prosocial or positively impactful for his community.

"When, aged seventeen, his father asked, 'You'd rather write than preach, wouldn't you?' Baldwin answered, 'Yes', recalling that this was 'the one time in all our life together when we had really spoken to each other'" (Baldwin, as cited in Field, 2011, p. 3). In order to move away from preaching and towards his passion for writing, an understanding was necessary between son and father. In an interview about his first novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Baldwin (1953) described that he had to "understand the forces, the experience, the life that shaped him [his father] before I could grow up myself, before I could become a writer" (Standley & Pratt, as cited in Field, 2011, p. 3). To, again, consider the WCT and its three main components, we can imagine Baldwin's experience of summoning to write being quite different from the summoning to preach earlier in life. Baldwin's purpose for writing initially stemmed from a deep desire and struggle to understand himself in the context of his family, his religion, and his community. These themes were reflected in his earliest pieces such as his novel *Crying Holy* and other pieces which centred on father–son relationships (Field, 2011). The purpose of writing, initially, was a way to dig out a meaning of its own which was buried, but later acted as a means to give voice to disenfranchised people and the corrupt systems in place.

The WCT takes into consideration unique work patterns, especially for artists like Baldwin (Duffy et al., 2018b). This allows the opportunity to question Baldwin's experience of freedom versus instability. Becoming a writer undoubtedly offered him some forms of both freedom and instability, which speaks to the possible conflict in internal sources of summoning such as one's values. Duffy et al. (2018b) discussed the concept of work volition which is the freedom of choosing one's work despite external barriers. In various studies, work volition has been correlated with work locus of control, job satisfaction, career self-efficacy, work meaning, and life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2018b). For Baldwin, the work volition he experienced as a writer was likely related to his geographical freedom and

freedom to tackle important tensions and contradictions in his writing. If he were to have remained in the USA, he would be "merely a Negro; or, even, merely a Negro writer" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 17). As Field (2011) points out, Baldwin felt split "between his artistic and political responsibilities" (p. 42) until his writing and activism fully intersected.

Baldwin's concept of freedom, however, was complicated by the feeling of isolation while in Europe, especially for a Black American (Field, 2011). In his writings, Baldwin described the "deliberate isolation" of African Americans in Europe and the difficulties of communication or connection between African Americans and Black Africans living in Paris (Baldwin, 1998, p. 86). Baldwin affirmed that the artist must purposefully look to inhabit a state of aloneness in order to "illuminate that darkness" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 484), from which humans collectively run, by tending to our communities and to our inner selves. According to Baldwin, our purpose is to "make the world a more human dwelling place", which is predicated on the writer exploring the spaces that are not safe for most others to go (Baldwin, 1985, p. 484). Baldwin's isolation was a means of social responsibility as well as for self-preservation.

## 6   Discussion

**If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving—James Baldwin** (1963, p. 86) in *The Fire Next Time*

Baldwin's lived experience composed a striking portrait of artistry and activism, antithetical to the drab and grayscale life James was compelled to conform to by American society and familial expectations. Baldwin witnessed his father experience this reality and succumb to "the darker forces in human life" (Baldwin, 1955, p. 178) imposed by an oppressive power structure built on White supremacy. Baldwin sought vibrancy in his experiences and the people with whom he was acquainted out of fear of succumbing to such a bleak outcome. In order to fully realize his calling, he explored places within and outside of himself that people like his father would not dare venture. Individuals like Bill Miller, Countee Cullen, Beauford Delaney, and Richard Wright guided him through these experiences and empowered him to live life dynamically in colour. Despite this, his experiences were still tinged by the "glaring black and white" shades (Baldwin, 1955, p. 178) that constantly infringed on his life.

Baldwin utilized every platform and medium he could as a pulpit from which to proclaim the words of the oppressed and overlooked. He preached from the testaments of his lived experiences, and his volumes of writing became evangelical texts for social justice. The life and work of James Baldwin, a celebrated non-heterosexual African American author and activist, speaks to intersectional elements involved in living out a calling and finding meaning and fulfilment in work. The crucial and enduring experiences throughout his childhood and early adult life pushed Baldwin

to choose a career in which he could harness his and his community's painful experiences into beautiful prose that could be used to fight for social justice. To develop and hone his writing skill, and dedicate himself fully to his calling as a witness, artist, and activist, Baldwin needed to reflect inward, explore his sexuality, feel the pain of unrequited love, and discover the intersections of his identity. This process entailed moving abroad and thrusting himself into a new country and culture in which he could better express a more authentic version of himself in an environment with greater tolerance for racial and sexual minority statuses at the time, allowing him to approach his full potential as an artist and writer. When Baldwin resurfaced in the USA in the 1960s, he was a changed man with the confidence and conviction needed to join the fight for social justice during the Civil Rights Movement.

There is a need for researchers and mental health practitioners to explore the idea of work and calling through a multicultural and intersectional lens, in order to explore the internal and external forces that influence individuals' work and the subsequent meaning and purpose they find from engaging with it (Allan et al., 2015; Duffy & Dik, 2013; Duffy et al., 2019). This is particularly the case for activists from marginalized communities, as their view of work can vary based on their cultural identities (Valocchi, 2013). Baldwin's life and work is evidence of this; coming from a marginalized and multiply oppressed background, liberal expression and activism became his way of life even though it was not engrained in his upbringing (Valocchi, 2013).

Early on, Baldwin was aware of the corrosive nature of his environment, and he grew more cognizant of the insidious grip that systemic racism had on Black Americans as well as the White people who perpetuated it in the USA (Campbell, 2002; Field, 2011; Leeming, 1994). In *Letter to My Nephew*, Baldwin (1998) uses his experiences to forewarn his nephew, and future generations of Black Americans, what it means to be Black in the USA. Baldwin describes it as being "born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being . . . not expected to aspire to excellence" but to "make peace with mediocrity" (p. 293). Baldwin's upbringing in Harlem (Baldwin & Bondy, 1964; Jackson, 1978), witnessing his stepfather's tumultuous relationship with work (Baldwin & Giovanni, 1973), experiencing difficulties with navigating the daily slights and indignities of a racist White dominant and heteronormative American landscape, and the ensuing rage and trauma that resulted (Campbell, 2002) would be the early external impetuses that inspired him to live as an expatriate. Baldwin honed his artistic skills in Europe, an environment more hospitable to Black sexual minorities at the time (Kaplan & Schwarz, 2011; National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). His conceptualization of the racism and injustices committed against Black people would stoke his internal drive to fight for equal rights and social justice in the USA alongside individuals like Medgar Evers, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Baldwin, 1998; Coles, 1988; Glaude Jr., 2020). Baldwin's reality and its influence on his ability and willingness to live out his calling is evidence of the need for counsellors and researchers to utilize

ecological and liberation-oriented practice in their work with marginalized individuals, particularly artists and activists.

Baldwin's words remain relevant and heralded in the fight against American racism. The fact that Baldwin's critiques of race relations are still relevant within the contemporary American context should not be lauded; they are testament to the ongoing systemic racial issues present in the USA (Cornelius, 2020; Maxwell, 2016). This speaks to the importance of community advocacy and activism. Baldwin's identity as a Black American cis-gendered non-heterosexual man was highly politicized within the context in which he existed. Acknowledging Baldwin's development as an agent of positive social change highlights the gravity of nurturing activists of colour like him in their sociocultural and career identities, the importance of mentors/role models with shared identities, as well as rectifying the oppressive and unyielding environments that produce them. The authors hope that this chapter adds to the diversity of psychobiography by applying an established psychological career theory to an esteemed author and activist from non-dominant majority background.

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**Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi)**, Ph.D., (he/him) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling Psychology at the University of San Francisco. His research focuses on the areas of transracial identity, identity development, names, mentorship, racial and ethnic socialization, qualitative research and psychobiography, and social justice training. He enjoys mentoring and learning from his graduate students.

**Nicole T. Maleh** née Elimelech, M.Ed., (she/her) is a fifth-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, completing her APA-accredited internship at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Her research focuses on ethnic and sexual identity development, psychobiography, parent-infant attachment, and mental health within medicalized settings, particularly within the neonatal intensive care unit. She uses qualitative research methods to co-construct meaning with her participants who come from diverse and unique backgrounds.

**Simonleigh P. Miller** (he/him) is a fifth-year doctoral student studying in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, completing his APA-accredited internship at ANDRUS in Yonkers, New York. He identifies as being of Afro-Caribbean descent, and his research is focused in the area of exploring the reality of African diaspora, specifically highlighting cross-cultural differences and similarities across populations, and "unpacking" the lasting effects of shared historical trauma on their communities. His other interests include psychobiography as well as providing and advocating for improved mental health care services in underserved and marginalized communities.

# "Water the Plants, Not the Weeds": A Narrative Identity Study of Black Resilience in the Aftermath of the Great Migration

**Nakia Hamlett and Jefferson A. Singer**

**Abstract** Spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement, American society is more openly confronting the enduring problem of structural racism and how it manifests for both Black and white individuals. This narrative identity study profiles a 73-year-old Black man, Lonnie B., born to sharecroppers in Mississippi, who migrated North to work in the shipyards of New London, Connecticut. Lonnie juggled three jobs, earned a bachelor's degree, and graduated from law school over the course of a 20-year period. He went on to become a prosecuting attorney, working primarily with youthful offenders. Employing McAdams's life story interview, we examined his narrative identity, focusing particularly on his self-defining memories and redemptive ideology, despite ongoing encounters with institutional and interpersonal racism. His personal philosophy, based in an ethos of love, education, and openness, and that draws on a foundation of family resilience, accounts for both his unflagging persistence and his generative efforts in social activism. We examine the challenges and benefits that he has experienced in maintaining this worldview in the face of slow-to-change structural barriers.

**Keywords** Narrative identity · Resilience · Psychobiography · Structural racism · Self-defining memories

## 1 Introduction

The narrative that follows is embedded, first and foremost, in a rich family legacy that, at its core, offers a tale of one family's resilience and the ways in which these strengths became the foundation of one man's character. From a broader perspective, this narrative is embedded in a larger story about the history of racism in America. Further embedded in this story are themes of *inequity*, *privilege*, and *advantage* that

N. Hamlett · J. A. Singer (✉)
Department of Psychology, Connecticut College, New London, CT, USA
e-mail: nhamlett@conncoll.edu; jasin@conncoll.edu

reflect how both those brought here originally through slavery and newer immigrants to America are socialized as *white* or *non-white*, reifying a system of racial advantages based on *whiteness* (Tatum, 1997).

In this system of accumulated and persistent inequity, many African Americans, and other non-white people and their families, tirelessly attempt to develop and sustain a modicum of dignity, self-esteem, and hope. Indeed, strivings, such as hope, personal growth, dignity, an undying need for love and caring, and an individual sense of purpose, are native to every human. In this psychobiographical analysis, we share one man's story of intellectual growth, love, persistence, and resilience, as well as offer hints about the powerful ways in which family resilience buffers against the deleterious effects of persistent racial danger, harm, economic inequity, and overall disadvantage.

## 2  Resilience

Resilience, by definition, is the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity (Hermans et al., 2011). Much of the literature on resilience among African Americans necessarily has a focus on what impedes or impairs resilience, often highlighting poverty, racial inequity, and trauma exposure. Work in this area often discusses "coping skills," and the abilities or strategies that African American utilize at different developmental periods to manage difficult circumstances, as well as other resilient processes that constitute recovery (Cunningham et al., 2018).

Spencer (2006) has enlarged the concept of resilience with articulation of the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) model. PVEST posits that individuals express more or less resilience, as mediated by a "meaning-making" process influenced by culture, context, perception, and outcomes. These outcomes are a function of individual vulnerability, stress engagement, reactive and stable coping strategies, emergent identities, and life consequences (Cunningham et al., 2018). This model, robustly examined in samples of African American youth, asserts that it is, collectively, the environmental circumstances, perceptions, and the quality of coping capacities that determine how individuals manage adversity across the life-span.

## 3  Family Resilience

Other researchers have turned their attention to family resilience (Black & Lobo, 2008; Gregory et al., 2019; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1996). Family resilience is defined in terms of a family's characteristics that help it to manage and navigate adversity and change. Healthy families "weather the crisis together" (McCubbin & McCubbin, p. 36), often emerging stronger, more loving, and more resourceful than

before. Thus, from this perspective, resilience connotes a level of healthy growth and adaptation to circumstances, wherein the family unit collectively manages stressors and supports one another for the collective good of the family. Research in this area also highlights the salience of kinship relationships, loving parent–child relationships, and the family unit as an ongoing source of support, comfort, enjoyment, and security (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1996; Parke, 2000). McCubbin and McCubbin (1996) also emphasize very important traits existing among resilient families, namely, a positive outlook, family member accord, flexibility, communication, time together, spirituality, financial management, routines and rituals, and mutual recreational interests.

Research would suggest that the family provides the foundation for this positive self-belief by fostering confidence in one's own developing capacity to manage adversity, but also a deep trust that the family will provide the additional support, comfort, and resources necessary to manage any situation. Consequently, for an individual who has the great fortune of being a member of a resilient family unit, the family is never far away; instead, the family becomes internalized as a source of strength, becoming a co-facilitator, creator, and *problem-solver* on an individual's life journey.

## 4 The Qualitative Narrative and Resilience

When we turn our attention to individual life narratives that exemplify resilience, we expect to unearth themes that highlight innate aspects of humanity such as persistence, self-efficacy, and wisdom. With narrative research, we collect personal accounts that highlight the vicissitudes of human suffering, triumph, love, and specific memories of life lived with others. Against a landscape of unmitigated white supremacy replete with raw dangerous energy and post-slavery, sharecropping poverty, we are gifted with a glimpse of one African American family's efforts to create an oasis of connection, protection, and resourcefulness for their children; efforts that would ultimately achieve their goal. As we listen for these themes, our attention returns repeatedly to the powerful notion that what the family builds cannot be undone by life circumstances and that love offers both a protective shield and a warm blanket that keeps the chill of life from settling in ones' bones. Thus, what we find, after peeling away the layers, is a picture of resilience, birthed in a rich family context, and glimpses of what, once internalized as a life narrative and lens, allows a person to endure and thrive, regardless of life impediments.

# 5   Present Narrative Identity Study

Narrative identity theory (McAdams & McLean, 2013) asserts that individuals embed the central themes of their identity in an evolving life story that provides unity and purpose to their lives. These themes and the stories that contain them are shaped from the dominant cultural influences or "master narratives" that inform their outline and often overdetermine their content (Hammack & Toolis, 2016). In a society that has historically been dominated by white people, it is crucial to ask whether the familiar master narratives within popular culture are applicable to Black people, and whether or not there are parallel master narratives that have existed and exist in Black society up to the current time. One goal of this chapter is to bring forward unique elements of Lonnie's life story that highlight distinct differences from life stories infused with white society's master narrative.

As Singer et al. (2013) elaborate, one can divide narrative identity into sub-components—the most crucial being the *life story*, *self-defining memories*, and the *narrative script*.

The *life story* is the chronological content that populates each stage of the ongoing life narrative. It most often starts with childhood recollections, carries forward through schooling, and then brings in episodes from early career and relationships. Depending on the individual's age, it would cover highlights and low points over the course of work and family life, culminating in one's later years and retrospective review of the life course (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 1985). When individuals participate in a more formal life story interview (McAdams, 1985), they are encouraged to provide chapter titles to the different segments of their narrative; these *life story chapters* have been more rigorously studied by Thomsen and Berntsen (2008).

In the telling of the life story, researchers have noted particular event narratives that stand out for their imagistic and affective power. These *self-defining memories* (SDMs) are vivid, evoke strong emotion at recall, well-rehearsed, and reflect individuals' most enduring concerns and/or unresolved conflicts. They are invariably linked to an individual's most desired goals and overall adjustment and well-being (Blagov et al., 2022).

Across the life story, it is quite common that a subset of an individual's self-defining memories shares similar sequences of events and outcomes that evoke the same emotional responses. By linking these memories, one can extract a *narrative script* (Demorest et al., 2012; Tomkins, 1987). The narrative script is a schema or template that organizes past and current experiences within the self-system (Conway et al., 2004). It serves as a filter that helps to define the meaning and emotional value of past, current, and anticipated life events. Narrative scripts can bring order to a set of self-defining memories, but they can also provide a thematic structure to the larger life story. Two important defining narrative scripts are *redemption* and *contamination* (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Perlin & Fivush, 2021). Redemption sequences commence with obstacles and negative affect but end in the overcoming of challenges and positive affect. Contamination sequences unfold in the opposite

direction—starting in positive affect, but ending in negative affect and disappointment.

What follows is Lonnie B.'s life story account that emerged from our life story interview, as well from additional life history questions and our conversation with his wife, Gwenn. After providing this overview of his life, we then zero in on his self-defining memories and narrative script that highlight his particular resilience themes in the face of systemic racism.

## 6 Overview of Lonnie B.'s Life Story

Lonnie B. was born on February 9th, 1948 in Greenville, Mississippi, the son of Lonnie and Lenora B. His sister, Kathryn was born three years later in 1951. Lonnie senior and Lenora began their marriage as sharecroppers picking cotton. Neither of his parents had education beyond the fourth grade, but both had an innate curiosity about the world and a desire to learn. Seeing no way to save money and in fact being told they owed money to the owner (despite a year of hard work), the young couple gathered up their belongings in one truck and left the plantation to start out on their own. Lonnie senior eventually developed a business cutting up logs in the forest and hauling them to the saw mill. Before Lonnie was born, the couple purchased a "shotgun" shack, so-named because you could fire a shotgun and the shell could go right through the two or three rooms lined up directly one behind the other.

From an early age, Lonnie observed how his parents would sit together at the end of the day and work their way through the articles in the newspaper, talking about local and national news. Their active interest in current events fueled his desire for education and international travel. With the family's funds very limited, Lonnie began his first job at eight years old, working on a milk truck, helping with deliveries before he went to school.

Lonnie attended an all-Black high school, cultivating a love of science and participating in county science fairs. For his 10th birthday his parents purchased a short-wave radio and Lonnie listened to broadcasts from all over the globe, further spurring his passion to take in the world beyond Greenville. Joining the Naval Reserves, he commenced active duty in the Navy just months after graduation. Over the course of his time in the service, he experienced episodes of discrimination in the jobs he was assigned and by local landlords in Norfolk, Virginia, who refused to rent apartments to Black sailors.

Discharged at age 20, he married his first wife, whom he had known for a couple of years, and then moved to Groton, Connecticut to pursue a job at Electric Boat, manufacturer of nuclear submarines. He quickly secured a position as an electronics mechanic. He soon noticed how divided the large plant was by race with the majority of Black employees working in the shipyard as laborers and assemblers and practically none in management.

Lonnie found other examples of Northern bigotry. Early in his time at EB, he asked a supervisor what a particular large piece of machinery was for and the reply

was, "We use that to make hockey pucks out of Black people." Boiling inside, Lonnie told himself to keep his mouth shut and keep his eyes on the bigger goal he had set for himself—getting an education and becoming a lawyer—a dream he had held since childhood. He found classes at a local 2-year college and started on this path.

His son, Lonnie the third, was born in 1969. With the counsel of his sister, Kathryn, who was studying to become a special education teacher, and through some extensive testing, it was quickly determined that the newborn was a Down Syndrome child and would face numerous physical and cognitive challenges. Although Lonnie had great respect and affection for his wife, he soon realized that she was not prepared for the challenge of a child with special needs. After some concerning incidents in which she became increasingly frustrated, Lonnie decided to put their son under his mother's and sister's care in Greenville. By 1974, the marriage had ended and Lonnie was fully focused on moving forward with his education.

When Lonnie learned of a Return to College program with evening classes at Connecticut College in nearby New London, he embarked on what ended up being a 13 year journey to earn his bachelor's degree. For the next four years, he juggled his job at EB, a second job at a stereo store and continued his coursework. Lonnie's college career was interrupted by a stretch where he moved to New Hampshire for the opportunity to run his own stereo store. The store grew in sales volume until it closed during a bad recession in 1982.

Back in New London, he finally finished his college degree in 1986. During all of these years, his son would spend summers with him, and he would make multiple trips back to Greenville. With his degree in hand, Lonnie next managed to get accepted to the University of Connecticut Law School and graduated from there in 1988.

Lonnie had met his second wife in the mid-70s and they married in the early 80s. They were very different from each other with Lonnie's highly social nature contrasting with her more private and less emotional style. As Lonnie had gained more knowledge of the law, he had become actively involved in local civil rights activities, serving over a number of years as an officer in the NAACP. During this period, he also faced the deaths of his parents, pulling him home to Greenville for month-long stretches. And finally, with both grandparents gone by 2000, Lonnie the third moved back to Connecticut to live permanently with his father. The confluence of these different stressors led to the breakdown of Lonnie's second marriage, ending also in 2000.

Within this timespan, specifically from 1988 to 1994, Lonnie took the bar exam and failed it five times, often failing by no more than 1 or 2 points. He finally determined through the help of a friend's intervention that he was dyslexic and also suffering from ADHD. With some treatment and adjustments in his study habits, based on his understanding of these disorders, he succeeded in passing the bar on the sixth try.

In 1996, he landed a position as an assistant prosecuting attorney for the state of Connecticut, beginning in the housing division, then becoming a line prosecutor for criminal cases, finally switching to juvenile matters in 2008 where he remained until

his retirement in 2021. For many of these years, he was the only black prosecuting attorney in the towns and counties he was assigned to work. He was the recipient of many honors and awards for his work as an attorney, but also for his community engagement activities. It was through his work with the NAACP that he met his third wife, Gwen. They have been a couple since the early 2000s and married 4 years ago. There seems to be little question for both of them that they have found their life partner and best friend.

Finally, we should note that Lonnie the third has thrived in his adult life, managing to stay employed and also becoming an elite athlete in Special Olympics competitions, even taking home a gold medal for doubles tennis in 2008 in the national meet, held in Lincoln, Nebraska, and again in 2018 in Seattle, Washington.

With this quick review of his remarkable journey from sharecroppers' child in Mississippi to distinguished state attorney in a Northeastern state, we now turned to an analysis of his resilience themes, as refracted through the lens of narrative identity.

## 6.1  Self-Defining Memories, Narrative Scripts, and Resilience Themes

We can trace Lonnie's narrative pattern of resilience in the face of obstacles to the very story of his birth, as told to him by a favorite aunt,

> She told the story that when my mother was in the hospital, uh, the colored hospital, she was quite ill to the point that she lost part of her lower intestines giving birth to me and that for approximately four, five days, I had not moved. So, they—the doctors were on the verge of making a decision if they were going to save my mother's life because I was dead. So, in this hospital . . . they had coal stoves that you put lumps of coal in and it warmed the room. So, my aunt took a towel and placed it on this stove, and when the towel became warm, really warm, she placed it on my mother's stomach and I moved, and my aunt said, "He's alive."

## 6.2  Captain America Shield

Lonnie followed this memory with the first of his major narrative themes of resilience—what he calls the *Captain America Shield.*

> And I know that I came from a group of people who have always protected me and loved me. And I think the greatest shield—you know, like you watch those Captain America sequels where the guy has a shield—I think the shield that I came with was a shield that was fashioned of love, that has been impregnable, and I say that in—and, and, you know, it, it, it almost brings me to tears because my parents are gone and I know what,—the sacrifices they made for my sister and me.

At other points in his narrative, Lonnie refers to this protective shield as a "foundation of love." We know from Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy

& Shaver, 2018) that a fundamental sense of security and trust provided by care-givers sets the groundwork for self-confidence and the capacity to make affirming connections with others. When speaking about this aspect of Lonnie's life, Gwen reinforced what she learned not only about Lonnie's parents, but through her own interactions with his sister and his nephew.

> They taught such grounded lessons of just being a good human being and you know, like growing up in the south, watching out for the bad things, and also the good things. And so, his upbringing was really good; a good family was a big influence, you know, in his life. And he's still like that now, and you can see where that has passed on to the generations. You know, it's just him, his sister, and their sons, she only has one child as well. And his son and his nephew are just really wonderful human beings. He reminds me a lot of Lonnie.

One other dimension of his being rooted in a sense of safety and love is ironically that Lonnie grew up in a segregated community in the South that often buffered him from the undermining messages of racism. As Gwen explained,

> I also think that because it was segregated, you're surrounded by people who love you, you know? And he grew up with his grandmother and grandfather. And you know, so in a sense, you're being protected, you know, on a daily basis because these people love you. It's almost like a cocoon.

Yet, as she pointed out, when he ventured into the "other world"—the white world—he learned to be on his guard at all times, since the possibility of hostility and violence was always close to the surface. In fact, he adopted a habit that has never left him of not looking people directly in the eye when talking—"You may notice that with him, because that's how you were raised. Your life depended on it. You could be lynched for looking at a white man in a white man's eyes or a white woman."

Although Lonnie's narrative is interwoven with multiple memories and references to the unquestioning love he found in his family, there is again a parallel sense of sadness and setback. Despite all the positivity of his home environment, his father had a pattern of infidelity that his mother could not reconcile with the deep love they shared. When Lonnie was 9, with he and his sister in tow she left his father and eventually filed for divorce. He identified this disruption as the turning point in his life and a period of profound sadness.

Yet over time he came to see their break-up in a different light. Even though they were separated under two different roofs, Lonnie's father came by the family home nearly every day and his mother continued to manage all of the bookkeeping for his logging business. They remained close up to the day of her death. Here is another of Lonnie's SDMs that highlights the foundation of love that could not be undone. Later in her life, Lonnie's mother was hospitalized with a tumor and Lonnie came back to see her in Greenville.

> So, one night late, I decided to go and just sit with my mother. So, I go into her room and the lights are out, but from the door back, I see a silhouette of a head. So, I step back 'cause I don't know who it is, and the nurse says, "It's your father. He's here every night." So, he sat there every night and got up and left [once he saw her sleeping].

## 6.3    Please Do Not Look for Me in the Whirlwind Because I Will Be in School

The next major resilience theme running through Lonnie's memories is the power of education. We have already seen how his parents, despite their lack of schooling, modeled engagement with reading and discussion. As Lonnie put it more than once, there was never a question in these two humble people's minds about whether or not his sister and he would attend college, they would always say, without hesitation, "*When* you two are in college." When we asked him about his powerful investment in education, here is the memory he shared,

> Well, you know, for some reason, I think—not for some reason, I think it's my parents. You know, I'm 4 years old. September school starts. I wanna go to school. I hafta go to school. So I am driving'm crazy at home. "I gotta go to school." So a family friend who's coming to the house who's hearing this and was a teacher at the Negro Normal School, which was this square building that had, I think, six rooms in it, two-story. She had a kindergarten class there. She let me sit in as an unofficial member of her class, which put me at ease, and it was only about less than five minutes from my house so I could walk there myself.

By high school, Lonnie was a self-described "science nerd" and competing in the country science fairs. However, he was still living at the borderlines of poverty and had no budget to fashion the projects that he cooked up in his head. Once again, this passionate drive to learn spurred him to keep at his dream,

> I read *Scientific American*, and they had a thick book that had all these projects in it, and one of them was a common particle accelerator. So you had to have all of this stuff to make it happen and you had to build a Van de Graaff generator . . . And the thing that was so exciting about it was my dad and I because I needed a rubber belt, and in Mississippi, where you gonna get it? We don't have the money. So I took a truck tire inner tube, cut it, made the belt, and then I, uh—aluminum wasn't a big thing at that time, so the bowls were cheap. So I remember getting two bowls and getting a piece of plexiglas pipe, and it took a while but I made this thing and it worked.

We can see in this early memory the same ingenuity and grit that kept him going to finish his two degrees and to keep at the bar exam despite his multiple attempts. In the Navy, at Electric Boat, working at and owning a stereo store, directing information technology at the law school, Lonnie's engagement with the intricacy of machines and devices has been a continual catalyst to move him forward. When we seek to understand resiliency in any individual from any group, the innate power of curiosity, the desire to learn, and the goal of mastery are forces that propel one through obstacles and apparent disappointments. After Lonnie recently finished his illustrious career as an attorney, he left his co-workers with a parting message,

> I wrote an exit letter from work, and I gave a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." And I said, "So please do not look for me in the whirlwind because I will be in school."

## 6.4 I Expect Failure

It may seem paradoxical that an individual who we characterize as having an unflagging optimism would voice the following credo—

> I expect failure. I don't expect to win all the time. That stuff's gonna go wrong. So, if it's gonna go wrong, just go on. I know it sounds—and this is not Pollyanna-ish—this is real because if you could choose, who would choose to have any adversity or any pain? Nobody, so if we know that and we can't do a thing about it, get on with living.

The key to Lonnie's life philosophy is not that setbacks won't occur or that we might not have dark moments of loss and profound disappointment. He accepts this, but he also has an unfailing conviction that things will turn and he will prevail. This goes back again to the belief his parents had in him. His father used to say, "Put the boy down anywhere and he will hit the ground running."

Lonnie relied on this dogged determination when he faced racism in his position at the submarine plant and when he juggled evening college classes with two other jobs. When his first wife could not handle the challenges of a child with special needs, he did not follow the advice of some of his friends to place his son in a group home. When time after time over a five year stretch, his bar exam scores would fall one or two points short, he would not give in.

> I, um, worked like a dog to get through law school. I take the bar, and I fail. I study like a dog a second time. I take the bar, I come home, my mother's died. And that's a low point. Um, and you know you put in that kind of effort that way, you expect something. And one of the things that I have learned in my life, and I, I remind people this all the time so they don't fall prey to it: we have a saying, if you work really, really hard, you're gonna succeed. That is not true. That is a misnomer and a snare we lay for people. A lot of people work really, really hard and don't succeed, and since they don't, they give up. You could have a death. You could have a loss of job . . . And what we should tell people is to have at it, that you gotta stay at it. You gotta have the tenacity to stay at it.

Being in Lonnie's presence, it is impossible to think of him as a 73-year-old man—there seemed an inextinguishable vibrancy and alertness that beamed from him over the hours that we spent together. The secret to this energy and his resilience in the face of failure is that his eye is always on the future. He is forever researching, reading up, planning, building another goal or dream for the next day. Inevitably, this restlessness took a toll on his partners. He acknowledges that his intense engagement in activities, community organizations, work, and schooling made him less than an ideal husband for someone seeking a more intimate and private life. Perhaps one of the reasons for the great success of his current marriage is that Gwen and he were friends well over a decade before they became a couple. And even after they began to live together, she kept her own house, which she still has as her retreat after 4 years of marriage. Although she too can be frustrated with his "energizer bunny" approach to life, she has her own independence and separate career as a lawyer. This space, physical and psychological, that is hers alone helps to diffuse some of his frenetic intensity.

One shared mantra that Lonnie and Gwen have is a phrase that she repeated multiple times in our interview with her. Gwen refers to it as their "motto" and describes how it works in their relationship,

> I think for us it's what I call "weathering the storm," I really do. It's really because, you know, you go through all kinds of things and stuff, when you're getting to know each other and then you, you sort it out, you sort out what's important, what's not important. You get older and you start to think, who cares about that, you know? But both of you have to feel that same way.

Hearing Gwen affirm this wisdom about how to navigate through their relationship challenges helped us to see the deep compatibility this couple has found with each other. Lonnie early on learned a similar lesson from his father about where to put one's energy and focus—encapsulated in the saying, "Water the plants, not the weeds."

## 6.5   Water the Plants, Not the Weeds

> Because look at your feelings and your views as like this bottle of water, and you got a bunch of plants and you got a bunch of weeds. You only got so much water. You can either water the weeds or you can water the plants. Dad used to remind me, he said, "Boy, the weeds have a way of growing on their own without much help. You should look after the plants." So, I try to look after the plants.

Episodes of racism and bigotry have been a constant in Lonnie's life as a Black man, growing up in the South, facing discrimination in the Navy, in his work at Electric Boat, in his search for housing in New London, and on a nearly daily basis in his long career as a prosecuting attorney. And yet, he has brought to these painful and rage-inducing encounters a determination to keep his focus on moving forward ("watering the plants") rather than letting anger or resentment consume him. We have touched base on some of the more egregious racist incidents in his life, but it is worth mentioning some additional memories that stood out for Lonnie. He walked right into the practice of "redlining" when he tried to buy a house on the other side of the dividing line between whites and Blacks in New London.

> When I placed a down-payment on the house, turned in all of the documentation to the bank, some other people at EB had done the same around the same time as myself. So, a couple of these guys, they had already had closings and had moved. I'm still waiting. So, I make it my business to go down to the bank. They let me talk to this loan officer, an older guy at the time, he had to be in his 60 s, .. And the thing that is so interesting about this is that as he and I talked—because growing up in the South, you had to learn a lot rules if you expected to stay alive as a black person. So, as he and I are discussing things, I can hear and feel some of the things that were familiar to me from the South. But he didn't even seem to grasp his use of them, which was kind of odd.

Despite seeing the obvious prejudices in this bank official's interactions, Lonnie kept his cool and cultivated a relationship with him and within another week landed his home. In a similar vein, if we recall the despicable put-down made by his

supervisor when he first started at EB (the "hockey puck" comment"), we can fast-forward twenty years later to a moment in the New London courthouse. Coming before the court with a set of potential charges was one of his former E.B. supervisors who had engaged in similar racist behaviors toward Lonnie. Although Lonnie felt tempted to rake him over the coals and extract revenge, he treated him no differently than any other defendant.

Even at the moment of his selection to become a state's attorney, Lonnie had to apply the same strategy,

> I was interviewed by a judicial selection committee to be a state's attorney. I'm sitting in a room similar to this with half-dozen or so people sitting at a table. I'm standing there, and the question posed to me, "Well, Mr. B., we've heard that some people believe the judicial system is not fair to people of color." Now think about that question for a moment. How do you answer it? If I say no, if I say yes … I said, "I've been in front of judges who've mistaken me for the defendant. I didn't say they were bigots. I just needed to say they need a little bit more exposure, and I feel just like Jackie Robinson did when Branch Rickey came to him and said, "Jackie, people are gonna say bad things about you, they're gonna throw things at you, they're gonna curse you, they're gonna do all kinds of stuff, and you gotta be able to take it. Can you?" And just as Jackie Robinson said, "I'm your man. I'm yours." That's how it ended.

When Lonnie looks back at these episodes of ignorance and racism, he acknowledges how enraging they are but he will not allow himself to dwell in bitterness. When asked to name the last chapter of his life story, he labeled it "Joy." Watering the plants, he puts his attention to

> … All those people who touched me, all those people who cared for me and the love that my folks put in me, and I think about that and I get to this point and I've accomplished what I have and I've done this stuff, why couldn't I be happy?

Lonnie's emphasis on the positive also never precluded his ongoing work for civil rights and social justice. As mentioned, he served for decades in the local NAACP chapter along with many other community activist and human rights organizations. When asked why he took on the role of a prosecuting attorney rather than working on behalf of defendants, he gave a revealing answer. He had made this decision from nearly the first day of law school. On the prosecution side, he could make sure to the best of his ability that the state applied its charges and used its power as fairly as possible. In particular, working in the criminal division, he sought to show young people, especially young Black individuals, that there were powerful officials within the "system" that could treat them with fairness and respect. The result of this work is that he has become a mentor and advocate for countless Black youth in New London County, a role that he embraces with his usual boundless zeal.

## 6.6   Narrative Script

Across Lonnie's self-defining memories that share a connecting current of resilience, we can identify a script that organizes and brings coherence to his narrative identity.

This abstracted sequence of actions and emotions provides a lens through which he sees the significant features of his past experience, but also a way of engaging with current and anticipated events. The schematic of this script can be represented in the following manner:

Love→Loss→Persist and Grow→Joy

Over and over, he stated at the root of his experience is the *Captain America Shield*—the foundation of love laid down by his parents and extended family from childhood on. Nevertheless, the fact of life is that there will be heartbreak, loss, and failure (e.g., his parents' divorce; the ending of his first two marriages; his failures at the bar exam; the loss of the store he owned)—*I Expect Failure*. In the face of these setbacks, Lonnie's response is to persist, but not simply endure. Instead, each setback is an opportunity to grow and learn—to reorient one's focus toward a positive direction—*Please Do Not Look for Me in the Whirlwind because I Will Be in School*; *Water the Plants, Not the Weeds*. As a result of this growth orientation, he characterizes the endpoint of his experiences to be the connection again to joy and gratitude in his life.

One can see this narrative script play out in each domain of his life, but we can end this analysis of his narrative identity by noting the application of this script to his extraordinary bond with his son, Lonnie the third. Love has been the foundation of this father–son relationship, even as Lonnie first confronted that his son was born with certain limitations. There was a period of loss that he experienced that was followed by a commitment to his son's growth and learning. When Lonnie was enrolled at Connecticut College, Lonnie the third would accompany him to class and grew to love the process of learning just like his father. Modeling persistence and a "can-do" energy, he took up tennis in his early 20s and became so adept that he won a national championship in the Special Olympics. This was one of Lonnie's greatest moments of unbridled joy to see his son standing on the podium and embracing his fellow medal winners. Whether in his own life, or with Gwen ("weather the storm"), or Lonnie the third, Lonnie has found a way to promulgate a message of resilience that does not deny failure or loss, but finds its way to joy.

## 7  Discussion

Due to the structural racism that pervades all of our institutions, private, public, financial, and educational, and media's tendency to focus on the sensational and violent, we hear very little about the stories of the larger number of Black Americans who have found their way to successful middle class and/or professional careers, and in the process, forged affirming narrative identities. Lonnie's story is an opportunity to highlight these triumphs and do justice to the remarkable resilience we see in Black communities.

At the same time, it is essential that we note the facilitating structural factors that combined with Lonnie's extraordinary individual characteristics of intelligence,

curiosity, forbearance, and determination. Lonnie was able to *obtain good-paying employment, access to home ownership, and participate in affordable higher education.* When struggling with the Bar exam, he was able to *make use of high quality affordable healthcare* that finally helped him to identify his long standing dyslexia and ADHD. As a single parent, combining more than full-time employment with his ongoing academic studies, he depended on his mother and sister to provide *access to affordable childcare*. The winning formula for taking Lonnie's inspiring resilience narrative and seeing it multiple by the thousands, if not millions, is for the society to make the genuine commitment to making good jobs, home ownership, quality education, health care, and affordable childcare accessible to much larger sectors of our society. These assets are the essential water that allows the plants to grow. Lonnie's story is a testament to how many more young people are poised to grow and learn, if only we provide the social and economic structures that allow them to do so.

## 7.1   "Keep Your Eyes' on the Prize"

In their efforts to achieve a better life for themselves, African Americans have necessarily had to maintain one eye held steady on survival and the other on strategic steps toward desired goals and achievements (e.g., *double consciousness*, Dubois, 1903). Successfully navigating spaces that were not designed to support the growth and well-being of African Americans is part-and-parcel of what it means to "achieve while black" in America. As his narrative highlights, Lonnie learned how to navigate these spaces, places, and people relying on his intellect and the coping skills conferred to him in the family context. Even in the face of dangerous, life-threatening racism, his careful balance of self-preservation, emotional control, persistent optimism, and willful deference allowed Lonnie to remain focused, unshakeable in his belief that his life was valued, covered in loving protection, and destined to achieve his heart's desires. With the secure base of the family system driving him forward to explore (Bowlby, 1969), Lonnie grabbed "life by the horns," refusing to accept setbacks as anything other than opportunities to build more resilience.

As exhibited by Lonnie's story, the art of navigating racism is a process that continually refines itself toward the greater purposes of the individual. By the time Lonnie moved North to pursue his education, he had developed an innate ability to *hear bigotry* even in its most subtle forms, to intuit what was not being said, and to decide repeatedly, how best to act in the service of his goals. At times, when the need arose, Lonnie was more direct to defend himself or speak up, but never in anger. Anger was decidedly beneath him, having been trained instead to harness the loving energy of the family and to choose strategies, *not weapons*, that would achieve his purposes, without causing undue damage to the self.

## 7.2 Lessons to Be Learned and Questions to Be Asked

The protection conferred by the resilient family creates a fertile ground for self-development and inspired action. With the seeds of hope, learning, and love embedded deeply in this soil, the ground is less likely to host and grow hate, fear, anger, resentment, or debilitating paralysis. When setbacks occur, as they did for Lonnie, the ability to "dust oneself off and try again" is innate because, with resilience embedded in his DNA, Lonnie's story of success is already essentially written. There is no choice except staying "in the love," continually striving in the pursuit of education and wisdom, and ultimately achievement. Anything else is death. With this instinctive focus on "the prize," the landscape becomes most salient for signs of progress: opportunities, resourceful ideas, instinctive, inspired action, and networks of cooperative support.

Once internalized as a way of navigating the world, one inevitably channels this same character and holds the same sentiment for others. Given the degree to which love and protection existed as a constant for Lonnie, he relaxed into a way of being such that this was what he ultimately had to offer to others. He was virtually immovable from this place of love. As noted by his wife Gwen, "He won't argue." This personality style, as a default, is distinct from most others who, in both adaptive and maladaptive ways, face the world with negative expectations and employ life strategies focused almost exclusively on self-protection. Unlike Lonnie, shielded as he was in family love, others often experience, instead, the lonely realities of merely surviving rather than the warm shores of thriving.

In sum, the story of Mr. Lonnie B. is, broadly, the tale of two parents' mission to create a better life and circumstances for their children. As Lonnie eloquently stated in his interviews, "His parents taught him and his sister to fly when they didn't know how." These words suggest that a parent's vision of "what could be" for their children is always there, although the road to achieving this mission may be less than clear. Moreover, in many cases, a parent's own parenting history and unmetabolized elements of their own experiences as children, feature prominently in our own personal strivings and achievements. Lonnie's story offers hope that if we, as psychologists, and others, can help families create this "cocoon" of protection for their children, then children can develop resilience like that exhibited by Lonnie.

Lonnie's story also teaches us that you sacrifice for those you love and it will pay dividends. Also, that once this love has been deeply internalized, you pay it forward with very little effort. Resilience in the family becomes resilience in the person and, as long as you continually water the plants and not the weeds, the prospects for a life fertile with abundant love and meaning are strong.

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**Nakia Hamlett**  is the William Meredith Assistant Professor of Psychology at Connecticut College. She previously served as an Instructor and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine. She completed her pre- and post-doctoral fellowships in that same department. Her clinical and research interests include child, adolescent, and young adult mental health, complex trauma, race-based traumatic stress, personality, and psychological assessment. For nearly two decades, beginning with a career in special education, Dr. Hamlett has worked with youth and families struggling with educational and cultural marginalization as well as related mental health and psychosocial challenges. In addition to her academic work and research, Dr. Hamlett works as an independent psychological evaluator and consultant.

**Jefferson A. Singer**  is the Faulk Foundation Professor of Psychology at Connecticut College. He has authored six books: *The Proper Pirate; Robert Louis Stevenson's Quest for Identity* (Oxford University Press); *Positive Couple Therapy: Using We-Stories to Enhance Resilience* (with Karen Skerrett; Routledge); *Personality and Psychotherapy; Treating the Whole Person* (Guilford Press); *Memories that Matter* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger); *Message in a Bottle* (The Free Press); and *The Remembered Self: Emotion and Memory in Personality* (with Peter Salovey, The Free Press). He has published over 100 articles and chapters in the fields of memory, personality, and clinical psychology. Dr. Singer is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and past recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award.

# Part IV
# Comparative Psychobiographical Perspectives

# The Founders: Comparing Democracies in India and the US Through Cultural Biographies

**Dinesh Sharma**

**Abstract** India and the United States (US) are often compared as two democracies that have stood the test of time. Yet, now as democratic institutions around the world come under threat, it is useful to compare the founders of the oldest constitutional democracy, the United States (1789), with the largest populace democracy, India (1950), to examine what the future of democratic societies may hold. I compare the founding fathers of America, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison with their Indian counterparts, namely Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and B. R. Ambedkar, respectively. I undertake an Eriksonian psycho-historical or psycho-biographical study of these men to demonstrate that WEIRD (i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) data assumptions apply not only to psychological sciences, but to most of the Western social sciences. While the struggle to build democratic institutions is a central theme in the lives and works of these men over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the cultural and historical particularities of their life narratives offer a critique not only of democracy, but how to better understand leadership across cultures and histories in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

**Keywords** India · US · Psychobiography · Founders · Democracy · History · Culture

## 1 A Tale of Two Democracies

When in a David vs. Goliath fight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stood up to the Russian President Vladmir Putin's *delusions of grandeur* of reconstituting the Soviet Empire, it set up a historical dialectic between India and the United States (US), two of the modern democracies. The US immediately condemned the action, while India ironically abstained. The rumblings of the news traveled quickly. Biden called India's position "shaky" (Reuters, 2022) among the Quad members (which

D. Sharma (✉)
Steam Works Studio, LLC, Princeton, NJ, USA

includes a defense alliance between Australia, India, Japan, and US), while India continued to abstain in voting against Russia's aggression at the United Nations (UN).

Why the differences between the two democracies? Is it a function of history, culture, psychology, or politics? India's defensive posturing may have suggested *a bystander effect*, a behavior where a passerby fails to come to the aid of another in a humanitarian crisis (Guiora, 2017; Library of Congress, 1964). Or is this an after effect of deeply rooted distrust of the West and history of non-alignment (Frankel, 2020; Tripathi, 2020), where the Indian government (not unlike China) has strayed clear of meddling in a local conflict in Russia's backyard?

Historically, India's founders, principally Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, dreamed of an India that would be pluralistic, non-aligned, and a non-militaristic state (Bhagwan, 2013), partly because India was born of the suffrage movement on August 15, 1947, after almost two centuries of colonialism. The US, ironically, was born almost two centuries earlier of a revolutionary war on July 4, 1776, to overthrow the same colonial powers. These long-term historical trends have left a political, cultural, and psychological legacy, and a divergence of social realities and opinions within the two democratic states. Certainly, the newly aligned Asian and African societies in the global south viewed themselves differently (Louro et al., 2020).

One might ask: Surely, the century old differences rooted in the colonial past do not make any difference today in the age of globalization and technology transference? However, as Faulkner (1951, p. 73) has observed, "The past is never dead. It is not even past." The two democracies—India and US—may view themselves differently in the light of history, notwithstanding the recent attempts at reproachment (Kux, 1992). The sloganeering between the two nations has been diplomatic, but the differences are real. The story is complicated when we look *under the hood* in India's long-standing dependence on Russian military equipment and assistance and US's long-standing antipathy for the Russian state. While India has been devising new ways to avoid supply chain disruption of Russian weaponry, the recent US sanctions following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine have made Indian Prime Minister Modi's delicate balance even harder due to a continuing border standoff with China (Stratfor, 2018).

Recently, India has been openly aligned with the West for *soft-power* tactics, and unlike previous governments has sided with Israel vis-a-vis the Arab or Gulf states (Ganguly & Blarel, 2021). Yet, India has remained tied at the hip to the Cold-War ally, Russia, for beefing up its *hard power* defense infrastructure. Thus, India's neutrality on the Russian invasion of Ukraine is consistent with its over-reliance on Russia for most of its modern history. For almost 50 years Russians have been a steady partner for India through the good times and the tough times.

Throughout its modern history, Gandhian ideals of peace and non-violence, which originated in Gandhi's sojourn in South Africa, at least in theory have kept India militarily non-aligned. However, India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, who as a student in London developed an affiliation for British Fabian Socialism, set the Indian economy on a path toward parliamentary state-controlled industrial

development, the so-called seven Five-Year Plans. The Nehruvian plan effectively grounded to a halt with the collapse of the Soviet Union. India's reproachment with the West may be a newfound *tryst with destiny*, especially, after the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s and dismantling of the Soviet sphere of influence (Hedrick, 2009; Kapur, 2006; Nilekani, 2009).

Today's India does not resemble anything like the hopes cherished by its founders, but the legacy of the decisions made a century ago remains. India has the world's third biggest defense spending, a far cry from what Mahatma Gandhi imagined, but 80% of the budget relies on Russian equipment and upgrades (Daniyal, 2022), partly a legacy of Nehruvian socialism, such that India cannot operate without the Russian arsenal.

More than anything else, what has kept India tethered to a democratic structure has been its constitution, written by B. R. Ambedkar. Over the course of its modern history India could have strayed off the path toward secessionist movements or anarchy and civil strife, but it did not primarily because the founders set it on path toward a functioning democracy (Guha, 2012).

Thus, in this essay, I compare the roots of the early differences between India and the US. I compare the founding fathers of America, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison with their Indian counterparts, namely Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and B. R. Ambedkar, respectively. I undertake a psycho-historical study of these men to demonstrate that WEIRD (i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) data assumptions apply not only to psychological sciences, but to most of the Western social sciences (Henrich, 2020). While the struggle to build democratic institutions is a constant theme in the lives and works of these men over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the cultural and historical contexts of their life narratives offer a critique not only of democracy, but how to better understand leadership across cultures and histories in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

## 2   From the General to the Mahatma

General George Washington and Mahatma Gandhi, the founding fathers of their respective countries, lived in different eras. One led the American Revolution (1765–1791), while the other the nonviolent freedom struggle for India's Independence Movement (1857–1947).

Recently unearthed oral histories of African Americans suggest that General George Washington had a biracial family (Lewis, 2016). It has been confirmed from the historical record that when Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, his adopted stepson, George Washington Parke Custis, later fathered children with two of his stepfather's slaves (namely Arianna Carter and Caroline Branham) at the Mount Vernon estate (Hoover, 2016).

"The acknowledgement of Washington's biracial family tree by the National Park Service and the nonprofit that runs the Mount Vernon estate is the latest development

in more than 200 years of speculation about the complicated history of the nation's first family," according to reports by the Mount Vernon estates (Pruitt, 2016).

Further adding to the evidence, some historians and journalists have speculated that Washington himself may have fathered a biracial child. The person's name was West Ford. He assumed the role of the primary caretaker of the Mount Vernon estate after the great General's passing (Abramson, 2022; Pruitt, 2016; Wiencek, 2004).

How is this plausible? The General was mostly away at battles, historians have continued to argue. He did not father any children with Martha Washington during their marriage. Washington even admitted that providence did not offer him a gift of progeny as he may have been suffering from sterility, several biographers have suggested. Yet, the speculations have continued to swirl as part of an oral history project and now a fact-finding mission.

Henry Wiencek (2004), in the book "*An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*," researched the paternity issues related to West Ford. He discovered a record indicating that Hannah Washington, who was George Washington's sister-in-law, visited Mount Vernon in 1784, when George Washington was likely at home. Wiencek has confirmed Hannah was accompanied by Venus, and that this could have been when West Ford may have been conceived; this story has also been corroborated by Jill Abramson of the New Yorker, who has reported recently on this issue (Abramson, 2022).

These questions go to the heart of the American founding. How can American founders advocate for equality and human dignity yet buy, hold, and sell African human beings as slaves? Such contradictions run throughout American history. Most Americans are aware that their founders were flawed, but the system they created has endured.

Did the American founding offer new freedoms to people around the world? Possibly. But the record on this issue is still hotly contested. For example, we continue to argue the role of *critical race theory* in US politics, education, and media (AEI, 2022; HGSE, 2022).

Recently published "The 1619 Project" (Hanna-Jones, 2019) calls into question the entire premise of the American Revolution. Authors of the series, which includes editors at the *New York Times*, have argued that the founders fought against the British rule to preserve slavery because it was a profitable business, rather than for the freedom and liberty of all human beings. The claim that the American Revolution was fought to preserve slavery or a *slavocracy* has kicked up a storm. Many prominent historians have called for retractions, calling "The 1619 Project" propaganda, not real history. We cannot go into a debate about this project here but suffice it to say the issues related to slavery in Washington's life or in the life of many of the American founders have not been fully settled (Hanna-Jones, 2019).

However, while the *original sin* of slavery may not have derailed the landmark achievements of the American Revolution, it has certainly upended the debate. For many people in this country and around the world, many more bridges and mountains had to be crossed to get to *the promised land*; the road to freedom, equality, and sovereignty has not been easy for all people. Yet, the General's influence on shaping

the discourse of democratic institutions around the world has continued unabated, although in fits and starts.

For the very first time in human history, we may have witnessed a self-governing people able to form a union against a colonial power. George Washington is often called the *Father of the Nation*. He was the first president of the United States, led the Continental Army (1775–83), and presided over the Constitutional Convention. Many landmarks including the capital are named after Washington. Today his face appears on the U.S. dollar bill and the quarter, not unlike Mahatma Gandhi's bespectacled image in India.

When General Washington defeated Lord Cornwallis at the Battle of Yorktown, October 19, 1781, the British were sent packing from the American colonies. One of the first places Lord Cornwallis landed up was in the city of Kolkata, British India, where he eventually died and was buried.

As Nico Slate has observed,

> Outside the city of Ghazipur, an hour east of Varanasi, the tomb of Lord Charles Cornwallis overlooks the Ganges. A marble dome, seventy-five feet high and sixty feet in diameter, the Cornwallis mausoleum embodies the ambitions of the British Raj. While the Ganges swells and shrinks, the stone crypt holds firm. Cornwallis would be proud. As governor-general of British India from 1786 to 1793, Cornwallis oversaw the growth of one of history's greatest empires (Slate, 2019, p. 1).

Similarly, as Matthew Lockwood has suggested, "A revolution in favor of liberty in one corner of the map initiated a reactionary revolution in the wider world, inflicting new suffering and new restraints on people for whom freedom and independence were not available" (Lockwood, 2019, p. 7). Across Europe, the hard lessons learned from the American Revolution were immediately applied, marking the start of an authoritarian counter-revolution that stabilized and expanded Britain's empire while fatally weakening France and Spain, such that, "Britain may have won the American Revolution" in the global context (Lockwood, 2019, p. 8).

While the British had been ejected from America, the empire had spread to other parts of the world from Asia to Africa. Newfound colonies were fueling the industrial revolution in England's factories and mills. Almost a hundred years later, under the reigns of the British Empire in South Africa, when a newly minted lawyer traveling on first-class ticket was thrown off the train, he set on a mission to reform one of the Transvaal colonies. It was in this context in 1914 that Gandhi as a British subject appealed to Jan Christian Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, for equal rights.

Both Jan Christian Smuts and Mahatma Gandhi were British-trained lawyers. Gandhi became the leader of the nationalist movement against the British Raj in India, but his early experiments began in South Africa. In India, he is known as the *Father of his Nation*, but not so in Africa. He is internationally recognized for his doctrine of nonviolent protest (satyagraha), which has been replicated in many political and social revolutions around the world.

In the eyes of millions of his fellow Indians, Gandhi became the Mahatma (*Great Soul*). To the adoration of the masses that gathered to see him, his country-wide tours made him a living legend; when he fasted, the world held its breath, and he could

hardly work during the day or rest at night. As his fame spread worldwide during his lifetime, it was only surpassed after his martyrdom; his name became synonymous with peace and non-violence.

Gandhi too has come under fire for being insensitive to the cause of the Blacks in South Africa. The calls to remove his monument have succeeded in Ghana and several other places. In this respect, he has been *cancelled* by critics in Africa and the Western world, not unlike many of the founding fathers of the US, whose monuments have been either removed or put on a shortlist to be displaced (Gowen, 2020; Hirsh, 2020; Pitts, 2020).

Gandhi's biographer and grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, has said the younger Gandhi when he arrived in South Africa was a 24-year-old unexperienced lawyer, undoubtedly "at times ignorant and prejudiced about South Africa's blacks" (Gandhi, 2015, para. 10). He believes Gandhi's "struggle for Indian rights in South Africa paved the way for the struggle of Black rights" (Gandhi, 2015, para. 11). Yet, the imperfect Gandhi was more radical and progressive than many of the so-called progressives even today. Ramachandra Guha, author of the "Gandhi Before India," has written that the project to achieve comprehensive equality for colored people was premature in early twentieth century South Africa. Thus, attacking Gandhi for racism, wrote Guha, "takes a simplistic view of a complex life" (Guha, 2013, para. 5).

Yet, it would not be too simplistic to state that George Washington and Mahatma Gandhi went about their life's project in diametrically opposite ways. Both fought for greater liberty and freedom. What Washington began as a revolution for liberty, freedom, and rights in 1776, over the course of the next century turned into a bottom-up movement for equal rights and justice throughout the British colonies. The battle cry for liberty became the march for rights and equality. Thus, through the instruments of civil disobedience or satyagraha, Gandhi and his followers, including those in ranks of the Civil Rights Movement in the US, achieved their aims through peaceful protests.

Both Washington and Gandhi were trained British solider and British lawyer, respectively, but owing to deeply rooted biographical and cultural factors, they called for different methods of resistance. Both required great moral courage. Whereas Washington relied on military force, or just wars, Gandhi on *soul-force*, or just peace.

Recently, Rajmohan Gandhi, who teaches at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, urged Prime Minister Modi to not do disservice to Gandhi's mission. He implored Modi to attend to two things: (1) be a peace-broker in Ukraine and (2) protect the religious minorities in India.

Posing a rhetorical question, Gandhi's grandson has asked Prime Minister Modi, when the state guests visit the Sabarmati Ashram in your home state of Gujarat, it must be done with your approval. Modi is undoubtedly familiar with the sentence in the autobiography of the man whose ashram that was: "It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings" (Gandhi, 2022, para. 17). Speaking in the voice of "the American Gandhi," namely Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi's grandson has petitioned Modi to not

remain silent in the face of such atrocities: "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people" (King, 2018, para. 77).

## 3 From the Enlightenment Man to Non-alignment

Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States, a man of Enlightenment values, while Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India, the main proponent of the Non-Aligned Movement marking the end of colonialism.

While Washington and Gandhi were men of action, Jefferson and Nehru were men of ideas, oratory, and great ideals. Both were prolific, statesmen, and bon-vivant—full of great vision and some great contradictions—with a gift for language, arts, and culture.

It has been well-documented that the author of the Declaration of Independence, and the well-known phrase "we take these truths to be self-evident that men are created equal ..." kept slaves throughout his life and fathered children from an enslaved woman (Monticello.org, 1998).

> Years after his wife's death, Thomas Jefferson fathered at least six of Sally Hemings's children. Four survived to adulthood and are mentioned in Jefferson's plantation records: Beverly, Harriet, Madison, and Eston Hemings. Sally Hemings worked for two and a half years (1787–89) in Paris as a domestic servant and maid in Jefferson's household. While in Paris, where she was free, she negotiated with Jefferson to return to enslavement at Monticello in exchange for *extraordinary privileges* for herself and freedom for her unborn children. Decades later, Jefferson freed all of Sally Hemings's children – Beverly and Harriet left Monticello in the early 1820s; Madison and Eston were freed in his will and left Monticello in 1826. Jefferson did not grant freedom to any other enslaved family unit (Monticello.org, 1998, para. 1).

Of course, Jefferson was a renaissances man and declared a genius by his peers (Library of Congress, 2000). He is remembered for being the primary author of the Declaration of Independence. The fact that he owned over 600 enslaved persons during his lifetime while forcefully advocating for human freedom and equality made Jefferson one of America's most diabolical heroes.

Jefferson's ideas about politics and government greatly influenced early American history. He believed that the American Revolution represented a clean break with the past and that the US should reject all European versions of political discipline and resist efforts to create strong central governmental authority.

It is not clear whether Nehru admired Jefferson, but at least one political thinker and current member of India's Congress Party, Shashi Tharoor, believes that Nehru was India's Jefferson—idealistic, intelligent, and a visionary, a claim many historians would not disagree with (Tharoor, 2018):

> Nehru defined Indian nationhood through the power of ideas, in many ways like Jefferson in the United States, a figure to whom he bears considerable resemblance—a man of great intellect and sweeping vision, a wielder of words without parallel, high-minded and eloquent, yet in many ways blind to his own faults and those of others around him (Tharoor, 2018, p. 227).

Almost a hundred years later when as a young lawyer, Nehru inspired his country to freedom, he chose a path of non-alignment from the West, akin to the break Jefferson engineered at the time of the American revolution. Due to the deeply harmful legacy of colonialism, many of the newly freed colonies answered Nehru's call from Tito in Yugoslavia, Nasser in Egypt, Kenyatta in Kenya, to Sukarno in Indonesia, known as the Non-Aligned Movement (Ministry of External Affairs, 2012).

Nehru was a founding member of the Indian National Congress and the independence movement. He often balanced the religion and traditionalism of Mahatma Gandhi with a more secular and modernist perspective, thus broadening the global appeal of the movement. In 1947, he became India's first prime minister and served until his death in 1964.

In many ways, the program for democratic institution building put Nehru's India on a path toward socialism and state-controlled industrialization. Thus, India for the past 75 years aligned itself with the Russian state for security and defense. In long run, this hampered India's entrepreneurial growth, till the collapse of the Nehruvian plan in the 1990s (Tharoor, 2018). Yet, the dependence on Russian arms and equipment has continued unabated.

Nehru may have underestimated the threats from China on its Northern flank. In fact, the era of non-alignment was dealt a great blow when China invaded India's northeast border and grabbed a large swath of the Aksai Chin valley in the northeast frontier in 1962. The Kennedy administration offered immediate assistance, but it may have already broken Nehru's resolve in the belief in total non-alignment; and because he blamed himself for not being able to defend India's northern frontier, it only hastened his death (Reidel, 2016).

On the more personal and biographical side, Nehru was not a traditionalist, an avowed secularist who believed religious dogma was antithetical to modern Indian life. With the rise of the Hindutva movement, many of the Nehruvian ideas—from Fabian socialism to secularism—have been called into question by Modi's dominant political party and their fundamentalist vision.

In his personal life Nehru may have been more open and westernized than in his political beliefs. There are now a series of books that document that there was a deep relationship between Edwina Mountbatten, the wife of the last Viceroy of India, and Nehru in the last days of the empire. This too has become fodder for the opposition parties to rail against India's first prime minister as morally duplicitous. Whether it was a romantic or a platonic relationship is not clear. We do not have any evidence from the DNA tests, and the letters exchanged between Nehru and Edwina have been sealed by the family members under lock and key (Tunzelmann, 2007).

## 4   From the Constitutional Convention to the Buddha

James Madison was the fourth president of the United States and framer of the American constitution, while B.R. Ambedkar was the architect of the Indian constitution and independent India's first law minister. The two democratic experiments

in modern history would not have been possible without the written documents to uphold the values of human dignity and human rights ensconced in them (Britannica, 2022; Montpelier.org, 2022).

In fact, the act of founding requires someone or a group of people to document the procedures or *the rules of the road* for a democratic experiment to work. Madison did that for the American experiment, while Ambedkar for the Indian democracy.

James Madison created the basic framework for the U.S. Constitution and helped write the Bill of Rights. He is therefore known as the Father of the Constitution. Besides creating the basic outline for the U.S. Constitution, James Madison was one of the authors of the Federalist papers. As secretary of state under President Thomas Jefferson, he oversaw the Louisiana Purchase. He and Jefferson founded the Democratic-Republican Party.

Madison's counterpart in India, B. R. Ambedkar (born 1891, Mhow, India), was a leader of the Dalits (Scheduled Castes; formerly called untouchables, whom Gandhi called the "children of god") (Gandhi, 1933, para. 1), became the law minister when India gained independence.

Born into a Dalit Mahar family in western part of India, he faced humiliation as a lower caste boy by his high-caste peers. Even though his father was in the Indian army, and he was awarded a scholarship by the Gaekwar (Governor) of Baroda, his discrimination may have continued. While he studied at major universities in the United States, Britain, and Germany and entered the Baroda Public Service at Gaekwar's request, but again repeated ill-treatment by high-caste colleagues led him into legal practice and to teaching. He soon became known as the leader of the Dalits and succeeded in securing special representation for them in the legislative councils. Disputing Gandhi's claims to speak for all the Dalits, he wrote critically "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables" (1945).

In 1947, Ambedkar took a leading part in the framing of the Indian constitution, outlawing discrimination against untouchables, and skillfully helped to steer it through the assembly; thus, he may be called the Madison of India. However, he resigned in 1951 due to lack of influence in the government. In October 1956, disappointed with persistent untouchability in Hinduism, he became a Buddhist, together with about 200,000 fellow Dalits, at a ceremony in Nagpur.

Ambedkar's book *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957) appeared posthumously, and it was republished as *The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition* (2011). Not unlike the history of race in the US, caste has played a significant role in Indian society and in the life of Ambedkar. Today, his life is the embodiment of many of the principles we hold dear in the two constitutions, such as equality, rule of law, justice, etc.

Ambedkar regularly invoked three slogans in his campaigns for human rights, which offer a window into his life and personality. During his graduate work at Columbia University, where Ambedkar was a student of the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, he studied the history of the French Revolution and the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. While attending the London School of Economics, he became part of the British Fabian Society, and their mantra: Educate, Agitate, and Organize. And in his final years, he frequently invoked Buddha's Three Jewels that

mark the commitment to Buddhism worldwide, and the core declaration of his conversion in 1956: "I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha" (Vishvapani, 2007, para. 1).

## 5   A WEIRDest Conclusion

As we can surmise from the brief introduction to the lives of these men, the social and cultural context of their birth and life history had a deep imprint on their biographies. While these men shared a common mission and purpose in building democratic institutions, they came from diverse backgrounds and from different eras. While Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were all wealthy Virginians and heirs to the American experiment, democratic revolutions inspired by them took root in different lands and places.

Gandhi was the son and grandson of the Dewan (Chief Minister) of Porbandar, Gujarat, deeply rooted in religion and culture of his people, which for long had preached pacifism and non-violence. Gandhi's awakening happened in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, when he was thrown off the train for traveling in a first-class compartment.

Nehru was the son of a powerful barrister, belonging to an elite Kashmiri pandit family in North India, whose father worked directly with the British empire, and valued intellectual and legal pursuits. Due to his experiences in England as a student and as a colonial subject, he became a proponent of non-alignment and a leading follower of Gandhi, his mentor.

Ambedkar, however, was "a commoner," who emerged from the lower ranks of India's archaic social structure to reach the highest pinnacles of his times. Ambedkar was part James Madison, as the father of India's constitution, and part Martin Luther King Jr., a hero of the untouchable caste. He was known for openly criticizing both Gandhi and Nehru, who had appointed him.

Thus, when we try to contextualize India's geopolitical strategy today—to abstain from criticizing Putin's Russia or reproachment with the West—we cannot help but see the triumvirate figures of Gandhi, Nehru, and Ambedkar looming large in the background on India's Mount Rushmore, as it were.

While Washington was a military general, Gandhi believed in militant non-violence; he gave his life for it. Gandhi and Washington were the opposites in strategy and tactics, if not the aim. Gandhi was more akin to Emerson and Thoreau, the New England mystics, on the one hand, and the abolitionists, on the other.

As Gandhi wrote in a letter to US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) in 1942, "I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson. I say this to tell you how much I am connected to your country." In the same letter Gandhi was even more assertive, "I venture to think that the Allied Declaration that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and democracy sounds hollow, so long as India and for that matter Africa are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Black problem in her own home."

While Jefferson was an Enlightenment man, Nehru believed in non-alignment with the West, at least in politics, if not in personal values; in the domains of religion and personal affairs he was a secular humanist. Despite their blind spots or because of it, they were men of the future.

While Madison was an original constitutionalist, Ambedkar's life in the context of India's two thousand years long-standing tradition seemed to be the embodiment of equality, fairness, and justice. His life and work, as a lower caste individual, rising to the upper ranks of Indian society has inspired millions of people in India. The fact that Ambedkar became the architect of India's constitution is a testament to the founding principles of democracy in India, but in the end, he resigned from these professional roles because progress was slow moving; he suggested we still have a long way to go to achieve full democracy. Shortly before his death, he offered Buddha's path as the true path to human equality and freedom, and openly rejected Hinduism for stymieing India's progress. He managed to combine the precepts of the American and French revolution with the teachings of Buddha.

In conclusion, the universal principles of democracy and human rights developed by the three prominent Virginians—Washington, Jefferson, and Madison—may have taken root in other parts of the world, but rarely devoid of the context, culture, and history.

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**Dinesh Sharma**  Ph.D., is a social scientist with a doctorate from Harvard University in human development and psychology. He is currently Director and Chief Research Officer at Steam Works Studio (edu-tech venture) in Princeton, New Jersey, and a contributing faculty member at NYU, Fordham, and Walden University. He writes for Psychology Today (US), Eastern Eye (UK), and has appeared on SABC and NewzRoom Afrika (SA) regularly. He was associate research professor at the Institute for Global Cultural Studies, SUNY-Binghamton; a senior fellow at the Institute for International and Cross-Cultural Research in New York City; and a columnist for Asia Times, Al Jazeera English, and the Global Intelligence among other syndicated publications. His biography, titled "Barack Obama in Hawaii and Indonesia: The Making of a Global President," was rated a Top 10 Book of Black History for 2012 by the American Library Association. His next book, "The Global Obama" has been widely reviewed and received the Honorable Mention on the Top 10 Black History Books for 2014. His book on Hillary Clinton examined the rise of women politicians before the "Me Too" movement, "The Global Hillary: Women's Political Leadership in Cultural Context" (Routledge, 2016) and was favorably reviewed. His latest book, "The Cultural Psyche," (IAP, 2021) is a collection of Robert LeVine's essays in psychological anthropology.

# Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD

**Claude-Hélène Mayer**

*The women who follows the crowd*
*Will usually go no further*
*Than the crowd*
*The woman who walks alone*
*Is likely to find herself*
*In places*
*No one has ever been before.*
*Albert Einstein*

**Abstract** This chapter uses a comparative psychobiographical approach within the research paradigm of hermeneutics to explore the heroine's journeys of two extraordinary women: Angela Merkel and Graça Machel. The author explores the lives of these women through the theory of the heroine's journey. Joseph Campbell was the first to describe the *hero's journey*, originally taking the stance that a female person does not need a hero's journey. But this claim has been refuted during the past decades. This psychobiography contributes to: (1) the expansion of comparative psychobiographies with WEIRD and non-WEIRD women, (2) filling the gender gap in psychobiographical literature exploring the lives of two women leaders in politics, (3) expanding the theories on heroine's journeys, (4) expanding the transcultural understanding of women's leadership through psychobiography, and (5) providing insights into the lives of woman role models while offering practical recommendations for women in leadership across cultures.

C.-H. Mayer (✉)
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
e-mail: claudemayer@gmx.net

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# 1   Introduction

Women leadership has often been neglected in research during the past (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020; Moodly & Toni, 2015; Samuel & Mokoaleli, 2017). The literature covering women in leadership is scarce in Western contexts, but appears to be even less available in African contexts (Meena et al., 2018).

Although researchers have promoted studies in psychobiography in African contexts (van Niekerk & Fouché, 2010), this scarcity of woman research can also be witnessed in psychobiographical research (Mayer et al., 2020; van Niekerk & Fouché, 2010). Shifting the focus even further to women leaders of non-WEIRD descent, it can be seen that women leadership in business as well as in politics has been neglected to a large extent; only a few rare exceptions can be found (Amaechi, 2016, 2020; Dawuni & Kang, 2015; Macupe, 2019; Mayer & Kelley, 2022). Mayer et al. (2020) have therefore called for increasing the psychobiographical research on extraordinary women in diverse contexts, thereby taking WEIRD (Heinrich, 2020) contexts and individual backgrounds into account.

The author explores the lives of Angela Merkel and Graça Machel through the theory of the heroine's journey. Joseph Campbell (1990, 2004), who was the first to describe the *hero's journey*, originally took the position that a female person does not need a hero's journey—a position which was counter-argued decades ago. Theories on the *heroine's journeys* have been developed by various authors and scientists (see Murdock, 2020). Accordingly, the heroine is defined as a woman of distinguished courage or ability, admired for her brave deeds and noble qualities (Wordhunter, 2015). The heroine's journeys, described by different authors, show commonalities in the sense that they are all spiritual or inner journeys towards internal growth. Further, they are cyclical, presenting light and shadow sides of archetypal female characters (such as good and bad ones). While hero's journeys often lead them to do what they *need* to do or are obliged to do, heroines often do what they *want* to do, governed by their hearts. Finally, the heroine's journey is more an inner journey of self-development and growth while the hero's journey is an external journey to change the world (Wordhunter, 2015). The chapter explores the lives of two extraordinary women leaders through a selected heroine's journey theory. These women are Angela Merkel and Graça Machel, two political leaders and activists.

Angela Merkel has been the first female German chancellor to retain this position for four terms, thereby becoming one of the most important European women in world politics (Moore, 2017). Merkel comes from a WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) background (Stock, 2000). However, she has often been marginalised in her life and career, as presented in previous psychobiographical research (Mayer et al., 2020). She worked extremely hard to make it to the top in German and international politics in strongly male-dominated, masculine, patriarchal leadership contexts through agency and self-direction (Klenke, 2017; Tsioulcas, 2013).

Graça Machel has been the first female Minster of Education in the free Mozambique for many years. She was the first lady both in Mozambique (through her late husband Samoa Machel) and in South Africa (through her late husband Nelson Mandela) (All Africa, 2014). She has become an extraordinary woman leader in pan-African politics, but also plays a major role in international organisations and local NGOs (SAHO, 2021). African societies—which tend to be male-dominated, patriarchal, and masculine in their mainstream political and professional culture—do often not cater for woman leaders (Bryer, 2020; Sheldon, 2021). Graça Machel comes from a non-WEIRD background, has fought in the anti-colonial struggle, and comes from a poor, rural, non-industrialised, non-democratic African background (BBC, 1999; Bloomberg, 2021).

This chapter explores the life of these two women who come from fairly different socio-cultural backgrounds, but who demonstrate many commonalities and similarities when explored in-depth with regard to their heroine's journey (Murdock, 2020). It responds to the call from Casey (2017) to hear the voices and multiple perspectives of diversity from women narrators.

The chapter uses a comparative psychobiographical approach (Mayer & van Niekerk, 2020) within the research paradigm of interpretative hermeneutics (Hassan & Ghauri, 2014), applying a purposeful sampling process and the collection of data from public domains and their analysis through content analysis. Findings are reported in a qualitative, psychobiographical reporting style (Schultz, 2005), responding to the overall research question of how two selected, extraordinary political women leaders conduct their heroine's journeys coming from differing (WEIRD and non-WEIRD) backgrounds. By responding to this question, the study contributes to: (1) the expansion of comparative psychobiographies on women leaders in WEIRD and non-WEIRD contexts; (2) addressing the gender gap in psychobiographical literature exploring the lives of two women leaders in politics; (3) expanding the theories on heroine's journeys; (4) fostering the transcultural understanding of women leadership through psychobiography; and (5) providing insights into the lives of women who are role models in the international and global political arena, thereby providing practical recommendations for women and their (political) leadership in different cultural contexts.

## 2    Women as Leaders in Psychobiography

Psychobiography has advanced during recent years and has increasingly gained interest in mainstream psychology (Mayer et al., 2021; Ponterotto, 2015). One fascinating aspect of psychobiography is the possibility of increasing the understanding of the inner attitude, the values, the challenges, the development, struggles, and successes of individuals (Ponterotto, 2019). However, as highlighted above, psychobiographies about individuals in African contexts, and with regard to women leaders in particular, are still extremely limited (Amadiume, 1998; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Meer & Muller, 2017; Panelatti et al., 2021). Several United States

psychobiographies have mainly covered the life and work of (male) United States presidents and politicians (Elovitz, 2016; McAdams, 2020; Ponterotto, 2019). Women politicians have even been less explored and their voices and life narrations how to live a life as a political activist or politician is almost non-existent (Mayer et al., 2020, 2022).

## 3   The Heroine's Journey

Psychobiographical research focuses on the life of extraordinary individuals through an in-depth, holistic perspective on their life or holistic life events, based on psychological theories (Kőváry, 2011; Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Kelley, 2021). To analyse a life based on the exploration of a heroine's journey represents a holistic and self-reflective approach which has been promoted in psychobiographical research in the past (Elovitz, 2016).

The heroine's journey goes back to the archetype of the hero—who, according to Jung (1981), represents the human unconscious and is associated with courage (Daskal, 2017), calculating risks carefully, has a second-sense when making decisions, and makes decisions based on aiming for social rights (Shadraconis, 2013), thereby uplifting the hero and the society (Campbell, 2004). While Campbell (1990) focuses on the male hero, others have proposed a "heroine's journey" which includes certain stages (Murdock, 2020; Schmidt, 2015).

Murdock (2020), who is a licensed family therapist in the USA, is interested in life stories and narratives across the life time felt that the hero's journey does not cater for members of marginalised groups and for exploring and transforming the life experiences of women who differ in narrative patterns in comparison to men. Based on Jungian philosophy and psychology and together with a project team, Murdock explored the patterns of life developments and narrations of women in myths, films, stories, literature, and interviews to find out in which ways the journeys of men and women differ (Murdock, 2022). Based on these studies and explorations, Murdock (2020) developed the heroine's journey which differs from the hero's journey (Campbell, 1990) to create conscious awareness in women, their journey and narrative patterns and use the self-recognition for personal growth, self-development, psycho-spiritual awareness, wholeness, and healing.

Campbell (1990) reacted to Murdock's heroine journey with: "Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological journey, the woman is there. All she has to do is realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to" (Davis, 2005, p. 7). However, this statement has been harshly criticised—either he was uninterested in women's journeys or unaware of the development need of women's psycho-spiritual journeys (Murdock, 2022). For this chapter, the heroine's journey described by Murdock (2020) will be used based on its long-term standing in the field, its development over the past 30 years and the following ten detailed stages, as described briefly in the following.

## 3.1   Heroine Separates from the Feminine

The *feminine* is often a mother or mentor figure or a societally prescribed feminine, marginalised, and outsider role. At the beginning of the heroine's journey, the daughter has to separate from her mother (psychologically and physically), and also from the archetypal mother type she has incorporated. How the process evolves is strongly defined by the mother's socio-culturally defined role and her abilities to stand up against the male-dominated, patriarchal society. The mother's archetype includes two extremes: the Great Mother and limitless nurturance and the Terrible Mother who represents stasis and suffocation (Murdock, 2020, p. 34).

## 3.2   Identification with the Masculine and Gathering of Allies

The heroine embraces a new way of life. This often involves choosing a path that is different from the heroine's prescribed societal role, gearing up to deal with the male norms that have been established within the society, the organisation, or group. The heroine enters the male world and often perceives herself as lacking in competence, power, and intelligence. The relationship with the father plays an important role and can be one of nurturing or absorption. During this stage, the woman identifies with the masculine, or wants to be rescued by the masculine. Here, usually she begins the hero's journey and she aims to win male allies who help her in the world of male power and authority, either through becoming like men or being liked by men. In the end of this stage, women need to define their own identity with a masculine image, this being a "man with heart" (Murdock, 2020, p. 56).

## 3.3   Road and Trial, and Meeting of Ogres and Dragons

When leaving home, the heroine encounters trials and meets people who try to dissuade her from pursuing her chosen path, or who try to destroy the heroine. During this stage, the heroine has to take on challenges and define her own identity and her inner journey through independence.

## 3.4   Experiencing the Boon of Success

The heroine overcomes the obstacles in her way. This is typically where the hero's journey ends and he recreates the world around him. In the heroine's journey, she transforms the limits of her conditioning, increases her capabilities, and finds her

inner self. Women might be caught up in the unconscious imitation of men and need to explore their real, individual selves during this time.

## 3.5   Heroine Awakens to Feelings of Spiritual Aridity and Death: Saying No

The heroine's new way of life—attempting the masculine and dominant identity—is too limited. Her success in this new way of life is either temporary, illusory, shallow, or requires a betrayal of self over time. The heroine then awakens to her own true self and learns to say "no".

## 3.6   Initiation and Descent to the Goddess

The heroine faces a crisis of some sort in which the new way of life is insufficient, and the heroine falls into despair. All of the masculine and dominant-group strategies have failed her and she seeks for a new evolvement through the dark. The descent to the Goddess relates here to the Goddess of Heaven and Earth, called Inanna-Ishtar and to her dark sister, called Ereshkigal. In this step, women "descend" into their own, inner depth, facing the shadow and thereby working through the pain and suffering. This period is characterised by mindful suffering and often by depression and the experience and transformation of pain.

## 3.7   Heroine Urgently Yearns to Reconnect with the Feminine

Although the heroine wants to, she is unable to return to her initial limited state or position. She has to accept her powers and integrates the body–spirit split, taking care of her body and her spiritual evolvement. The separation from the feminine evolves in the conscious mind, and the heroine has to deal with this experienced loss and overcome it by reconnecting to her feminine self, thereby starting a deep search for meaning in life. The heroine connects with the feminine as a preserver, as a creator and moves onto new journeys.

## 3.8   Heroine Heals the Mother–Daughter Split

The heroine reclaims some of her initial values, skills, or attributes (or those of others like her), but now views these traits from a new perspective. This part of the journey

is often very painful, because it involves the healing of the split from the feminine nature. There is also recognition:

> [of the] imbalance in values within our culture. We have separated from our feelings and our spiritual natures. We are lonely for deep connection. We yearn for affiliation and community; for the positive, strong nurturing qualities of the feminine that have been missing from this culture. When an individual or a society becomes too one-sided, too separated from the depth and truth of human experience, something in the psyche rises up and moves to restore authenticity. (Murdock, 2020, pp. 134–135)

Besides the way the external mother–daughter relationship was conducted and experienced, the heroine has to define her internal image of her mother. This is necessary because, from an early stage onwards, the mother represents the self and the heroine needs to go in search of the personal mother. Here, the abandoned heroine seeks reconnection with her mother and the transformation of the relationship for healing purposes. Sometimes healing through natural and community connection is possible and the image of the grandmother is used as a guide.

## 3.9   Heroine Heals the Wounded Masculine Within

The heroine makes peace with the "masculine" approach to the world as it applies to her. This is possible with the vision and the power of the feminine which are included in the feminine "female visionary faculty" (Murdock, 2020, p. 146). In this phase, the heroine claims back her femininity, her dark sides, as well as her light sides.

## 3.10   Heroine Integrates the Masculine and Feminine: Beyond Duality

In the final stage, in order to face the world and the future with a new understanding of herself and the world and life, the heroine integrates the "masculine" and "feminine" qualities and perspectives. This permits the heroine to see through binaries and to interact with a complex world that includes the heroine, but the world is also larger than her personal lifetime or her geographical and cultural milieu. It integrates the global perspective that is balanced here in a kind of "sacred marriage" of the feminine and the masculine (Murdock, 2020, p. 161). In this integration of the two genders within the woman, a woman of wisdom and a man with heart need to be integrated to heal at the final stages of the heroine's journey. The woman joins these two aspects of her nature. This stage goes beyond duality since it integrates the ancestral and the futuristic side of life by displaying a circular perspective as a model for living, which also reaches out to the divided aspect of the integrated human.
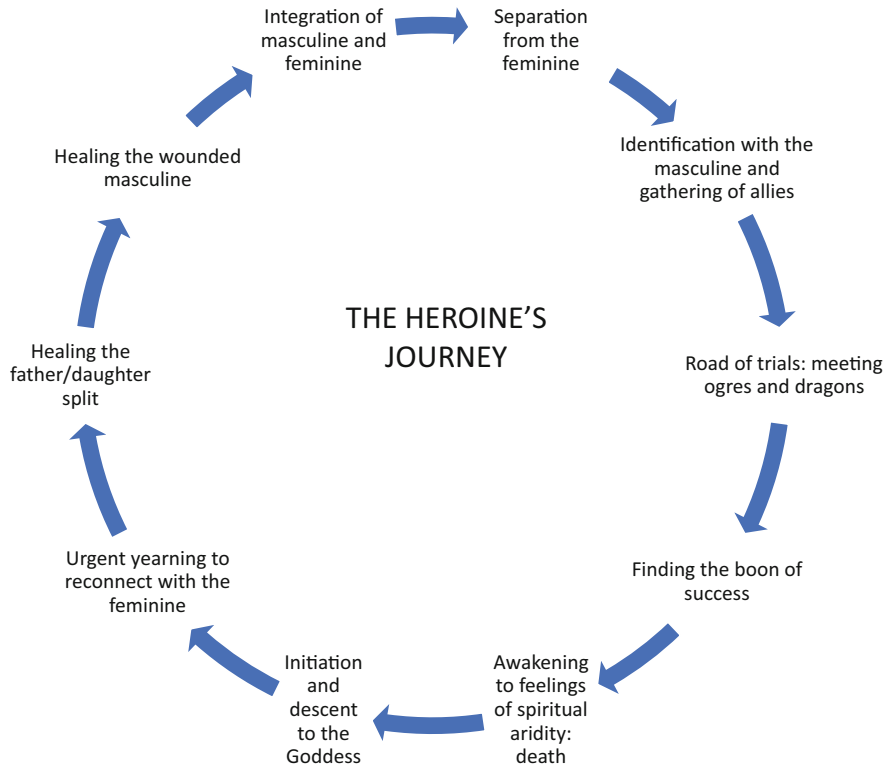
**Fig. 1** The Heroine's Journey. Source: Murdock (2020)

Figure 1 illustrates the process of the heroine's journey.

In summary, the heroine kicks off her journey by embracing masculine values and power, then breaks away by finding her own feminine vitality, and finally reconciles the feminine and the masculine at the culmination of her quest (Davis, 2005).

## 4 Research Methodology

This research study is anchored in an in-depth qualitative research design (Yin, 2018), using a psychobiographic approach (Schultz, 2005). It specifically employs an interpretative hermeneutical research paradigm (Creswell, 2013; Hassan & Ghauri, 2014) and a comparative case study approach (Trigg & Bernstein, 2016), as previously used in psychobiography (Mayer & van Niekerk, 2020).

The purposefully sampled subjects (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019) are Angela Merkel (the previous first-ever woman chancellor of Germany and extraordinary global politician) and Graça Machel (a previous Minister of Education in

Moçambique, a political activist, and the previous first lady of two countries, namely Moçambique and South Africa). These two extraordinary women were chosen for this study for several reasons. They are both contemporary political women leaders in male-dominated contexts, they both have been politicians at the pinnacle of the governance of countries, they are both outstandingly successful, and they have lived their heroine's journeys. Further, both women had to fight marginalisation within their own cultural contexts. While one woman comes from a WEIRD background, the other is from a non-WEIRD background.

Life history data were collected from primary and secondary sources which included autobiographical accounts, interviews, videos, self-reports, newspaper articles, and Internet pages, as well as biographical literature, magazine articles, reports, and scientific work on these women's lives (Allport, 1961). As in previous psychobiographical research, the author used content analysis to analyse the data, going through the five-step process of content analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006), including (a) familiarisation and immersion, (b) inducing themes, (c) coding, (d) elaboration, and (e) interpretation and checking.

Qualitative quality criteria were applied to maintain rigour in this study. These criteria were credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and confirmability (Creswell, 2013).

The study is limited to the comparative psychobiographical case study research design within its research methodology and theoretical scope. Its focus is on two selected women leaders. The literature used was limited to English and German literature publications.

In psychobiography, ethical considerations are of vital importance, especially when dealing with living subjects and their private lives. The researcher ensured that there was no potential harm or embarrassment in the presentation of the participants and their relatives (Runyan, 1982, 2013). Additionally, the researcher aimed to remain respectful towards the individuals researched and treated the data and findings with empathy, respect, and responsibility (Elms, 1994; Ponterrotto, 2017), as well as beneficence, fairness, and justice (Ketefian, 2015).

## 5 Findings and Discussion

In the following, the heroine journeys of Angela Merkel and Graça Machel will be presented, compared, and discussed according to defined aims and contributions of the study.

### 5.1 The Heroine's Journey of Angela Merkel

Merkel (neé Kasner) was born on 17 July 1954 in Hamburg, previously West Germany, and she grew up in East Germany where her father worked as a Protestant pastor. Merkel showed extraordinary intelligence, and since her father was a pastor,

she grew up with a strong faith in God as a male father figure (Langguth, 2005). Her mother, being a housewife, provided her with much attention and cared for her well-being (Langguth, 2005, 2012), passing on her own fascination with learning to her daughter (Packer, 2014). She might therefore be associated with limitless nurturance and the Great Mother archetype (Murdock, 2020) (Stage 1). Already in childhood, Merkel had a strong sense of self-direction and leadership (Tsioulcas, 2013).

Merkel enjoyed her masculine traits, choosing a path that was different to her prescribed societal role, by taking on leadership roles in school (Müller-Vogg, 2004) and developing a keen sense of logical analysis and an interpretation of the meaning in life (Resing, 2017). During teenage years she was labelled "a member of the unkissed club", since she was not associated with attractiveness, but rather with intelligence, will, and power (Packer, 2014). All of these traits, especially in 1960s Germany, can be associated with masculine socio-cultural roles and therefore suggest Stage 2 of Murdock's journey. She also showed increasing political awareness and joined a group of Christian believers (Resing, 2017).

As indicated for Stage 3, Merkel developed a strong self-awareness, obtaining a doctorate in quantum chemistry while questioning societal values and norms (Evangelical Focus, 2015). With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Merkel started her political career, against all odds, since she was a Christian woman from East Germany entering a West German male-dominated party (Klormann & Udelhoven, 2008; Stock, 2000). In 1998, Merkel became the General Secretary of the Christian Democratic Union party (CDU) in the unified Germany and later advanced to becoming the first woman German chancellor in 2005 (Qvortrup, 2017). In this role, she was the "chancellor of all Germans" (Mayer et al., 2020) (Stage 4).

Merkel enters Stage 5 when focusing on her life and her core values as a Christian. She began to bring her belief into her public identity from 2012 onwards, confessing publicly to her Christian faith (PCM, 2019; Mayer, 2021). While in Stage 6, she is strongly criticised for her political stance which appears, for example, to be pro-refugees.

Stage 7 is represented in Merkel's life when she must deal with strong political criticism (Mayer, 2021), thereby returning to a conscious self-reflection on her actions. However, there is no indication that she suffered from depression, which is usually described in Stage 7. It appears that her strong religious faith enabled her to transform all the challenges she experienced (Mayer, 2021). While in her fifties and sixties, Merkel created collective feelings of self-worth within the German society (Visser, 2011), thereby strengthening her work and interest in building the German nation, focusing on her political engagement and contribution to the German society and the international complex understanding of nations (Katholisch.de, 2018). All of these aspects represent Stage 7 of the heroine's journey.

With regard to Stage 8, Merkel stands for her original values and restores her own identity publicly by representing cultural diversity and tolerance (Carrel, 2017; Spencer, 2019). These values are also demonstrated in her Christian belief system, which is more publicly acknowledged from 2012 onwards (Mayer, 2021), thereby restoring authenticity. In this phase, she highlights that she usually analyses situations very carefully and in detail before she makes decisions (Macias, 2017).

In Stage 9, Merkel does not like to show emotions (Kornelius, 2018) and is known as being unemotional and distant (masculine-ascribed characteristics), rather than as a feminine, compassionate, and warm leader (Steckenrider, 2013). However, during the refugee crisis in 2015, Merkel clearly reconnected with her femininity and displayed values of compassion and emotionality (Mück, 2017). Packer (2014) suggests that, with time, Merkel learned to listen carefully and control herself. This indicates that she has reconnected with her inner feminine wisdom and her values of care and leadership (Stage 9). She has become a symbol of social change and, according to Qvortrup (2017), is the "queen of Europe"—being described in feminine terms. At the same time, she is viewed as "the mother of the nation" or *Mutti* by her party and voters, or as *Mama Merkel* by refugees (Zeller, 2015), referring to her feminine, caring, and nurturing side. Also, Merkel took the decision not to reapply for her position as German chancellor in 2020, but rather to make time for her family (reconnecting with the feminine side of herself) (Stage 9).

Merkel's leadership style is clearly associated with feminine warmth, gentleness, and concern for others, in addition to the masculine-assigned traits of confidence, aggressiveness, and self-direction (Klenke, 2017). This description implies the integration of her feminine and masculine sides with leadership, as referred to in Stage 10. She demonstrates a global approach to complex understanding and focuses on the past, present, and future which suggests a circular, all-encompassing perspective on life.

Packer (2014) considers Merkel's political career—particularly at the beginning—as constituting a triple anomaly: she was a woman (divorced, remarried, no children), a scientist (chemistry), and an *Ossi* (a product of East Germany). Over the two decades, Merkel managed to become one of the most influential leaders in the European Union and in world politics (Moore, 2017), with her blend of feminine wisdom and a masculine heart (Murdock, 2020). She not only expressed her development and integration in terms of language, but was also able to merge this with her non-verbal communication into an authentic, holistic, and well-rounded leader (Sollmann & Mayer, 2021).

## 5.2   The Heroine's Journey of Graça Machel

The second heroine's journey analysed in this chapter is that of Graça Simbine Machel, who was born on 17 October 1945 in Incadine, Gaza Province, in Mozambique (SAHO, 2021). She was the last born of six children and was raised by a single mother, since her father died a few weeks before her birth (SAHO, 2021). She was raised in a non-WEIRD context.

Machel's mother was extremely nurturing and managed to provide all six of her children with formal education without any support from a male figure (All Africa, 2014). She also refused to remarry in order to receive support. Therefore, in Stage 1, Machel experiences strong support and nurturing from her mother and her siblings. Machel is not rescued by the masculine, as usually happens in Stage

1, and can only identify with the masculine through her male siblings and extended family members, since there is no parental father figure in the household (SAHO, 2021). Through her family support, she embraced a life that was atypical of the normal socio-cultural roles of girls in Mozambique (Stage 2) who often did not go to school. Machel, however, went to school and was attracted to the clandestine anti-colonial struggle in which her older siblings were taking part (Sheldon, 2021). The struggle, which was often led by men, geared her up to deal with male norms of the colonial governments and anti-colonial group movements (Learning for Justice, 2021). She continued with the covert political struggle when studying in Portugal, representing Stage 2 of the heroine's journey.

From there, Machel entered Stage 3 when she had to flee Portugal owing to her political activities. She encountered trials and challenges and had to define her own identity as a freedom fighter, standing for her independence. Machel then returned to Africa, first to Tanzania to undergo military training in the FRELIMO camp, and then to Mozambique where she joined the political fight in 1975 (Santrock, 2018). By this time, she was in her thirties, aiming at overcoming the obstacles of the suppressed Mozambique (Stage 3). With her increased activities in the struggle, she got to know Samora Machel, whom she later married. After the independence of Mozambique, she became the Minister of Education and Culture (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2021a, b). During Stage 4, it is possible that Machel was caught up in an unconscious imitation of the male freedom fighters around her. She then increased her skills and capabilities, and after her husband was killed in a helicopter crash, she left her position as Minister in 1986. She expanded her own socio-cultural focus, acting on a more global level, deepening her personal growth and identity development during her global activism during the 1990s (Learning for Justice, 2021; SAHO, 2021; The Elders, 2021), and dedicated community involvement (SAHO, 2021). Accordingly in her twenties and thirties, she intensified and consolidated the community involvement which she had experienced in her family of upbringing (Newman & Newman, 2018). Through this development, she wakes up to her own true self and deep core values, becoming an independent global activist (Stage 5).

During Stages 6 and 7, the heroine goes through suffering, pain, depression, and strong transformational forces. This stage occurs in Machel's life after the death of Samora Machel in 1986, who strongly represented the male power of the struggle. During this time, Machel entered into a deep search of herself and the meaning in her life and reconnected with the creator and her feminine identity to move onto new journeys. She increasingly fought for women's and children's rights (Machel, 1996, 2016, 2021a, b; Learning for Justice, 2021).

She entered Stage 8 when she became involved in a close, loving relationship with Nelson Mandela. During this time, Machel reclaimed some of her values, skills, and attributes as a female activist and first lady, and viewed these traits from new perspectives to restore the authenticity of herself as a foreign first lady in South Africa (Lamb, 2017). Through her second marriage, Machel overcame her internalised image of her mother as a single, strong woman (Stage 8), transforming that mother image into a woman who remarried. Through her second marriage, she transformed her relationship with her mother image and went into a healing process

regarding her motherly image as a single, independent nurturer (Stage 8). At the same time (or following this process in Stage 9), she built up her own community of elders (The Elders, 2021) to reconnect with her feminine (networking and community-orientated) self and healed her wounded masculine by reviving the role of herself in relation to the Mother archetype (Murdock, 2020). She thereby claimed back parts of a new femininity as the first lady of South Africa, representing both her dark (the widow, the foreigner) and her light (the heroine, the nurturer, and carer) sides (Stage 9).

   After the death of her second husband, Nelson Mandela, Machel took a full year to reintegrate her feminine and masculine qualities and redefine herself in terms of her activities and the world. She reached a sense of peace with her life and herself (Smith, 2014) and felt grateful to have been close to two extraordinary individuals (Bryer, 2020). She integrated her global perspective even further, developed an increasingly complex understanding, and aimed to balance aspects of herself as a woman (of wisdom) and a man (with heart) by displaying a circular perspective and standing in for supporting children, future generations, effective leadership and resilience (Stage 9). This circular approach to life is reflected in Machel's response to the South African civil unrest in 2021. She called for non-violence, unity in diversity, peacefulness, and resilience (Makhafola, 2021), integrating diverse perspectives (Casey, 2017) and reminding the ANC—the ruling party in South Africa originating from the anti-apartheid struggle—of its original idea of creating peace and equality in South Africa (Makhafola, 2021).

## 5.3   Comparing the Heroine's Journeys of Merkel and Machel

By comparing the lives and heroine's journeys of these two remarkable women (see Table 1), it can be recognised that both came from homes with caring and nurturing mothers (the Great Mother archetype), who fostered their interest and curiosity in learning and education (Stage 1). Both mothers played extraordinary roles during their childhood and adolescence: for Merkel as a Christian girl in East Germany with extraordinary intellect, and for Machel as a school-going girl from a rural, poverty-stricken, single mother background, later gaining a scholarship to study in Portugal. Machel and Merkel were consciously critical of the systems in which they lived (East Germany and colonialised Mozambique), and both were subgroups fighting these systems (Merkel in Christian groups, Machel in the anti-colonial struggle). Both groups were operating in connection with male-dominated underground movements against the political system (Stage 2).

   Both women used their opportunity to get higher education (Merkel's doctorate and Machel's studies in Portugal). While Merkel could take the non-violent struggle route into politics owing to the fall of the Berlin wall, Machel went into military training in her thirties. Both connected strongly to the male-dominated systems and

**Table 1** The Heroine's Journey in the Lives of Merkel and Machel

| Stage | Theme | Merkel's life (born 1954) | Machel's life (born 1945) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Heroine separates from feminine | Strong nurturing of her mother and Great Mother archetype (Childhood). | Strong nurturing and support from the mother, Great Mother archetype (Childhood). |
| 2 | Identification with the masculine | Takes on leadership roles in school, extraordinary logical thinking abilities, intelligence, will and power, joins Christian groups and increasing political awareness (Teenager and Twenties). | Attends school as a girl from poverty-stricken, single parent household (thereby identifying with the masculine); involvement in anti-colonial struggle (Teenager and Twenties). |
| 3 | Road of trials | Enters West German male-dominated party politics as a female, Christian, East German believer, showing strong independence (Thirties). | Political activities in underground movement in Portugal; flees to Switzerland; returns to Africa (Tanzania) and military training with FRELIMO in 1975; overcomes obstacles of colonial suppression (Twenties). |
| 4 | Boon of success | Becomes General Secretary of CDU party (2000) and All-German chancellor (2005) (Forties and Fifties). | Activist with the FRELIMO; marries Samora Machel; becomes Minister of Education and Culture (until 1986) (Thirties and Forties). |
| 5 | Awakens to spirituality | Awakens to true self by integrating personal vocation into her life; claims foundations of Christianity as important in her life and in Germany (Fifties and Sixties). | Death of Samora; awakens to true self; becomes independent global activist (Forties and Fifties). |
| 6 | Initiation and descent to the Goddess | Is strongly criticised for her politics (e.g. migration and Covid-19 issues); deals with criticism in transformative way (Fifties and Sixties). | Experiences pain, suffering, and depression after Samora's death. Fights for women's and children's rights; deep search of self, reconnects to values and new meaning in life after loss of first husband and retraction from government positions (Forties and Fifties). |
| 7 | Reconnection with the feminine | Demonstrates deep search for meaning in her growing public faith, and building of community and political understanding (Fifties and Sixties). | Gains new feminine identity through community work, rights for the vulnerable, and marriage to Nelson Mandela (1998–2013). |
| 8 | Healing the mother–daughter split | Stands for original values and restores own identity publicly by representing cultural diversity, tolerance, and Christian values of social support, help, and togetherness. | Becomes first lady for second time in foreign country, changing perspectives, redefining image of the mother. |

**Table 1** (continued)

| Stage | Theme | Merkel's life (born 1954) | Machel's life (born 1945) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Healing wounded masculine | Reconnects with strong femininity; shows compassion and emotionality, feminine wisdom, and values of care and leadership (Sixties). | Heals wounds of masculine actions; reclaims femininity by standing for future generations and non-violent actions (Fifties to Seventies). |
| 10 | Integrating the masculine and the feminine | Merges feminine and masculine aspects as scientist, remarried woman, analytical thinker with emotionality and compassion (Sixties). | Merges masculine and feminine sides; creates circular perspective; stands for global peace and equality; values non-violent action with focus on future generations (Sixties and Seventies). |

took on major challenges (Stages 2 and 3). Thereafter, both women took on official, governmental roles in their forties and were on the road to success, both being protected and fostered by men in politics (Merker by the then-chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Machel by her then-husband, Samora Machel) (Stage 4).

In the following years, both women experienced a re-awakening of their spiritual side. Merkel integrated her belief system more openly into public politics, while Machel, after the death of her first husband, engaged in a holistic redefinition of herself (Stage 5). During Stage 6, Merkel was highly criticised for several of her political decisions and she transformed criticisms into international solidarity, community, and political understanding, while Machel focused on more community action with special regard to children and women's rights. While Merkel operated from her governmental position, Machel built up NGOs and networks to operate mainly independently from governmental organisations.

Additionally, both women reconnected with the feminine in Stage 7. While Merkel shared her faith and belief publicly for the first time in her political career, she also reconnected with building communities and creating broader political understanding. Machel re-explored her new feminine identity through community work in South Africa, working for the vulnerable, and becoming the third wife of Nelson Mandela whom she married on his eightieth birthday in 1998, when she was in her fifties. In this way, the women both moved from the reconnection with the feminine into healing the mother–daughter split (Stage 8). Merkel stood for her original values and restored her own identity representing cultural diversity, tolerance, Christian values, and social support for minority groups, such as refugees, while aiming at creating a strong Germany with the slogan "*Wir schaffen das!*" ("We can do it!") (Mayer, 2021). Machel, in Stage 8, as the first lady of South Africa, became part of Mandela's family and created a new image as the woman and partner in his life. Finally, in Stage 9, one can see that Merkel healed the wounded masculine by demonstrating her emotions and compassion, as well as feminine wisdom, care, and leadership. Machel also claimed back her femininity by standing for the future generations and for non-violent actions, reminding the nation constantly of Mandela's heritage and vision for the country (Stage 9).

Both of the women analysed in this study successfully reached Stage 10 of the heroine's journey, integrating the masculine and the feminine. However, they did so in different ways. Merkel blended the feminine and masculine by integrating both identity parts: her analytical scientists' strengths with the compassionate and emotional aspects of her identity which she revealed when in her sixties. Machel, on the other hand, in her sixties and seventies merged her feminine and masculine aspects by taking the future generations into consideration in creating a vision of peace, equality, and non-violence.

## 6 Reflecting (Critically) Upon the Theory of the Heroine's Journey

One of the aims of this chapter is to critically reflect upon and expand the heroine's journey. Interestingly, the heroine's journey reflects upon a woman's journey within Western contexts. However, it is notable that it can here also be applied to Machel's, an African woman's, life within international contexts. It needs, however, to be explored further, if the journey is also valid for women in general in African or other cultural and transcultural contexts. Is this heroine's journey valid for women who live a life below the socio-economic poverty line? Or is it a theory that only caters for women in rather middle or upper-class Western or Westernised settings and contexts? This question leads to additional critical reflections if the heroine's journey is still valid for women in Western worlds in the twenty-first century (although it was revised and is published in its 30th anniversary edition): Both of the lives of the women explored in this chapter are born in a post-WWII era (Machel 1946 and Merkel 1954). For these women who were born in the "Silent Generation" (1940s) and the Baby Boomers (1950s) generation, the opportunities, contexts, and gender roles in Germany and Mozambique (Portugal and South Africa) differ strongly from the opportunities and gender roles which women in these countries face now. It can be acknowledged that women liberation movements across the world have contributed to more equal rights of women during the past decades and a change in challenges for women in leadership and during their lives in general. Murdock's (Murdock, 2020) theory very much takes the inner journey of women towards inner healing and wholeness into consideration. Therefore, the inner journey might be still very valid for many women in the world who, for example, belong to Generation Z. However, new theoretical approaches should maybe take into consideration to develop women journey which consider internal and external heroine journeys to lead to a more complex understanding of gender-specific journeys. The heroine's journey is not only focused on the inner development of the heroine (see Campbell, 2004). As in the hero's journey, the heroine also goes out into the world to change it actively. Her journey can rather be considered a twofold process of both changing the world and transforming the self.

The theory should further be tested and validated in different parts of the world and thereby take culture-specific contexts and transcultural journeys into consideration. Finally, it is also a question of this theory caters for women from all political and socio-economic backgrounds or if it is rather a theory that is anchored in concepts, life-styles, and journeys of the Western or Westernised upper-class. The degree of elitism (cultural, political, socio-economic) in this theory needs therefore to be critically considered and to be explored further. Finally, its transgenerational applicability and the question if it is still a valid and contemporary theory needs to be addressed in future (psychobiographical) research.

# 7  Conclusion

This chapter responds to the research question of how two selected, extraordinary, political women leaders conduct their heroine's journeys coming from differing (WEIRD and non-WEIRD) contexts. Both women start off with strong mothers who instil the joy of learning into their daughters. The girls grow into women who are critical of their own political and societal systems, and both develop strong faith and belief anchored in their family backgrounds. Both fight the socio-political system of their origin, and later become key players in the political systems of their countries through political activism, following a significant political change.

While Merkel remained for two decades in her governmental positions, Machel decided to leave the government for her work in the non-governmental sector. Both women demonstrated intensely masculine ways of dealing with challenges in life, while later reintegrating their feminine sides and healing the masculine part of their identities. Ultimately, both women were successful in reaching the goal of their journeys Clearly, these women are perceived as extraordinary women leaders on a global level.

It is impressive that both women, although coming from extremely different contexts, moved through the heroine's journey with many similarities during their lives. However, while two major changes were implemented for Machel through clandestine militant action, marriages, and the deaths of her two husbands (external circumstances), most of Merkel's major changes were implemented through her intra-personal developments. Only one was influenced by external circumstances, namely the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

It can be concluded that this psychobiographical study contributes to: (1) the expansion of comparative psychobiographies on women leaders in WEIRD and non-WEIRD contexts, (2) filling the gender gap in psychobiographical literature exploring the lives of two woman leaders in politics, (3) expanding the theories on heroine's journeys, (4) fostering the transcultural understanding of women's leadership through psychobiography, and (5) providing insights into the lives of women role models in the international and global political arena.

It is recommended that future research should focus on the heroine journeys of woman leaders from various cultural backgrounds and circumstances. More in-depth

research should be conducted to explore the inner developments even more closely, and their connection to the changes in the socio-cultural circumstances in their lives and external living contexts. Research needs to investigate whether the heroine's journeys differ for women in different cultural contexts and their activism as politicians, actors, writers, and the like. It is also suggested that the archetypes which play a major role in their lives should be analysed in the light of their life story developments.

On a practical level, it is recommended that psychobiographies of heroine's journeys from different cultural (WEIRD and non-WEIRD) backgrounds help women all over the world to learn about the integration of identity parts and stages in women's lives, and how women from different socio-cultural stances deal with their intra- and inter-psychological development throughout their lives in the context of socio-political developments. Psychobiographies can be used as role models for women and their (political) activities and leadership in different socio-cultural contexts. These psychobiographies can also show how women from minority groups and from WEIRD and non-WEIRD backgrounds can conduct their lives successfully. Finally, these comparative psychobiographies can demonstrate that women share many similarities although they come from diverse backgrounds, and accordingly create healing and solidarity for women across cultures.

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**Claude-Hélène Mayer** is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

# From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile

**Prim Siripipat, Carina Chen, and Joseph G. Ponterotto**

**Abstract**  This chapter presents a multiple case psychobiography inclusive of two women's tennis superstars and social activists: Billie Jean King (1943–present) and Naomi Osaka (1997–present). The study design is cross-sectional (between subjects of different generations) and longitudinal (within subjects). The overarching goal of the study was to explore the origins of our subjects' exceptional talent in tennis and their unwavering commitment to use their international sports platform to promote social justice and equity across race, gender, and sexual orientation. A multiple theoretical model was employed inclusive of psychosocial/psychodynamic theory (Erikson and Adler), existential theory (Frankl and Merleau-Ponty), and race-culture specific theories (Cross; Rockquemore and Laszloffy). Data sources included first-person voice as well as secondary and tertiary archival sources. A chronological chart methodology adapted for psychobiography was used to help provide socio-historical context of the subjects' lived lives. An ethical decision-making model for psychobiography was incorporated to guide the process of psychological research on living subjects. The study extends the theoretical and subject base for psychobiography and concludes with suggestions for follow-up research.

## 1   Introduction

Interest in sports and admiration of sports superstars transcend culture, time, and place. Perhaps since the time of Leonides of Rhodes, the great Olympian who won 12 Olympic Wreaths (equivalent of today's Gold Medal) across four consecutive

P. Siripipat · C. Chen · J. G. Ponterotto (✉)
Division of Psychological & Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University – Lincoln Center Campus, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: psiripipat@fordham.edu; cchen224@fordham.edu; ponterotto@fordham.edu

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Games (164–152 BCE), humans have cherished their sports heroes (Miller, 2004). Some of these heroes throughout sports history have used their platforms to promote equity, opportunity, inclusion, social justice, and peace.

From the present authors' North American context, a number of athletes exemplify this trend. African American track and field stars, Tommie Smith (Gold Medal) and John Carlos (Bronze Medal), stood on the winners' platform at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Each raised a right-gloved fist during the award ceremony to protest oppression of African-descent people and to promote human rights (Smith & Steele, 2007). During the Vietnam War, international icon and boxing champion Muhammad Ali sacrificed prime years of his competitive career when he was stripped of his boxing license by refusing induction into the U.S. Army because of his religious and non-violence beliefs (Ali & Durham, 1975). Tennis superstar Billie Jean King applied her stature to advocate for women's financial equity across sports and then LGBTQ+ rights within and beyond the athletic world.

In the present decade, African American and National Football League (American football) quarterback Colin Kaepernick and Japanese-Haitian tennis star Naomi Osaka used their sports platform to protest violence toward African Americans in the USA. For their social justice advocacy they suffered harsh backlash to the point of physical threats, emotional harassment, and adverse impacts on careers and earnings.

The purpose of the present chapter is to understand the inner psychology of two women's tennis superstars who have and continue to devote extensive energies to using their international platforms to promote social justice in the areas of racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and women's equity. The selected contemporary historic figures transcend a half-century of using sports as a vehicle to promote human good, Billie Jean King (late twentieth century) and Naomi Osaka (twenty-first century).

## 2   Positioning Historic Subjects in a Non-WEIRD Context

The overall purpose of this book is to expand psychobiographical theory and research beyond the traditional WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, and Democratic) participant (or subject) pool that has been typical in psychological research. In an influential review of the social and behavioral sciences research, Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) found that while 80% of study participants came from WEIRD societies, they only represent 12% of the global population. It may be fair to say, at least until very recently, that this uneven distribution of research subjects could be applied as a criticism of psychobiography (see critique in Young & Collins, 2018). Since the time of Freud's (1910/1957) psychobiographical profile of Leonardo da Vinci, an overwhelming percentage of psychobiographies have focused on figures from WEIRD societies and individuals who are WHMC— White, Heterosexual, Male, and Christian. The two subjects for our profile represent a number of non-WEIRD-WMHC characteristics. King is a lesbian female (gay cisgender female), while Osaka is a woman with non-Western origins, specifically, a Japanese citizen of Japanese-Haitian bicultural identity.

## 3    Study Design

The present study is a multiple case psychobiography that is both cross-sectional and longitudinal. It is cross-sectional since the two study subjects represent different generations and different historic periods in women's social justice advocacy through tennis. King, born in 1943 is a member of "The Silent Generation," while Osaka is part of "Generation Z" (Thompson, 2021). These athlete-activists are separated by four generations historically, yet they are linked through their tennis greatness and deep commitment to issues of social justice. The study is also longitudinal since each subject is explored developmentally across their lifespans through the year, 2021.

Our sample was purposeful and tied to a long-standing admiration for both the athletic prominence and social justice courage displayed by these tennis superstars. Further, the lead two authors of this chapter (Siripipat and Chen) were internationally competitive tennis players, are female, and represent racial ethnic minority groups. Siripipat, an international sports journalist, has worked with Billie Jean King.

## 4    Centering Ethical Considerations

While ethical considerations in psychobiography are often noted in published studies, they are usually addressed quite minimally. We wanted to integrate ethical considerations throughout the present psychological profiling. To guide our awareness of potential ethical issues, we employed the "Six-Step Ethical Decision-Making Model for Psychobiography" (Ponterotto & Reynolds (Taiwon Choi), 2017, 2019). The six steps are: (1) identify ethically important moments as they emerge throughout the study; (2) explore these ethical moments in light of existing ethical standards and principles; (3) weigh possible courses of action within a context of ongoing consultation; (4) decide on and implement a course of action; (5) monitor and follow-up on impacts of reporting information; and (6) debrief and process with colleagues to advance research and practices in psychobiography.

Regarding the first step, we acknowledge that both of our historic subjects are alive and active, and the present psychobiographical report could impact King, Osaka, and their families and friends. Though it is uncertain whether our subjects or their next of kin would ever read this chapter, it is important that our coverage be balanced, well-researched, and incorporate best methodological practices in psychobiography (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019). Further, the present authors engaged the following ethical considerations in this study.

1. Our study proposal was submitted to Fordham University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and found to be "Exempt" from "Expedited" or "Full Board" review. As our study is not designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge, and relies on publicly available documents, it was not considered to fall under the purview of traditional psychological research.

2. Our research proposal was then sent to four established psychobiographers who are part of the "Psychobiography Research Group" (co-led by Paul Elovitz, Claude-Helene Mayer, and Inna Rozentsvit). These Reviewers provided feedback and/or questions on ethical considerations for us to consider.[1]
3. We have informed both King and Osaka of our planned study and its focus. While we received King's written endorsement (through Siripipat) and good wishes on the project, we have not heard back from Osaka directly.
4. The research team met periodically throughout the study to consider possible emergent ethical issues in light of the six-step decision-making model.

## 5 Data Sources

The authors relied on first-, second-, and third-person sources, using the source-organization designations presented in Ponterotto (2017). First-person sources included direct "voice" from the two participants, such as autobiographies, speeches, social media posts, and quoted statements in journalistic accounts. Secondary sources included perceptions and memories of participants' contemporaries in their inner circle (colleagues, friends, and family). Third-person sources included biographies, journalistic reports, archives, and competition summary reports. As each type of document source has its own strengths and limitations (see Ponterotto, 2017 for a discussion), we worked to triangulate data and impressions across the three types of sources to enhance interpretive credibility.

## 6 Chapter Structure

The remainder of this chapter includes separate profiles of each participant, starting with King given her elder statesperson status in women's tennis. Each profile reviews theoretical anchors to guide psychological interpretation and offers a psychological profile organized along Erikson's developmental stages. To help understand and present important socio-historical context for each participant, Hiller's (2011) multi-layered chronological chart (MLCC) methodology was employed. The MLCC summarizes salient life experiences plotted across major life areas sequenced chronologically across the lifespan of the participant. Initially designed for traditional biographical research, the MLCC has been adapted for psychobiography by a number of contemporary researchers (e.g., Harisunker & du Plessis, 2021; Nel et al., 2021; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013). The chapter then ends with a brief discussion and suggestions for follow-up research.

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[1]The authors would like to thank Drs. James W. Anderson, Paul Elovitz, Jason D. Reynolds (Taewon Choi), and Benjamin Wegner, for their thoughtful comments on our ethical approach to this study.

# 7 Billie Jean King: A Psychological Portrait of a Sports Icon and Pioneer

> Everybody in tennis was white shoes, white socks, white clothes, white balls. I just said to myself, "Where is everybody else? This is not good." That's when I promised myself, I would fight for equality for the rest of my life (Billie Jean King, cited in Foudy, 2019).

In the nascent stages of her tennis career, Billie Jean King had an epiphany about the sport while playing in Los Angeles—she loved the game but not the culture (Polishook, 2017). Seen as a country club, white collar sport in the 1950s and 1960s, the lower middle-class Californian knew tennis would need a complete makeover (King, 2008). Recognizing the gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequities of tennis at a young age, Billie Jean discovered her life purpose at 12 years old and vowed to fight for equality for the rest of her life (King, 2021). Although it seemed like a lofty declaration at the time, the little girl from Long Beach, California delivered on her promise to use tennis as a vehicle to become a champion on the court and in life.

On the court, the former World No. 1 won 39 Grand Slam women's singles, women's doubles titles, and mixed doubles titles, including a record 20 Wimbledon titles (King, 2021). The International Tennis Hall of Fame inductee earned many victories and milestones over the course of her athletic career, but none was bigger than her triumph over Bobby Riggs in the "Battle of the Sexes" match in 1973 (Ware, 2011, p. 8). Nearly 50 million Americans tuned in to watch what many viewed as more than just a tennis match—it represented an ongoing national debate over women's rights and their changing roles (Ware, 2011). As one New York Times editor stated, "In a single tennis match, Billie Jean King was able to do more for the cause of women than most feminists can achieve in a lifetime" (Lipsyte, 1994).

## 7.1 Theoretical Frameworks

This psychobiography examines King's journey through a multi-theoretical approach including Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1950), Viktor Frankl's logotherapy theory (Frankl, 1949), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontological philosophy on the interconnectedness of existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, as cited in Dahlberg, 2006). Using Erikson's psychosocial development theory as the primary template, particular attention is paid to critical tasks inherent in each life stage and how these specific crises impacted King's development from birth to later adulthood (Corey, 2017). Although King remains alive at the time of this paper, her age at 79 years old enables nearly complete examination across the whole lifespan.

In addition to Erikson's psychosocial developmental model, the integration of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy theory and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontological philosophy highlights the significance of life purpose and context. Frankl was the

founder of logotherapy, which proposed that finding meaning is the primary motivational force in peoples' lives (Frankl, 1949; Krasovska & Mayer, 2021). The application of this theory occurs in Erikson's stage four when King identifies her life purpose at just 12 years old (King, 2021; Polishook, 2017). Within this framework, we examine how finding meaning so early in King's childhood fueled her success and motivation to sacrifice for the greater good. Whereas some psychological theories are individualistically focused, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy considers the system, group, society, and various influences of the social world on the existential reality of the individual (Dahlberg, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). With this application, we can identify the social and political forces that aided King's trajectory from the 1950s to 1970s.

## 7.2 A Psychological Portrait

Using Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory as a frame of reference, a psychobiographical analysis of Billie Jean King can be organized into four chronological periods in her life: an athletic and loving familial foundation (birth to 6 years old); finding purpose in life (7–19 years old); the biggest battle of her life (20–34 years old); and sexuality revealed (35–65 years old) (see Fig. 1).

## 7.3 An Athletic and Loving Familial Foundation (Birth– 6 Years Old)

Billie Jean Moffitt was born on November 22, 1943, in Long Beach, California (King, 2008). King's parents had a traditional marriage and raised their children with middle-class Protestant values (Ware, 2011). Her father, Willis Jefferson "Bill" Moffitt, a Navy man and firefighter, was the "boss" who helped support the family while her mother, Betty (Mildred Rose Jerman), stayed at home to take care of the children (King, 2021). A few years after Billie Jean was born, the couple had their second child, Randall James, also known as "R.J." Although Betty and Bill came from broken homes during the Depression, they were both committed to the idea of marriage and maintaining unity was paramount (King, 2008). This emphasis was apparent in how the King's ran their household, including their family dinners which were always held promptly at 5:15 p.m. every evening with no distractions. While these rules seemed stringent to an outsider, Betty and Bill saw importance in connecting as a family and exchanging ideas. King has fond memories of her family's dinner table conversations. Whether it was about school, sports, problems, or even philosophical topics, Billie Jean and R.J. appreciated these opportunities to learn from their parents (King, 2008).

Timeline columns (life stages / years):

| Familial Foundation (Birth – 3 years) | | Finding Life Purpose (7 – 19 years) | | | | | Biggest Battle of Her Life (20 – 34 years) | | | | | | | Sexuality Revealed (35-65 years) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1943 | 1946 | 1949 | 1952 | 1955 | 1958 | 1961 | 1964 | 1967 | 1970 | 1973 | 1976 | 1979 | 1982 | 1985 | 1988 | 1991 | 1994 | 1997 | 2000 | 2003 | 2006 | 2009 | 2012 | 2015 | 2018 |

**Tennis Highlights**
- Introduced to tennis for the first time / first formal tennis lesson
- No. 1 player in So. California
- Drops out of L.A. State College to focus on tennis career
- Becomes 1st female athlete to earn more than $100k in prize money in single season
- Wins 1st Grand Slam at Wimbledon / Achieves World No. 1 ranking
- King defeats Bobby Riggs in the highly publicized, historic "Battle of the Sexes" match
- Becomes 5th woman in history to win career Grand Slam / 1st woman named Sports Illustrated's Sportsperson of the Year
- King captures a record 20th career title at Wimbledon with doubles partner, Martina Navratilova
- Wins the U.S. Open with Martina Navratilova for King's 39th and final Grand Slam title
- Retires from singles competition
- 1st woman to have major sports venue named in her honor (USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center)

**Family & Significant Relationships**
- Father was a former Navy basketball player who turned down an invitation to try out for the NBA. Mother was a bodysurfer.
- King's brother, an eventual MLB pitcher, Randy Moffitt, is born.
- King is inspired by her church minister, Reverend Bob Richards, an Olympic pole vaulter and gold medalist
- King's best friend, Susan Williams, introduces her to game of tennis + meets her 1st tennis coach, Clyde Walker
- Meets ex-husband, Larry King, at Los Angeles State, whom she would have a 22-year marriage
- Meets Ilana Kloss at the South African Championships, whom she would eventually marry 52 years later
- Begins affair with hairdresser-turned-assistant, Marilyn Barnett
- Meets English singer, composer, and eventual friend, Elton John at a party before the Battles of the Sexes match
- Marilyn Barnett sues BJK and reveals her sexuality
- Divorces Larry King and begins dating Ilana Kloss
- King accepts her sexual identity as a gay woman
- Marries Ilana Kloss in a secret ceremony

**Social Activism**
- King notices everything at a L.A. tennis club is white, including the people. Identifies life purpose to fight for equality.
- Helps organize the 1st all-women's pro tennis tournament
- One of nine women who sign $1 contracts to launch a new women's professional tennis tour
- Threatens to boycott U.S. Open and successfully lobbies for equal pay + wins Battle of Sexes match vs. Bobby Riggs
- Cofounds World Team Tennis (WTT) + 1st woman to coach co-ed team
- Founds the Women's Sports Foundation, aimed at fighting for gender equality in sports
- Becomes 1st woman commissioner in professional sports history for WTT
- Named one of the 100 most important Americans of the 20th century by LIFE Magazine
- Recipient of 1999 Arthur Ashe Courage Award
- Appointed Global Mentor for Gender Equality by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Launched the BJK Leadership Initiative

**THEORY APPLICATION**
**Erikson, Psychosocial**
- Trust vs. Mistrust: King's parents' dedication in building a strong familial bond enables her to develop a sense of security and trust in the world (1943-44)
- Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt: King is encouraged to assert herself in various endeavors from a very early age, including sports, fostering self-reliance and personal autonomy (1944-46)
- Initiative vs. Guilt: Through sports, King is given the freedom to play, explore, and engage in meaningful activities as she learns how to exert power over herself and the world (1946-49)
- Industry vs. Inferiority: King expands her understanding of the world and through her unique social support system, achieves a sense of competence. (1949-55)
- Identity vs. Role Confusion: King achieves her athletic rise as the top player in Southern California and reaffirms her self-identity as an elite tennis player, leader, and social activist (1955-61)
- Intimacy vs. Isolation: Despite the strong relationships in her life, BJK struggles to come to terms regarding her sexuality which leads to internal conflict and feelings of loneliness (1961-78)
- Generativity vs. Stagnation: King comes to terms with her sexuality and continues to use sport/tennis as a vehicle to fight for equality and impact others (1978-2003)
- Integrity vs. Despair: Although she remains alive, King reflects on her life and legacy with a sense satisfaction and very little regrets (2003-present)

**Frankl, Logotherapy**
**Merleau-Ponty, Ontological Forces**
- At 12, King identifies her life purpose at an unusually young age as fighting for equality becomes the primary motivational force in her life.
- Sociopolitical forces including the Open era of tennis, second-wave feminism, and passage of Title IX served as sociopolitical shaped King's existential reality and trajectory as a social activist

**Age**

| 1943 | 1946 | 1949 | 1952 | 1955 | 1958 | 1961 | 1964 | 1967 | 1970 | 1973 | 1976 | 1979 | 1982 | 1985 | 1988 | 1991 | 1994 | 1997 | 2000 | 2003 | 2006 | 2009 | 2012 | 2015 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 18 | 21 | 24 | 27 | 30 | 33 | 36 | 39 | 42 | 45 | 48 | 51 | 54 | 57 | 60 | 63 | 66 | 69 | 72 | 75 |

**Fig. 1** Billie Jean King (1943–Present), biographical and theoretical summary

As much as the family enjoyed dinner time, the Moffitt's greatest connection was through sports. Betty Moffitt was a fast runner and excellent swimmer who used to bodysurf in 15-foot ocean waves (King, 2021). Bill Moffitt was a "total jock" who played basketball in the Navy and even declined an invitation to try out for the National Basketball Association (Foudy, 2019). Bill Moffitt declined and opted for a regular paying job so he could help support the family. Reflecting on her father's missed opportunity to play professional basketball, King said, "I think the experience helped him to understand my own dreams of success in sports. I always felt that he really got me" (King, 2008, p. 49). Billie Jean's brother, R.J., was an avid baseball player and became a Major League Baseball pitcher for the San Francisco Giants, Houston Astros, and Toronto Blue Jays. Growing up in an extremely athletic family enabled King to explore her passion for sports. She played every sport she had access to—basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, and of course, tennis. She was the ultimate "tomboy"—something her father, a devoted sports enthusiast, supported wholeheartedly regarding King's athletic aspirations (King, 1977, as cited in Ware, 2011).

In Erikson's first stage, *Trust vs. Mistrust* (birth to 1 year old), consistent, reliable, and predictable care enables the infant to develop a sense of trust (McLeod, 2018). With her parent's dedication in building a strong familial bond, Billie Jean found security and hope through this strong support system. Although she grew up in a strict, conservative familial environment, King and her younger brother were encouraged to be anything they wanted and assert themselves in all their endeavors, including sports (King, 2021). Biographer, Susan Ware, wrote, "Feeling so well grounded in this secure family environment as a child was an important precondition for Billie Jean King's success, athletic, and otherwise" (Ware, 2011, p. 31). Having the freedom to play and express herself enabled King to successfully complete stages two (*Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt)* and three (*Initiative vs. Guilt*) (Erikson, 1950).

## 7.4 Finding Purpose in Life (6–19 Years Old)

During this period, relationships outside the family would become a huge source of inspiration for the future 39-time grand slam champion. At 11, her best friend, Susan Williams, introduced her to the game of tennis (King, 2008). A few weeks later, their softball coach, Val Halloran, informed the two girls about a coach who offered free tennis lessons in Long Beach's Houghton Park every Tuesday. There, King met her first tennis coach, Clyde Walker, and she immediately fell in love with the sport. After just her second time playing tennis, Billie Jean informed her mother, "Mom, I found what I'm going to do with my life. I want to be the No. 1 tennis player in the world!" (Foudy, 2019).

Interestingly, King had access to quite a few elite athletes during her childhood, making her newly identified aspirations seemingly achievable—at least in her eyes. In addition to her father being a professional-caliber basketball player, the minister at the Moffitt's church was an Olympic athlete. Reverend Bob Richards was the first pole-vaulter to win two Olympic gold medals (Lannin, 1999). King always enjoyed hearing his stories as an athlete, which often occurred during his sermons (King,

2008). In women's tennis, King looked up to two former World No. 1's, American Doris Hart, a 35-time grand slam champion, and Althea Gibson, the first African American to win a Grand Slam title (International Tennis Hall of Fame, 2022; Britannica, 2022). Billie Jean, a history buff, recalls, "If you could see it, you could be it. You say you want to be No. 1, what does that look like? Well, Althea was No. 1 at the time when I was 13 and I went wow, I want to be that" (Foudy, 2019).

In addition to setting her goal of becoming the best tennis player in the world, it was around this time that King identified her life purpose. While playing tennis in Los Angeles, she noticed everything was white, including their shirts, shorts, shoes, and socks. Even their skin was white (Polishook, 2017). It was then, at the age of 12, King decided to fight for equality for the rest of her life.

In stage four, *Industry vs. Inferiority* (6–12 years), a child's peer group, teachers, and caregivers become a major source of the child's self-esteem. The next stage, *Identity vs. Role Confusion*, (12–19 years), is a major stage of development where the adolescent reexamines their identity as they attempt to find out who they are and what they want to do in life. In addition to her prodigious athletic skills, King's unique support system enabled her to develop a strong sense of self and discover her life purpose at an unusually young age. According to Frankl's logotherapy, striving to find meaning is the primary motivational force in people's lives (Frankl, 1949). By age 12, King had clear conviction of where she wanted to go and what she wanted to achieve—relieving her of the stress and anxiety that could occur when an individual is unable to find meaning in life.

During her adolescence, King continued to her rise, becoming the top player in Southern California and subsequently, in the nation (Higdon, 1967). She graduated from Long Beach Polytechnic High School in 1961 and went on to attend Los Angeles State College (now California State University, Los Angeles) (Ware, 2011). At the time, there were no athletic scholarships available for women. King would hit a crossroads with her tennis career.

## 7.5 Biggest Match of Her Life (20–34 Years Old)

Tennis took a backseat for King's first couple of years in college. In addition to having less time to train, Billie Jean's attention was on her new love interest, Larry King (Higdon, 1967). In the *American Masters* documentary, King recalls, "I was totally in love with Larry. I just liked to listen to his ideas, whether it was about being egalitarian, whether it was about being libertarian or about the news of the day" (Erskine et al., 2013). Indeed, Larry played an instrumental role in the development of Billie Jean's career (Ware, 2011). The fellow tennis player introduced her to gender inequities and feminism, and most importantly, encouraged his girlfriend to pursue her dreams (Walsh, 2007). He said, "We felt Billie Jean's potential was a tennis player. There was no point in her becoming just another housewife. She was immensely talented. I didn't feel her talent should be wasted" (Kates, 1973, p. 1).

Indeed, the two did not waste any time. At 21, Billie Jean married Larry and with his support, dropped out of college to focus solely on tennis.

The decision to leave college paid dividends. Shortly after leaving college, King won her first Grand Slam singles title at Wimbledon and achieved her goal of becoming the world's No. 1 player—a goal she had set as a young girl (King, 2008). Billie Jean would hold the number one ranking for an additional 5 years during her career (1967–68, 1971–72, and 1975), winning a total of 39 Grand Slam singles, doubles, and mixed doubles titles (Billie Jean King Enterprises, 2022). She became the first woman to earn more than $100,000 in prize money in a single season. While that was a significant amount of money at the time, King was dissatisfied with the pay inequities in her sport. The pay gap widened following the debut of the Open era and professionalization of tennis in 1968. After winning the 1972 US Open and discovering the men's champion had earned $15,000 more than her, King threatened to boycott the following year (Gittings, 2013). Recognizing that the negotiating power was on the side of the defending champion, tournament officials obliged, making the US Open the first Grand Slam to offer equal prize money to men and women in 1973. As the leader and advocate for equality amongst her tennis peers, King was primed for what would be one of the biggest matches of her life—The Battle of the Sexes.

On the evening of September 20, 1973, nearly 50 million Americans tuned in to watch a winner-take-all $100,000 match between 29-year-old Billie Jean, an advocate for women's equality, and 55-year-old Bobby Riggs, an aging ex-tennis star (Ware, 2011). To many, this was more than just a tennis match—it represented the intensifying national debate over women's rights and their changing roles (Ware, 2011). A win would prove that female athletes (and women, in general) could surmount sexism (Spencer, 2000). Rather than being thrown off by the pressure and circus atmosphere of that day, King rose to the occasion beating Riggs in straight sets 6–4, 6–3, 6–3 (King, 2008). Tennis peer and 18-time Grand Slam singles champion, Chrissie Evert, said, "It was as if someone had won the presidential election. Everybody ran on to the court. It transcended tennis" (Erskine et al., 2013).

Merleau-Ponty's ontological philosophy on the interconnectedness of existence recognized the impact of the social world on an individual (Dahlberg, 2006). Through this lens, we can identify three salient factors that served as the backdrop to the "Battle of the Sexes" match and King's impact thereafter. First was the establishment of the Open era in 1968 and the professionalization of tennis, which helped boost the sport's platform and popularity. Second was the revival of the broad-based social movement called the second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Spencer, 2000). Former first lady, Hillary Clinton said of King, "She was a sport figure but also an activist. She began to speak out in a way that both exemplified and accelerated the changes that were occurring about women's lives" (Erskine et al., 2013). The third factor was the passage of Title IX in 1972, a legislation addressing widespread discrimination against women in all aspects of higher education (Ware, 2011). As biographer, Ware (2011, p. 2), said, "Billie Jean King was the right feminist in the right sport at the right moment in American history."

In Erikson's sixth stage, *Intimacy vs. Isolation*, King achieved the task in owning her identity as a professional tennis player, a leader, and a women's activist. She was able to share this with her husband, family, tennis colleague, and sports peers (including Muhammad Ali whose career ran parallel to hers) (King, 2008). Outside the realms of tennis and feminism, however, King did struggle with one aspect of her identity—her sexuality. By 1973, King admits knowing she was gay but did not feel comfortable revealing it to others, including the public (Erskine et al., 2013). King would soon be forced to share her truths with the world.

## 7.6 Sexuality Revealed (35–65+ years)

The love that once bonded Billie Jean and Larry morphed into detachment (Ware, 2011). King began having an affair with her female hairdresser-turned-assistant, Marilyn Barnett. The relationship ended on a sour note as Barnett sued King for property and money, and exposed her ex-lover as a lesbian in 1981 (Ware, 2011). Although King's sexuality had been an open secret for years in the tennis world, this was different. Being exposed as a lesbian to a predominantly homophobic American public was devastating (Davies, 2013). In a Home Box Office (HBO) documentary (Greenburg & Bernstein, 2006), King said, "My sexuality was probably the most difficult struggle I've had in my whole life and the one thing it taught me was that until you find your own truth, you really cannot be free." Against the advisement of her lawyer and publicist, King decided to share her truths with the world, which was a huge risk considering the effect it had on her endorsements (Davies, 2013).

As she healed and societal views changed regarding homosexuality, King came to accept her sexual identity around the age of 51 (Shuster, 2013). Like many other moments in her life, she turned adversity into an opportunity as she became an advocate not only for women's rights, but for gay rights. Billie Jean retired not too long after her press conference and divorced Larry in 1987 (Ware, 2011). While King's sexuality was painfully revealed to the public, behind closed doors, she was adjusting and began secretly dating her doubles partner, Ilana Kloss (Ware, 2011). Kloss would become her life partner and after 40-plus years, the two remain together.

Some acknowledge that King's best work in activism occurred after her retirement from tennis (Erskine et al., 2013). Her energy, once occupied by sport, had been dispersed into endeavors like the Women's Sports Foundation which focused on creating more opportunities for girls. Through this advocacy, King was able to successfully complete Erikson's stage seven, *Generativity vs. Stagnation*. Today, she remains alive at 79 and with seemingly very few regrets, she will most likely complete Erikson's eighth and final stage, *Ego Integrity vs. Despair*.

# 8 Raising a Racket: A Psychological Portrait of Naomi Osaka

> . . . anger is a lack of understanding. Change makes people uncomfortable.
> (Osaka, 2021)

Billions watched as Black Americans were killed or violently attacked by White police and civilians in 2020 (Bergeron, 2020). After police shot Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Naomi Osaka intended to withdraw from the semifinal of the Western & Southern Open to turn attention to the violent injustice (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). At the US Open the following week, Osaka donned face masks, bearing the names of Black men and women who were killed or violently attacked, to bring America's systemic racism to international light and provoke conversation (Gaillot, 2021b).

The young tennis star's physical and digital presence is a beacon for change, and her transformation from athlete to athlete-activist is one that psychological motivations may account for. Drawing upon several psychological theories of human development, this profile will attempt to understand how Osaka developed her voice.

## 8.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Much of the existing literature chronicles Osaka's achievements as an elite tennis competitor and is focused on short periods of her life. Other significant questions about Osaka's life remain to be answered: What facilitated her transformation from the shy tennis player who shocked tennis audiences with her first Grand Slam win, to the outspoken activist who started conversations about race in a predominantly white sport? Are there aspects of her childhood that influenced the development of her personality and identity? This section attempts to answer these questions using a multi-theoretical approach, integrating four psychological theoretical models: Erik Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory, William E. Cross Jr.'s (1971) nigrescence theory, Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy's (2005) continuum of biracial identity (COBI) model, and Alfred Adler's (2013) birth order theory.

Erik Erikson's (1950) stage theory was outlined earlier, and here we note that, as Osaka is 23 years old at the time of this writing, we examine her identity development across six of the eight stages.

William E. Cross Jr. published his first theory of nigrescence analyzing Black identity development in five separate stages (Cross, 1971). The theory, developed at the height of the Civil Rights movement, outlines "the process of becoming Black." Each stage represents a new level of liberation from the psychological domination of a racist society, and the model culminates in the development of a new identity as an agent for social justice. We examine Osaka's progression into athlete-activist with this framework.

Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy developed the continuum of biracial identity (COBI) model to allow biracial individuals, such as Osaka, to identify themselves along a continuous scale (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). This model resists the temptation to "fit" biracial individuals into one singular category, and it recognizes that biracial identity can be fluid over time across a blended continuum. We examine Osaka's biracial identity as a Haitian Japanese woman using this model.

Alfred Adler's theory of birth order maintains that birth order significantly and predictably impacts the development of a child's personality (Adler, 2013). This model is used to examine Osaka's personality development as the second born child in the family.

## 8.2   A Psychological Portrait

Using Erikson's model of psychosocial development, we categorize Osaka's life into five chronological periods: A *hafu* (mixed race) in Japan and America (birth to 3 years), playing to win (3–11 years old), a *hafu* representing Japan in America (12–18 years old), on the world stage (18–21 years old), and a beacon for change (22 years old to present) (see Fig. 2).

## 8.3   A **Hafu** *in Japan and America (Birth to 3 Years Old)*

Naomi Osaka 大坂 なおみ was born on October 16, 1997 in Osaka city, Japan (Osaka, 2017). Her Japanese mother, Tamaki Osaka, and Haitian father, Leonard Maxime Francois, had Osaka's older sister, Mari 大坂 まり just one year and a half before. Tamaki's family deemed her relationship a disgrace upon discovering Francois was Black; instead of agreeing to *omiai*, the matchmaking process for arranged marriages, Tamaki remained with Francois and stayed estranged from her family for more than 10 years (Larmer, 2018). The family was conscious of their country's prejudice against *hafu*, so the Osaka sisters adopted their mother's surname to help them assimilate into Japanese society (Larmer, 2018).

Three years after Osaka's birth, her family moved to America to live with Francois' parents in New York (Larmer, 2018). Osaka recalls being "surrounded by both Haitian and Japanese culture," hearing her grandparents speak Haitian Creole while her mother spoke to her in Japanese. At home, the aroma of Haitian stews filled the air and rice ball snacks were prepared for Osaka to bring to school for international day.

During Erikson's (1950) first stage of *Trust vs. Mistrust* (birth to 18 months), Osaka's parents successfully provided a reliably safe and loving home environment, fostering a sense of hope in Osaka at a young age. In Cross' first stage of nigrescence, *Pre-Encounter*, Black individuals are socialized to live in a world

**Hafu in Japan & America** (Birth – 3 years) | 1997 | 1999 | 2001 — **Playing to Win** (3 – 11 years) | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 — **Hafu Representing Japan in America** (12 – 18 years) | 2009 | 2011 | 2013 — **On the World Stage** (18 – 21 years) | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 — **Beacon of Change** (22 years – present) | 2021

**Places of Residence**
☐ Osaka city, Japan (1997)
☐ New York, USA (2000)
☐ Florida, USA (2006)
☐ California, USA (2019)***

**Tennis Highlights**
☐ Starts tennis lessons with her father, Leonard, and her sister, Mari (2000)
☐ Naomi's family moves to Florida for the girls to train full time (2006)
Naomi competes in her first main draw Grand Slam event at the Australian Open (2016) ☐
☐ Naomi competes in the Junior Orange Bowl International Tennis Championship (2007)
Naomi is named the Women's Tennis Association's (WTA) Newcomer of the Year (2016) ☐
Naomi defeats Serena Williams for the first time at the Miami Open (2018) ☐
Naomi wins her first Grand Slam and become the first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam tournament (2018) ☐
Naomi wins her third Grand Slam (2020) ☐
Naomi wins her second Grand Slam and becomes the first Asian tennis player, male or female, to be ranked No. 1 in the world (2019) ☐
Naomi wins her fourth Grand Slam (2021) ☐
*Naomi withdraws from the French Open after citing mental health concerns (2021) ☐

**Family & Significant Relationships**
☐ Leonard watches the Williams Sisters win the French Open Doubles title, inspiring him to coach his girls into becoming the next Williams sisters (1997)
☐ Leonard moves his family to New York to live with his parents on Long Island (2000)
☐ Leonard starts coaching his daughters, following Richard Williams' method of reading books and watching DVDs
Tamaki's father accepts his granddaughters' careers as professional athletes (2014) ☐
☐ Tamaki brings her daughters to meet her parents in Japan for the first time (2008)
Naomi meets and befriends basketball legend, Kobe Bryant (2019) ☐       ☐ Kobe is killed in a helicopter accident (2020)
Naomi starts dating rapper, Cordae (2019) ☐

**Social Activism**
Naomi travels to Minneapolis to attend a protest after George Floyd's murder (2020) ☐
Naomi publishes an essay on Esquire condemning systemic racism and police brutality (2020) ☐
Naomi pauses play at the Western and Southern Open to bring international attention to the shooting of Jacob Blake (2020) ☐
Naomi dons the names of seven Black victims of police brutality on face masks leading to her second ☐
US Open win with the goal of starting conversations about systemic racism across the world (2020) ☐
Naomi announces she will not be doing press at the French Open due to the negative effect it has on her mental health, ☐
sparking an international conversation across sports about the importance of elite athletes' mental health (2021)

**THEORY APPLICATION**
**Erikson, Psychosocial**
☐ Trust vs. Mistrust: A sense of hope is fostered in Naomi due to the safety and love that her parents provided her and her sister (1997)
☐ Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt: Learning to play tennis relatively autonomously helped Naomi develop strong willpower (2000)
☐ Initiative vs. Guilt: Naomi's longing to defeat Mari gave her a sense of purpose at this young age. (2000)
☐ Industry vs. Inferiority: Her family's move to Florida conveyed her parents' belief in Naomi's abilities and helped her develop a sense of confidence in pursuing the sport as a future profession. (2006)
☐ Identity vs. Role Confusion: Naomi's pursuing tennis as a profession gave her a sense of fidelity dedicated to the sport. (2006)
Intimacy vs. Isolation: The introduction of her boyfriend and mentor into Naomi's life taught her how to be ☐
to be more vulnerable with her thoughts and emotions, signaling her newfound understanding of love (2019)

**Cross, Nigrescence**
☐ Pre-Encounter: Naomi's Black heritage was wiped from her name so that she appeared more Japanese on paper (1997)
Encounter: Naomi's witnessing violent attacks on Black people brought forth an immediacy in ☐
participating in protest and a public recognition of equal pride in her Asian and Black heritages (2020) ☐
Immersion-Emersion: The support via social media that Naomi received after the publication ☐
of her essay helped her realize others experience very similar feelings and reactions to hers.

**Rockquemore & Laszloffy, Continuum of Biracial Identity**
☐ Naomi, like Mari, is given her mother's Japanese maiden name to help them better fit into Japanese societal norms (1997)
☐ Naomi represents Japan, skewing her towards her Japanese identity (2010)
Naomi identifies herself as fully Black and fully Asian, placing her at two polar points on the continuum (2020) ☐

**Adler, Birth Order**
☐ Naomi starts playing tennis and maintains the goal to defeat her sister on court (2000-2012)

**Age**
| 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 20 | 22 | 24 |

**Fig. 2** Naomi Osaka (1997–Present), biographical and theoretical summary

that is "non-Black, anti-Black or the opposite of Black" (Cross, 1971). By wiping her Black heritage from her name, Osaka's parents helped her appear "more Japanese" on paper and gain wider acceptance in Japanese society. This decision placed her closer to her Japanese heritage on Rockquemore and Laszloffy's (2005) COBI model sliding scale.

## 8.4   Playing to Win (3–11 Years Old)

The same year Osaka was born, her father became fascinated with Venus and Serena Williams, Black sisters who paired together to win the French Open in 1997 (Larmer, 2018). After learning that Richard Williams, the sisters' father, taught his girls without knowing how to play tennis himself, Francois determined that he, too, could teach his Black daughters. "The blueprint was already there. I just had to follow it," Francois explained to The New York Times (Larmer, 2018).

At age 3, Osaka was introduced to tennis. She and her sister ran through tennis drills Francois picked up from reading books and watching DVDs (Larmer, 2018), but it was not hitting that hooked Osaka to the sport. "The main thing was that I wanted to beat my sister," she explained, "For her, it wasn't a competition, but for me, every day was a competition. Every day I'd say, 'I'm going to beat you tomorrow'" (Larmer, 2018). Since Francois stuck to Williams' blueprint for his daughters' success, neither Osaka nor her sister Mari entered tournaments in the junior tennis circuit, and Mari remained Osaka's main competitor for years (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). Early on, Mari was the dominant tennis player and beat Osaka 6-0 in every practice set. In 2006, the family moved to Florida for the girls to focus on their tennis training full-time, and 6 years later, Osaka finally defeated her sister (Larmer, 2018; Lipsky-Karasz, 2020).

From the moment Osaka stepped on court, she had space to play and improve her skills and game away from pressure that her sister absorbed as the stronger player. This freedom to play without intense scrutiny enabled Osaka to successfully resolve Erikson's second stage, *Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt* (2–3 years; Erikson, 1950). Her intense will to defeat her older sister helped Osaka develop a sense of purpose, thereby successfully resolving Erikson's third stage, *Initiative vs. Guilt* (3–5 years) (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020).

We may also apply Alfred Adler's theory of birth order by recognizing Osaka's competitiveness and eagerness to overtake her older sister (Adler, 2013). She continues to carry this competitive edge with her as she strives to achieve her goal of winning "many" Grand Slams (GQ, 2021). Finally, her family's recognition and encouragement of her tennis abilities were characterized by their move to Florida to pursue tennis full-time when she was only 9 years old. This helped her develop confidence in her abilities and future profession, thereby successfully completing Erikson's fourth stage of development, *Industry vs. Inferiority* (5–11 years).

## 8.5   A **Hafu** *Representing Japan in America (12–18 Years Old)*

Before competition, Francois decided that his daughters would represent Japan; to him and Tamakmi, it felt natural for them to represent the country in which they were born (Larmer, 2018). Osaka later recalled overhearing two Japanese players question and dismiss her Japanese identity based on the color of her skin in 2007, sharing, "I remember that specifically because, yeah, I sometimes feel like a lot of people think that way about me" (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). No more than 1 year later, Osaka's mother decided that it was time for the girls to meet their grandparents in Japan (Larmer, 2018). Osaka's grandparents accepted their granddaughters despite their mixed heritage, but they were less accepting of their chosen lifestyle, preaching that tennis, like other sports, is a hobby, not a career (Larmer, 2018). It took another 6 years for her Japanese grandfather to notice how local media celebrated Osaka for defeating the former Doubles World No. 1 (Larmer, 2018).

Regarding Erikson's (1950) fifth stage of development, *Identity vs. Role Confusion* (ages 12–18 years), Osaka's early commitment to professional tennis helped secure her identity as a tennis player and gave her a sense of fidelity dedicated to the sport. She increasingly grapples with her racial identity as someone who not only represents Japan on paper and in half of her biological heritage, but also as someone who does not look like the "typical" Japanese person. Her father's decision to have her represent Japan and Osaka's steadfastness in her Japanese identity skew her toward the Japanese end of the COBI continuum (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

## 8.6   *On the World Stage (18–21 Years Old)*

Osaka continued to climb the world rankings and in 2016, she competed in her first main draw Grand Slam event at the Australian Open (Osaka, 2017). Continuing to draw attention, Osaka took down several top ranked players over the remainder of the year and was subsequently crowned the Women's Tennis Association's (WTA) Newcomer of the Year ("WTA names Osaka top newcomer," 2016). Her next big break came in 2018 when she finally faced the athlete who inspired her to play: Serena Williams.

Osaka drew Williams in the first round of the Miami Open. Despite her nerves stepping on court to play her "dream" match, Osaka defeated her idol with a convincing score of 6–3, 6–2 (WTA Staff, 2018). "I kind of wanted to impress her . . . And I just wanted to make her say, 'Come on!' one time, and I think she did, so I'm really happy about that," said Osaka in her post-match interview.

After the intense high of meeting and defeating her childhood hero, Osaka had a series of disappointing performances at major and warm-up events. Matches predicted to be comfortable wins for Osaka turned into frustrating defeats, leaving

fans and media stunned (Larmer, 2018). Just ahead of the 2018 US Open, Osaka shared a personal message to social media to explain her poor performance:

> ... the last couple weeks have been really rough for me, I haven't been feeling the ball right and it's thrown me off a lot to the point where I started getting really frustrated and depressed during my practices. I had a lot of pressure entering the hard court swing because I felt a lot of expectation on me from Indian Wells and I didn't feel like the underdog anymore (which is a totally new feeling for me) (Osaka, 2018).

No longer the underdog, Osaka defeated Williams again in a tense US Open final. The crowd, upset over the umpire's calls against Williams in her first major final since giving birth, booed upon Osaka winning the match (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). A tearful Osaka turned her trophy acceptance speech into an apology to the crowd for how the match ended and a thank-you to Williams for the dream opportunity to play her in the final (ESPN, 2018). This win propelled her to the top of WTA rankings and the soft-spoken, shy, 21-year-old became the first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020).

The pressure Osaka felt in 2018 remained as she entered the 2019 season as one of eleven players vying for the No. 1 world ranking (Nguyen, 2019). By winning the Australian Open, she claimed the top spot (Trollope, 2019) and became the first Asian tennis player ranked No. 1 in the world (Sen, 2019).

The months following Osaka's historic achievement proved difficult as she battled through injuries, tough losses, and parting with her coach ("Split with Bajin not over money: Osaka," 2019). One new relationship, however, seemed to lift her spirits; Osaka befriended basketball legend, Kobe Bryant. Bryant mentored Osaka and helped her "find greater confidence" (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). "There would be some really tough losses. I didn't even know he was paying attention, but he would text me positive things and tell me to learn from it. For me, it was definitely helpful," Osaka shared in an interview after Bryant's untimely death (Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). Not only had Osaka engaged in a new friendship with Bryant, but she also started dating rapper Cordae (GQ, 2021). During Erikson's (1950) sixth stage of development, *Intimacy vs. Isolation* (ages 19–40 years), Osaka developed significant new and existing relationships, romantically with her boyfriend, and a strong friendship with Bryant.

Days before her 22nd birthday, Osaka made headlines when she relinquished her US citizenship for Japan (Leussink, 2019). Although her choice was internationally debated, losing her American citizenship was a nonevent for Osaka; she is quoted saying, "I don't necessarily feel like I'm American. I wouldn't know what that feels like" (Larmer, 2018).

## 8.7 A Beacon for Change (22 Years Old to Present)

In 2020, the world shut down due to the devastating 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the professional tennis circuit came to a halt (WTA

Staff, 2020). Then on May 25th, Osaka watched alongside millions as George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police (Hill et al., 2020; Lipsky-Karasz, 2020). In an essay condemning systemic racism and police brutality, Osaka revealed feeling a call to action, to protest, to speak up, and to publish thoughts that she "never would have imagined writing 2 years ago" (Osaka, 2020b). The essay served as her public entrance into the world of activism. Though widely supported, as evidenced by the rise in Black Lives Matter marches that took place in Japan and the USA, Osaka was still met with resistance for speaking out on racism (Osaka, 2020a). She noted that speaking about the topic is challenging for her due to the homogeneity of Japan's culture. "Biracial people," she says, "are the future of Japan . . . We can't let the ignorance of a few who hold back the progressiveness of the masses" (Osaka, 2020b).

By August, the COVID-19 spread slowed in New York, America was amid a nationwide reckoning with its systemic racism, and tennis was back. On August 23rd, Jacob Blake was violently attacked by police and on August 26th, Osaka stated her intention to withdraw from the Western and Southern Open semifinals (Maine, 2020).

> . . . before I am an athlete, I am a black woman. And as a black woman I feel as though there are much more important matters at hand that need immediate attention, rather than watching me play tennis. I don't expect anything drastic to happen with me not playing, but if I can get a conversation started in a majority white sport, I consider that a step in the right direction. Watching the continued genocide of Black people at the hand of the police is honestly making me sick to my stomach (Osaka, 2020c).

The tournament paused play for one day, and Osaka played her match the day after before pulling out of the final (Bodo, 2020). This event logged the second time Osaka used platform to bring attention to systemic racism and specifically, police brutality.

2020 US Open COVID-19 protocols required players to enter courts masked, so for each match leading up to one of her most recent Grand Slam wins, Osaka bore the name of a Black victim of racial injustice: Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Philando Castle, and Tamir Rice (Mansoor, 2020). No longer shy or unsure of herself, Osaka used her platform to protest racial injustice, advocate for Black lives, and "make people start talking" (Bergeron, 2020). Later, she shared that the public discourse around her masks inspired her to continue winning so she could wear each of the seven masks for the seven matches needed to win the US Open (Bergeron, 2020).

Although the world was deeply occupied with Osaka's nationality, there existed little conversation on her race. In her essay, she self-identifies as Asian and Black and in a subsequent 2021 interview, she explained that she does not feel "half anything, because [she feels] both Japanese *and* Haitian fully" (Gaillot, 2021a; Osaka, 2020b). We may now place Osaka on two points of Rockquemore and Laszloffy's (2005) COBI continuum, one point at the extreme for her Asian racial identity and one point at the extreme for her Black racial identity.

Osaka's essay sheds light on her transformation from athlete to athlete-activist. Following Cross's (1971) model of nigrescence, Osaka transitioned to the second

stage, *Encounter*, when she witnessed violent attacks on Black people through viral videos. She describes her heartache when she saw the video of Floyd's death and the immediacy she felt to protest in St. Paul (Osaka, 2020b). Osaka previously referred to herself as tan (GuardianSport, 2019) but now, she identifies as equally Asian and Black. This development of pride in her Blackness marks her transition to the third stage of nigrescence, *Immersion-Emersion.* The outpouring of support for Black lives, not just from other Black people but from people of different races helped Osaka realize that others experience similar feelings and reactions (Osaka, 2020b). The Internet and social media aided her transition to the fourth stage of nigrescence, *Internalization*. Once Osaka recognized her platform is a tool to raise awareness on injustices against Black people, she committed to creating a more equitable and just society. This new sense of purpose marks a possible beginning of her transition to nigrescence's final stage, *Internalization Commitment.* Osaka has already stood for multiple causes, the most recent of which includes mental health (Martin, 2021). One may even predict that she is prematurely fulfilling Erikson's (1950) seventh stage of psychosocial development, *Generativity vs. Stagnation*, by igniting sport-wide conversations about systemic racism and mental health for professional athletics.

## 9   Discussion

This chapter has profiled two extraordinary women athletes and social activists. They both used their international sports platform to stand up for marginalized subgroups in the USA and worldwide. Though naturally different in life experience and historical context, one at the twilight of her career and one at her prime, both King and Osaka have been courageous role models in using their notoriety, power, and privilege to benefit oppressed communities. Perhaps their continuing stories will encourage other renowned athletes across many sports and many nations to also fight for social justice, for without justice and equity, the value and meaning of sports is certainly diminished.

This chapter also served to advance psychobiographical study of women, sexual minorities, and biracial historic subjects. Further, while relying on three more traditional theories used in psychobiography—those of Erikson, Frankl, and Adler—the study also integrated theoretical perspectives from Merleau-Ponty's ontological philosophy, as well as race-specific theories of Black racial identity development (Cross, 1971) and biracial identity development (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Contemporary psychobiographers have called for expanding the theoretical perspectives used in the study of historic and exceptional lives (Mayer et al., 2021; Runyan, 1982, Schultz & Lawrence, 2017; see also Mayer & Kőváry, 2019).

It should be noted that our sample was purposeful in that research team members have particularly followed the careers and personal lives of King and Osaka. Certainly, there are many outstanding racial minority tennis superstars across cultures who have promoted equity and social justice, and their profiles are worthy of

presentation. Among these extraordinary personalities are Serena and Venus Williams, Arthur Ashe, Ora Washington, Althea Gibson, Wang Qiang, Gabriela Sabatini, Guillermo Vilas, and Pancho Segura to highlight a few.

We hope that our readers have enjoyed the brief stories of King and Osaka presented here and found these two psychological profiles fair and balanced. We invite readers to consider conducting their own psychobiographical research on non-WEIRD-WMHC sports personalities.

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**Prim Siripipat**   is a Ph.D. student at Fordham University's counseling psychology program. Prim was a former top ten nationally-ranked junior tennis player and a member of the Duke Women's National Champion Tennis team. After graduating from college with a B.A. in sociology, she spent 19 years in sports broadcasting, becoming an award-winning TV/radio personality and journalist for various networks, including ESPN. Prim obtained two masters', including an M.S.Ed. in mental health counseling from Fordham's Lincoln Center campus, and is currently pursuing her doctoral degree with hopes of helping the athlete population beyond sport.

**Carina Chen**   is a counseling psychology doctoral student at the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University's Lincoln Center (Manhattan) Campus. Her current research interests are in the areas of mental health for athletes, Asian Americans, and third-culture kids, and she most recently studied the behavioral aspects of substance use disorders. A former competitive tennis player, she began playing tennis at 4 years old and represented Hong Kong in international tournaments before competing in team and individual events representing Wellesley College.

**Joseph G. Ponterotto**   (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and Coordinator of the School Counseling Program in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University's Lincoln Center (Manhattan) Campus. His primary teaching and research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling, psychobiography, career counseling, qualitative research methods, clinical assessment, and the history of psychology.

**Part V**
# Theoretical and Reflective Contemporary Perspectives and Future

# My Psychoanalytic Psychobiography and Methodology

**Paul H. Elovitz**

**Abstract** While sharing a common humanness, all people, cultures, and ethnicities are special and different. If Joseph Henrich is correct, as he asserts in *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous* (2020), then the West is the weirdest society. While Elovitz finds weird to be an unscientific term, the West certainly has been a change agent that has broken with so many traditions and run roughshod over its cultures and ethnicities, as well as nature itself. Yet its focus on analysis, democracy, individualism, material prosperity, and so forth provides many of the conditions for psychobiographical and other psychological work. Humans need major cultural exchanges around our planet, including through the in-depth study of the lives of people in all cultures. People need to know each other's psychology at the micro and macro levels. Elovitz believes that it will be very good if non-Western peoples can have the benefits of democracy, education, material well-being, etc., while maintaining their specialness and enriching knowledge.

**Keywords** Countertransference · Creativity · Innovation · Nasmyth ·
Psychoanalytic psychobiography

## 1   Introduction

Psychobiography provides in-depth insights into the lives of people (Schultz, 2005). Psychobiography is about going beyond what is spelt out by biography. It focuses on the why, exploring the motives of an individual and sometimes a group (prosopography). Psychobiography is much more explanatory, interpretive, and comprehensive than biography. Usually, it will start with the early childhood experiences of an individual but then go beyond those origins to an in-depth understanding of the subject's personality and life decisions, drawing on psychoanalytic, psychological,

P. H. Elovitz (✉)
*Clio's Psyche* of the Psychohistory Forum, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, USA

psychohistorical, and other scholarship. In my half-century experience, psychobiographers often come from fields of history, journalism, literary studies, psychoanalysis, and psychology.

Researching and writing about the lives of interesting and important people is an incredibly significant form of scholarship that more colleagues should engage in. We need more quality psychobiography, which requires an enormous amount of work to deepen our understanding of the human condition. I encourage this study in my roles as editor in chief of a psychohistorical journal, a midwife of all forms of psychohistory (including applied psychoanalysis, political psychology, and psychobiography) since 1975, and co-creator of the Psychobiography Research and Publication Group. The greater part of my quite rewarding in-depth study of lives has revolved around American presidential candidates and presidents. The electoral timetable and immense amount of family background, childhood, and personality characteristics brought into the public arena have spurred on my career as a presidential psychobiographer. While this form of psychobiography has special challenges, it also has incredible rewards, especially if the candidate is elected president; then new materials are brought out that confirm or question my assessments and enlarge my knowledge, leading to subsequent articles and book chapters.

Some essential psychobiographical tools are empathy, endless curiosity; a focus on coping mechanisms and emotions, strong respect for factual evidence, and a willingness to search for unconscious motivation. In studying lives, the researcher needs to be able to probe the details of family background, body images, literal and metaphorical dreams, fantasies, identifications, role models, and responses to failures and traumas. Listening is the most essential tool of the psychoanalyst and the psychobiographer. The psychobiographer must gather facts assiduously, listen carefully to the conscious and unconscious evidence, and probe to find personality traits and unconscious motivations.

In the process of listening to the evidence, I have developed a methodology that focuses on the difference between conscious and unconscious motivation. There are many elements that I search; however, it is very important to keep in mind that I avoid using diagnostic codes. Placing a psychiatric diagnostic label on someone (often a disdained political leader) usually closes the door to future investigation and knowledge rather than opening it. In working in a clinic and with insurance companies, I have had to list diagnostic labels while always knowing that they are the most tentative of hypotheses. I am reminded of when, at the psychoanalytic low-cost clinic, a very experienced intake worker nervously assigned to me a paranoid man in his forties for treatment. She labelled him paranoid and feared his delusions. I soon discovered that his delusions were relatively safe in that they involved his projecting them onto and then raging at a man from a distance (e.g. the mailman). Although I was treating him twice weekly for almost a year, there was never evidence of him acting out his delusions. He remained tormented by fantasies formed in his adolescence, which horrified him so much that he would not let me near their origin and meaning. While I helped this very troubled man gain some insight into his fantasies and maintain a normal day-to-day life, in retrospect, I regret that I was not a more

experienced analyst and that he had such firm defences, which appeared to be based on a profound sense of shame.

Psychobiography is not the same as pathography. It is about deepening our knowledge and opening new doors of enquiry. Nor is psychobiography hagiography. Idealising a subject, as was done in writing glowing, one-dimensional lives of the mediaeval saints, denies their humanity. Good psychobiography shows the full human being. Early practitioners of Freudian psychobiography were often rightfully denounced for being reductionistic, thus fitting their subjects into a Procrustean bed, which involved lots of stretching of facts or cutting off limbs to fit in the theoretical resting place. Freud was a brilliant and courageous searcher for the truth who suffered from not having, according to his own theory, a proper analysis because he had no transference object (psychoanalyst). He also became rigid in defence of many of his early ideas and his intellectual breakthroughs, which were often attacked. Like Freud, I look to childhood materials in starting my psychobiographies, but this is only the beginning, not the end.

While most psychoanalytically based or informed psychobiographies are of people from white, European/American, industrialised, rich, democratic cultures, this is only the beginning of a methodology suitable for the deeper understanding of peoples of all colours, cultures, and areas of our globe.

## 2 Research into the Creators of Modern Industrial Society

The psychobiography I most favour and advocate for is based upon adaptability, childhood, creativity, defence mechanisms, empathy, innovation, interpersonal relations, personality, and resourcefulness in overcoming life's disappointments and traumas. In 1980–1981, I began a major prosopographical[1] research project of 92 innovators from the English Industrial Revolution (ca. 1760–1851). I sought to test the hypothesis that it was less abusive childrearing that enabled these men to create the first modern urban industrial society, which would serve as a model for the modern world. A sabbatical semester led me to England and Scotland where I gathered materials from archaeological sites, libraries, museums, the Patent Office, rare book collections, and other locations. Despite diligently searching during my two trips to the British Isles, there simply was not enough evidence to prove or disprove my improved childrearing hypothesis. Nevertheless, I learnt a great deal while studying some fascinating individuals and historical developments.

At this point, my transference and countertransference to my research subjects need to be mentioned. As the son of striving Jewish immigrants with a strong

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[1]Prosopographical, or a multi-person biography, was originated in the work of Sir Lewis Namier who did pathbreaking work on the members of the eighteenth-century British House of Commons during the American Revolutionary War. An outstanding example of this genre is David R. Beisel's *The Suicidal Embrace: Hitler, the Allies, and the Origins of the Second World War.*

concern for disadvantaged minorities and ordinary people (as opposed to those who had the advantage of family connection and wealth), I was especially attuned to the contributions of Scotts, Quakers, and other nonconformists (i.e. those who would not accept the official Anglican religion and were therefore barred from the English universities and politics). This led me to teach my students that these disadvantages led the discriminated against families to disproportionately become pioneers in the creation of the new society because they initially were barred from marrying into the gentry and sending their sons to Cambridge and Oxford. Consequently, more sons of innovators strengthened the family businesses, therefore reinforcing the industrial process. I identified with these minorities because of the quota on the number of Jewish students that Dartmouth, Yale, and other elite Protestant Ivy League colleges when I applied made me attuned to these issues. This is simply another example of how the life experiences and values of scholars influence how they approach their materials.

## 3   Nasmyth as an Example of My Minimal Theory Psychobiography

James Hall Nasmyth (1808–1890) is an industrial innovator whose life I am presenting to illustrate the importance of family background, childhood, experience, and values as an example of my scholarly approach. He was a Scottish-born British innovator who provided a wealth of information for the psychobiographer in his autobiography *James Nasmyth: Engineer—An autobiography* (2018). Jamie was the youngest of four sons of the striving Edinburgh portrait and landscape painter Alexander, who "was always anxious to give pleasure to his children" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 76), was quite mechanically inclined, and, while teaching all of his children to be self-sufficient, assisted his oldest brother and his youngest son in establishing their careers in London. Four-year-old Jamie enjoyed following his father into his workroom and was soon working with the tools himself. Although his father tried correcting the young boy's preference for his left hand, his methods were not harsh. He soon decided to let Jamie "go on in your own way in the use of your left hand" while fearing "you will be an awkward fellow in everything requiring handiness in life" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 68). Alexander's eldest son became a successful London portrait painter, while his youngest son accepted his alleged inadequacies due to his left-handed preference and did not start painting as a hobby until later in life, then proving to be rather talented (Nasmyth, 2018). Indeed, his elder brother, Patrick, and six of his sisters, were also accomplished painters (Cooksey, n.d.).

Alexander allowed Jamie plenty of time and activities in his workroom with mechanics being the area that this future engineer felt he could thrive in despite his left-handed preference. Young Nasmyth went to bed thinking of different projects; indeed, as a son with his own bedroom, he soon set up a brass foundry in it. For bigger projects, he went to his father's workshop. When this workshop was

inadequate even at age 13, he used the professional machinery in the factories of his friends' fathers and would lend a hand in the work being conducted (Nasmyth, 2018).

As Alexander also taught his son to be a careful observer and an excellent draughtsman, Jamie sketched outlines for his father's portraits and mechanical devices for others, so he was seen as a useful youth to have around. The mill owners and their foremen admired the growing talents of this left-handed but ambidextrous adolescent. When the boy heard about railways being built in England, he was soon making a train as part of an exhibition so others could enjoy the streets of Edinburgh in it. Again, his father's connections as a portrait painter to important patrons led to this project being financed partly by Edinburgh's leaders (Nasmyth, 2018). While his elder brother had been delegated to become a portrait painter, Jamie's left-handedness headed him in the direction of the mechanical arts, becoming an engineer. His eldest brother was impractical with money, unlike James, who "determined, after I had obtained a position, not to cost my father another shilling" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 144) and saved his money, which later enabled him to start his own business at a young age.

There could not have been a more fortuitous time for a young and well-educated Scotsman to head South. Of course, there were issues of luck as well as parental delegation and societal assistance. As a 6-year-old, Jamie fell down the stone stairs of his house but was saved from brain damage by landing on some carpets being carried in at the right moment. As a schoolboy learning English in preparation to make his career in the English centre of the Industrial Revolution, his interest was on mechanics, not the intricacies of language. This infuriated the Scottish speaking boy's English teacher, who went from cuffing him on the side of the head and hitting his hands with a leather strap to savagely hitting his head against a wall, leaving him bleeding and bedridden for over a week. While teachers at the time were allowed enormous latitude in their mistreatment of children, Alexander removed his son from school and threatened to have this prominent and profusely apologising teacher brought before the magistrates. Fortunately, there was no brain damage to block Jamie's road to becoming one of the leading engineers of his era (Nasmyth, 2018).

To launch his mechanically talented son's career, Alexander informally researched and made contact with the best-known and most talented engineer of the time, Henry Maudslay. An English machine tool innovator, tool and die maker, and inventor, Maudslay is considered the founding father of machine tool technology. His inventions were an important component of the Industrial Revolution. Prosperous families offered significant sums of money for their sons to become his apprentices (Nasmyth, 2018).

The Nasmyths, with a family of thirteen, could not afford this expenditure. Furthermore, when father and son arrived at Maudslay's, they discovered that he was no longer accepting apprentices because all too often they hindered his factory's work. But the Nasmyths were not to be deterred. In arranging for the visit to Maudslay's factory in London, they brought, along with letters of introduction, numerous documents, including the sketches of the railway engine Jamie had designed and built (Nasmyth, 2018). As Maudslay proudly showed the visitors

through his works, the hoped-for apprentice observed a worker cleaning ashes and declared he would feel fortunate to do this job. Maudslay commented, "So, you are one of that sort, are you" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 131). When Maudslay was shown Jamie's sketches, he realised that he would soon give the young man a position as his assistant because he was thoroughly impressed with James' abilities as a draughtsman, unusual drive, and mechanical experience.

Alexander Nasmyth carefully guided his son's path, at first finding a fine lodging quite close by, which happened to be next to the theatre district. However, as he told his son years later, they secured a much less welcoming lodging because it was important that Jamie not have the distractions associated with women; a bonnet had been in the nicer lodging. The young man loved his work and soaked up Maudslay's knowledge, having no intention of ever leaving his employ. Tragically, after 2 years, Maudslay fell ill and died. This led to Nasmyth considering taking on a partner and trying his luck in Manchester, the great centre of the new industry (rather like Silicon Valley today) (Nasmyth, 2018).
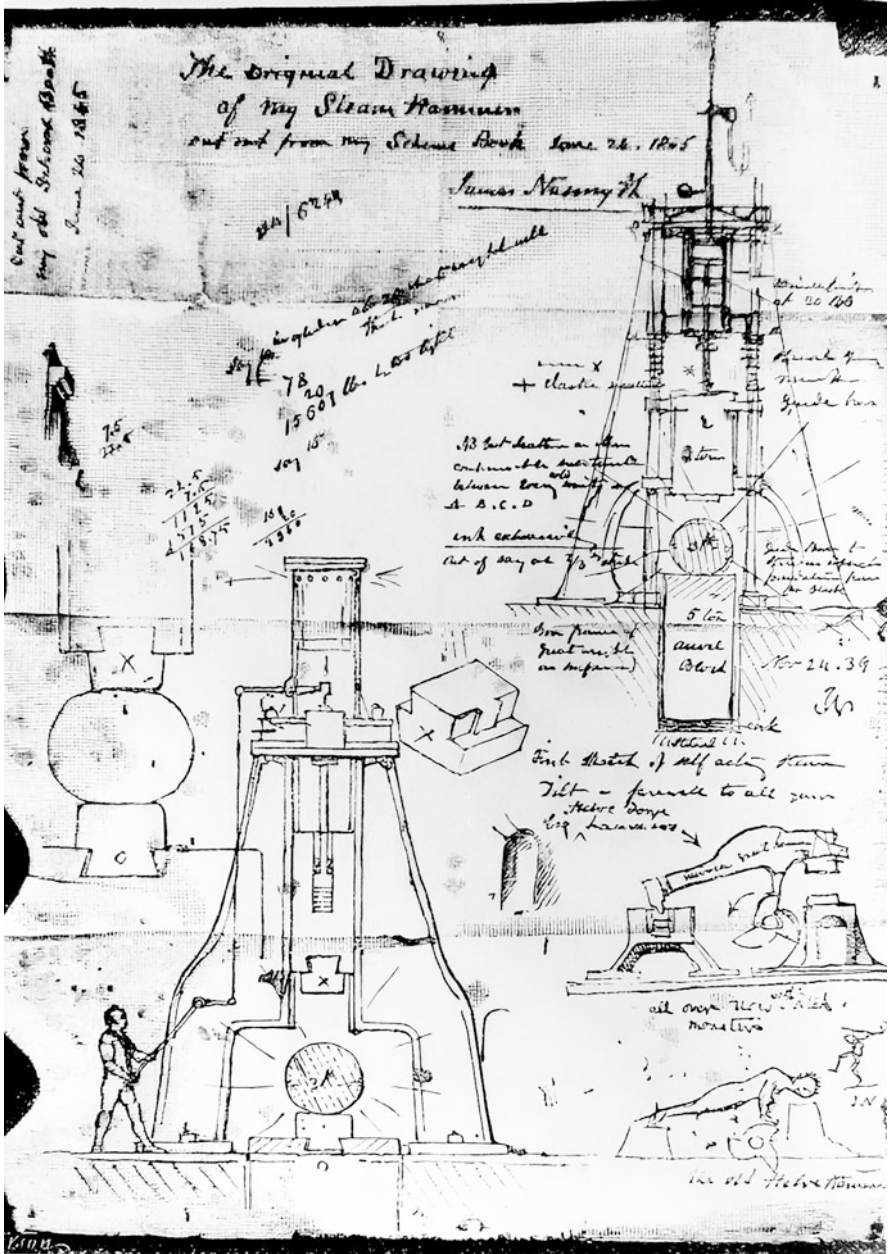
Copy of the Original Sketch in Nasmyth's 1839 Sketchbook

Nasmyth thrived in Manchester. His most famous invention is the huge mechanical steam engine. I came across the enclosed original drawing while looking into his

sketchbook at the Society of Mechanical Engineers in London. From a psychobio-graphical perspective, it is a wonderful case study that shows the creator physically connected to his invention from his body. The sketch was included in his autobiography, where he referred to the steam hammer invention as "my thumping baby" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 243). Amidst many other elements, it shows a human being turning a disc and a devil figure with an axe about to cut off his head. That humanoid figure becomes a mechanical entity or shaft. To me, the axe-wielding devil in the sketch illustrates the enormous anxiety aroused by breaking with the methods, tools, and norms of the father figures, creating something new. When Nasmyth first saw the steam hammer he designed, he proudly declared, "there was my thumping baby" (Nasmyth, 2018, p. 243).

The steam hammer was but one of this successful industrialist's inventions. At age 48, he retired from business, devoting his much of time to astronomy, building his own huge telescope; his work led to a crater on the moon being named Nasmyth. He turned to painting as well. Despite his father's fears about his son James' left-handedness, he had a creative life and fulfilling life (Nasmyth, 2018).

In writing this brief sketch of Nasmyth's life, my focus is on the family environment in which James grew up, his identification with his father's love of the mechanical arts, Alexander's encouragement of his son, and the early love of mechanics. I also explore the connection between the human body and the mechanical steam engine without any phallic references. In doing my research on innovators, initially, the tendency to project human qualities onto machines surprised me. Eighteenth-century inventors' sketches labelled not simply the arms, legs, and teeth of machines but sometimes the "breasts" (referencing the male, not the female, mammary glands).

# 4  Methodology

As a veteran psychoanalytic historian, I am most comfortable focusing on case studies and questions that arise in the course of my research, allowing the theoretical issues to remain latent. Thus, I look to the who, what, where, when, why, and how, accepting that our emotions, fantasies, and unconscious motivations are included in these factors. Starting with the psychoanalytic premise that there are no opposites in the unconscious, this approach leads me to question what is usually seen as binary choices. Consequently, when I see signs of sadism in a subject or patient's behaviour or thoughts, I become more attuned to hints of masochism. Of course, the opposite is also true. Thus, as a psychological historian, I was not surprised that Maximilien de Robespierre, who resigned a judgeship during the Old Regime because of his opposition to the death penalty, sent former comrades and friends to the guillotine during the Reign of Terror to further the Revolution.

Curiosity is the driving force that leads me to continuously look beyond the obvious. Experiencing, being taught, and reading extensively about countertransference as well as my more than a decade of supervision (control analysis) with nine

senior analysts have attuned me to aspects of other human beings that I was previously unaware of. However, in the language of the layman, it is "trusting one's guts" (in psychoanalysis, we call it the countertransference) that is most useful when probing the unconscious of a subject.

This brings to mind a patient who was close to his mother and sought earnestly to be a good person. Although he had previously lived and had sex with a girlfriend, years later, he was unable to consummate his marriage to a coworker for its first 6 months. As I encouraged this nice young man to tolerate what was to him an extremely embarrassing situation, I did not even consciously think of "Madonna–whore complex", which Freud develop in his rubric of psychic impotence as indicated by Bernstein (2011, p. 106). I simply felt confident that he would overcome his sense that his lovely wife would somehow become like a prostitute if he had sex with her. Finally, while playfully wrestling with each other, they were able to consummate their marriage. As much as we are inclined to make light of sex today, it can be extremely scary because it may involve many complex elements such as aggression, assertion, commitment, eroticism, forbidden behaviours, love, procreation, revealing oneself, tenderness, and much else. One theory cannot encapsulate it all, although some give us leads in our search for understanding as healers and psychobiographers.

My main point here is that binary explanations involved in proving or disproving a theory are too limiting. Theories can be quite useful, but they can also be like the proverbial hammers to which everything looks like a nail. I am quite comfortable with complexity; indeed, when I finish a psychobiographical study, I do not incline to believe that this is the final word on the subject because more evidence may be forthcoming. As a scholar, I may gain additional knowledge, if nothing more than from the experience of reaching another stage of life. Other biographers, based on their own life experiences, personalities, and training, to say nothing of the culture in which they live, may have additional insights that might never have crossed my mind.

In my analytic training during our first psychoanalytic case presentation seminar, I was struck by how each candidate applied a different theoretical framework based on the case presented by the instructor. As the seminar progressed, the extent to which each of us inclined to favour particular approaches based on our own personalities and favoured theories became more apparent. At the time, the works of Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut were hotly debated. Psychoanalytic teachers spoke of Kohut's extreme narcissism, which fits into his theory of healthy narcissism. The more I learnt, the more I came to believe that theories tend to reflect some basic needs of their formulator. Theories can be extremely valuable but are best kept in the background rather than risking their being forcefully used to squeeze a patient into one.

## 5 The Importance of Facts and the Implementation of Primary and Secondary Sources

Rather than beginning with theory, I see facts as the starting point of all psychobiographical research, including the specifics of family history, birth and birth order, childhood, emotions, fantasies, personality, and life traumas. Primary sources such as autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs (by contemporaries) are essential but not sufficient. As invaluable as they are, there are pitfalls in starting with the subject's own words. While I do not regret having started my study of Adolf Hitler with *Mein Kampf* (1925/1943), his *Letters and Notes* (Hitler & Mazer, 1973), and his speeches, there was no doubt that he lied and distorted aspects of his life for political and psychological reasons. These were manageable because I could rely on the research of many contemporaries, journalists, scholars, and the intelligence services in their search for the truth.

Occasionally, as a political psychobiographer, starting with the sources created some problems. Donald John Trump's numerous books, starting with *The Art of the Deal* (1987), are a prime example. While his dictation of the books reveals much of his outgoing personality, at times his accounts vary from his reality far more than any other presidential candidate I researched. I regretted accepting certain points as facts in my earliest (March 2016b issue of *Clio's Psyche*) of 12 publications on or about him. It went to the printer in 2015 and focused on his celebrity politics and psychobiography. The talented ghostwriter for his book subsequently reported that Trump never seemed to read a book and came out strongly against electing him president (Mayer, 2016). Subsequently, in "A presidential psychobiographer's countertransference to Trump" (Elovitz, Fall 2016a, pp. 1–8), and in a class shortly before the election, I broke with my 40-year tradition of withholding my presidential preference from readers and students.

Other examples of relevant facts are quite numerous. As mentioned before, they include birth order: Frank Sulloway (1997) argues that in America, younger sons are more innovative than their older brothers. In our history, we have had 45 presidents, of whom 15 have been eldest sons and seven youngest, with most being middle sons, and none have been an only child. The complexities of their birth order are not sufficiently investigated. It is my impression that parental identification of artists, industrialists, and leaders of all sorts is quite important but has not been sufficiently studied to draw definite conclusions. There is more data on posthumously born United States presidents because we have had three (Jackson, Hayes, and Clinton), and it should be explored if searching for their father may have been a motivation that led to the presidency. There are so many different styles of attachment, which would make for interesting studies, as would comparative parental delegation. In writing psychobiographies, I always pay close attention to the individual's mechanisms of defence.

We also need secondary sources of those who have some emotional distance from the individual and are more likely to be checking the facts carefully and challenging the assumptions of their subjects. Certain journalists who are financed by major

publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wallstreet Journal*, write very fine early and psychologically inclined biographies as opposed to the poor quality of much that is written about contenders for the presidency by political advocates and especially adversaries.

Empathy is an essential element for the psychobiographer. It is often difficult to establish or maintain because the subject's activities may run against the values of the psychobiographer. Nevertheless, I have found ways of putting aside my hatred for the actions of people I am researching, writing, and lecturing on. Hitler is a prime example because he organised the killing of a large number of my relatives in Poland and Ukraine, who were known by my parents and unable to escape the reach of the Nazis. The first step in doing this was to confront my hatred and recognise that I would have to work to find ways around it. This I accomplished by focusing on how a bright child beloved by his mother could become such a murderous individual. In teaching, I call my lecture, "Hitler (1889–1945): Humanity Betrayed". When looking at the murderous Hitler as a hurt and abused child, it became easier to proceed.

As previously stated, my approach is based mostly on my curiosity, which leads to question after question as I immerse myself in the subject's life. In contrast, academic psychologists seem to be oriented to applying or testing theories. I am led to my questions mostly by societal emotions that I observe or feel, as well as my experience as a historian and psychoanalyst. As a therapist, I was trained to follow the strong or unusual emotion, or the lack thereof, at a time when one would anticipate it. As a student of the process by which American presidents are elected and govern, I follow their relationship to strong societal emotions, examining how they relate to them, often following popular emotions while claiming to lead the nation. For example, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, George W. Bush organised the growing fear and anger in the country into his War on Terror.

The considerable problems faced by academic psychologists in doing psychobiography can result in those willing to undertake this valuable endeavour devoting enormous time and energy into justifying their actions to colleagues. This results in their turning to theory to justify their work, which in turn can result in the whole person getting lost in the parts. The difficult and distracting problems academic psychologists face are illustrated after Claude-Hélène Mayer and I started the Psychobiography Research and Publication Group in the fall of 2021; the first request for collegial feedback focused on the ethical issues involved in a promising research study, not on the actual psychobiography. My concern is that this is a distraction and that worrying about justification could result in considering into which box to squeeze the evidence. At the minimum, it is time and energy not devoted to the actual psychobiography.

Using myself as a major instrument as a therapist helped train me to be an Eriksonian participant observer in conducting my research. After decades of working as a psychoanalytically trained psychohistorian, I assumed this role with caution. A very long and deep personal psychoanalysis, a lengthy group analysis, 10 plus years of control analyses with nine different senior analysts, sharing my thoughts before publication with fellow researchers who do not hesitate to contradict my

conclusions, submitting most of my writings to a double-blind refereeing system, and a propensity to question my judgements increases my cautious confidence in my conclusions.

## 6  Probing the Unconscious

Research comes from or relates to some deep personal needs of which the researcher may or may not be aware when she/he starts their project. The self is the invaluable instrument of research despite the fantasy prevalent in the academic fields of psychology and history that to be objective one must separate one's personal feelings and thoughts from scholarship. These ideas are normally drummed into graduate students by professors who disdain the unconscious. In Rutgers' excellent history programme, a classmate who wanted to openly do psychobiography was literally and harshly told by our professor to leave Rutgers and go to Harvard where William Langer had (unsuccessfully) advocated doing psychohistory based on psychoanalysis. I was pleased when I learnt this Renaissance professor never earned tenure at Rutgers. Nevertheless, in my days of searching for an academic position at what historians called the "meat" or "cattle market" at the American Historical Association's (AHA) annual convention, the most colleagues I saw stuffed into a room and crowded in the corridor hoping to catch some of the knowledge being relayed was when Robert Jay Lifton gave a talk on some of his psychohistorical work on Nazi Germany.

Generally, the work of those colleagues who devote their careers to understanding the human psyche is ignored by most professional historians, who prefer to rely on their own uneducated, informal sense of psychology. However, they sometimes have trouble avoiding the much more insightful work of those who concentrate on deep psychological knowledge. Thus, one will find that historian Ian Kershaw denouncing psychohistorical studies of Hitler while publishing his own in the next paragraph. Still, no matter how hard they try to place psychohistorians as beyond the pale, our work seeps into their thinking and scholarship.

The extremely widely read historian who won two Pulitzer Prizes, Barbara Tuchman, spoke to the merits of my field when she famously wrote "All good history is psychohistory". I would add that the best biography is in fact psychobiography, whether or not the biographer acknowledges or even knows it. The self is a central instrument in our work despite all the efforts of most graduate professors to get their students to separate themselves from their subjects (Beisel, 1979, pp. 1–6). As I have discovered in my professional life as a psychohistorian trained and practising as an analyst, it is emotions that give us the energy to do our best work. I tell my students that we live in our emotions; therefore, emotions should be examined and understood rather than separated from our research. This is why I so openly practise and advocate for Erikson's disciplined subjectivity.

It is much easier to advocate the use of self as the research instrument, that is, disciplined subjectivity, than to practise it. I contend that human beings never fully

understand themselves and their motivations, but by constantly probing oneself and being quite open to one's unconscious and the insights of colleagues, we can get closer to our motivations and realities in doing our work. I sometimes maintain a research journal, which includes day and night dreams, humour relevant to the subject, off-hand remarks about it, and parapraxis (errors revealing unconscious motivations, memory lapses, slips of the tongue, etc.). I often pick up my "Freudian Sips" coffee cup as a reminder. In this process, it is easy to delude oneself, which is one reason why I have other trusted colleagues read virtually everything I write before publication.

The passion analysts and intellectuals feel about politics is one of the reasons why I have struggled quite hard against psychopathologising presidents and political leaders generally. If political psychology and psychobiography are associated only with disdained presidents and other politicians, then our field will never gain the acceptance it deserves.

While I have never trained in academic psychology, I have associated with numerous academic psychologists throughout my career. Initially, I felt very disappointed that the ones I encountered were so hesitant to discuss the whole person rather than examine just aspects of personality. Young students sign up for psychology courses to learn about themselves, their families, and others, only to discover that to make it as a psychology major in most universities in the USA, they need to identify with the research methodologies and projects that their professors are excited about, which rarely includes the whole person.

## 7    Dreams as a Useful Tool for Psychobiography

Dreams, as Freud said, are "the royal road to the unconscious" (1900). Dreaming of our subjects, like those of patients, can provide valuable insights into their personalities and issues. My dreams about candidates and presidents are an invaluable tool that I use to probe my unconscious feelings towards them. During my early research on President Carter, I dreamt that I was his psychoanalyst and realised a lot about my transference as well as the fact that I feared his self-defeating tendencies reflected in his schoolwork and Annapolis diary that his mother had shown me before his election. Because I was still inexperienced as a psychobiographer and psychotherapist, this dream led me to discontinue writing the book I was working on about Carter.

While dreams are an incredibly useful tool for the psychobiographer, they are unfortunately used insufficiently. Academic psychologists with their preference for quantitative evidence are not inclined to utilise these dreams in their scholarship. Historians and policymakers who do not see themselves as being psychological in their approach fail to have psychological insights that would be invaluable or recognise them in others. For example, I came across a wonderful article by a Russian American historian about the dreams of Peter the Great of Russia, only to learn from the writer that he discontinued this line of enquiry because of his

colleagues' lack of interest. In terms of policymakers, including those defending our national security, a prime example is an Osama Bin Laden playing soccer against Americans dream that I published in *Clio's Psyche* (Grollnick, 2002, p. 97), which is a prediction of the 9–11 terror attack. Unfortunately, the dream was noted and analysed after Bin Laden achieved his goal of getting Americans to mostly create more terrorism by engaging in George W. Bush's War on Terror.

The dreams that interest me most are about adaptation, creativity, innovation, invention, and problem-solving. As a psychotherapist, often I was frustrated in my efforts to get my patients to probe their own dreams because patients look to the clinician, whose job is mostly that of a facilitator, for the answers, which lay within themselves. Fortunately, analytic candidates and those who have been in analysis for a while hopefully become quite proficient in analysing their own dreams and may be ready to end their treatment when they do not need their analyst very often. I had the good fortune of discovering the dreamwork of Montague Ullman (Limmer & Ullman, 1987), who created a methodology of enabling ordinary people to quickly analyse their dreams in a small group setting. Before long, I trained with him and devised a useful methodology for the psychohistorical exploration of dreams, which extends to even long-deceased people.

Not surprisingly, women appeared to me to be more adept at analysing their dreams than men since they tended not to be as self-censoring and often talked about their dreams to their friends. It impressed me how a window designer for elegant New York department stores who came to me for marital counselling had used her dreams to work out her design issues. Unfortunately, when her domestic life became disrupted, she temporarily lost this valuable ability. I was so impressed with the value of dreams that before long I was writing a book entitled *Creativity in Dreams*, which unfortunately never got published as I was once again distracted by the incredibly time-consuming process of probing the psychobiography of presidential candidates. I intend to eventually uncover it from my files and write another article on the subject.

I am looking forward to the time when women will be the most prolific psycho-biographers. They are inclined to be better listeners than men and are more attuned to the feelings of people around them. Women tend to be more open to their emotions, childhood, and dreams while also generally being less competitive than men. In recent history, they have made enormous strides in academia and clinical history, although often at the cost of following the more scientific model of the academic psychologist, which I find to be unfortunate.

## 8   Conclusion

Psychobiography provides an opportunity to gain insights into the conscious and unconscious lives of the most interesting and important people as well as of the ordinary. Although there has been great resistance in the academic history and psychology community to the study of lives, lately, it has been making headway

among academic psychologists in South Africa such as in the *South African Journal of Psychology* and around the world. This chapter focuses on the approach of a psychoanalytic psychobiographer showing the relationship between working with patients as well as psychobiological subjects, living and deceased. A major example is a brief psychobiography of James Nasmyth as he is an exemplar of the English Industrial Revolution's creators. There were sometimes striking tendencies to project parts of the body into machines by some innovators.

In discussing my methodology, I highlight the value of experiencing long-term therapy, psychoanalytic training, and the uses of countertransference. The value of examining one's countertransference is stressed with examples gleaned from doing psychotherapy and presidential psychobiography. There is a considerable emphasis on probing the unconscious through day and night dreams and parapraxis. The major focal point is on a psychobiography emphasising adaptation, childhood, creativity, innovation, invention, overcoming trauma, problem-solving, and the avoidance of psychopathology as a way of showing its enormous value in understanding the human condition.

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**Paul H. Elovitz** is a founding member and past president of the International Psychohistorical Association (1978–) who continues to serve on its leadership council after presenting at all 46 annual conferences. In 1982 he founded the Psychohistory Forum to nurture psychohistorical research and continues to head its Executive Board. It has virtual and in-person meetings in New York City as well as at international conferences and in 1994 it started publishing its scholarship with *Clio's Psyche*, of which he is Editor-in-Chief. Currently, with a colleague from South Africa, he is starting an international psychobiography research and publication group. Prof Elovitz is a historian, psychoanalytic researcher, and author of over 400 publications, covering presidential psychobiography, teaching, documenting the field of psychohistory, and much more. He is trained as a psychoanalyst and practiced for almost 30 years before retiring to devote more time to scholarship and teaching. In 2019, his psychoanalytic institute honored him with the title Research Psychoanalyst. *The Many Roads of the Builders of Psychohistory* is an edited volume containing autobiographies of 32 contributors to the field, four biographies of them, and one interview. It is written as a companion volume to *The Making of Psychohistory* (Routledge, 2018), and he's planning an edited volume of the lives of psychobiographers in conjunction with the establishment of the psychobiography research subgroup of the Psychohistory Forum. Six of his prior books are edited. Before becoming a founding faculty member at Ramapo College, he taught at Temple, Rutgers, and Fairleigh Dickinson universities. At the moment, he is scheduling the teaching of a psychobiography course at a psychoanalytic institute. Dr. Elovitz may be contacted at cliospsycheeditor@gmail.com.

# Epilogue: Reflections on the Futures of Psychobiography

Joseph G. Ponterotto, Paul J. P. Fouché, Claude-Hélène Mayer, and Roelf van Niekerk

Having explored a diverse international body of psychobiography, the editors now build onto the vivid history and development of psychobiography and present ideas for possible future directions in psychobiography with special regard to extending beyond a WEIRD focus.

Before projecting forward, let us examine some of the specific contributions of the current set of chapters. These can be organised into four areas: expanded scope of coverage across time, country, race, gender, and occupation; theoretical advancement and expansion; methodological developments; and ethics in psychobiography.

J. G. Ponterotto
Division of Psychological and Educational Services, Graduate School of Education, Fordham University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: ponterotto@fordham.edu

P. J. P. Fouché
Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa
e-mail: fouchejp@ufs.ac.za

C.-H. Mayer (✉)
Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, School of Management, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
e-mail: claudemayer@gmx.net

R. van Niekerk
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha, South Africa
e-mail: Roelf.vanniekerk@mandela.ac.za

# 1 Expanded Scope of Coverage Across Time, Country, Race, Gender, and Occupation

In the past decade, the psychobiography community has responded to the call (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) to expand the scope of psychobiography beyond the traditional White, heterosexual, male subject and to include more subjects who represent racial/ethnic minority groups, women, and non-WEIRD research contexts (Adler & Singer, 2022; Fouché, 2015; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Mayer et al., 2021a, b). This volume furthers Fouché and van Niekerk's (2010) initial loud call for the internalisation of psychobiography. Our collection of 18 single and multiple case study psychobiography chapters focuses on the lives of 17 deceased historic and public figures and nine living figures (inclusive of Elovitz's autobiographical reflections). The deceased historic figures span millennia, going back to the Egyptian pharaoh, Hatshepsut (fifteenth century BCE, van Peer, chapter "Looking on Darkness Which the Blind De See: Shakespeare's Psychobiography in a Social Context"), through the lives of Socrates and Jesus (Citlak, chapter "Socrates and Jesus: Between the Honour-Shame Cultural Code and The Twardowski School"), past the life spaces of political leaders George Washington and Mahatma Gandhi (Sharma, chapter "The Founders: Comparing Democracies in India and the US Through Cultural Biographies"), up through historic figures only deceased in the last two decades.

The living subjects profiled include mostly renowned public figures such as political leaders Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (Harry & van Niekerk, chapter "Tragic Optimism: A Psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai") and Angela Merkel and Graça Machel (Mayer, chapters "Graça Simbine Machel: Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist" and "Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD"), tennis superstar and social justice activist Billie Jean King (Siripipat et al., chapter "From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice Through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile"), the popular Chinese actress and comedian Fan Bing and Zhou Libo, respectively (Sollmann, chapter "Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and "Learning""), the iconic Oprah Winfrey (Mayer, chapter "Oprah Gail Winfrey in Psychobiographical Perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy"), and our only private citizen (non-public figure) of focus, Lonnie B. (Hamlett & Singer, chapter ""Water the Plants, Not the Weeds": A Narrative Identity Study of Black Resilience in the Aftermath of the Great Migration"). It will be of interest to monitor in future psychobiography publications the percentage of deceased versus still living public figures studied and the ethical implications thereof.

## 2   Theoretical Advancement and Expansion

Psychological theory anchors psychobiography and distinguishes our discipline from more traditional historical biography. The present collection of psychobiographies presented a wide variety of theoretical models anchoring the research. The great psychobiographer, James W. Anderson (1981), once noted that psychoanalytic/psychodynamic theories, given their depth and richness, can transcend time, place, and culture in astute application. In our collection of psychobiographies we see once again the lasting value and application of grand theories (Demorest, 2005), such as Carl Jung on Angela Merkel and Graça Machel (Mayer, chapter "Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD"); Viktor Frankl on Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (Harry & van Niekerk, chapter "Tragic Optimism: A Psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai") and Billie Jean King (Siripipat et al., chapter "From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile"); Melanie Klein and Ronald Fairbairn's object relations theory on Leni Riefenstahl (Kelley, chapter ""Impressionen Unter Druck": A Psychobiography of Leni Riefenstahl"); Erik Erikson on Graça Simbine Machel (Mayer, chapter "Graça Simbine Machel: Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist"), Flora Tristan (Lodi-Smith et al., chapter "The Pedagogical Value of Psychobiography as Illustrated by an Examination of Eriksonian Psychosocial Development in the Life of Flora Tristan"), Billie Jean King, and Naomi Osaka (Siripipat et al., chapter "From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile"); Irvin Yalom's existential theory on Oprah Winfrey (Mayer, chapter "Oprah Gail Winfrey in Psychobiographical Perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy"); and Alfred Adler on Naomi Osaka (Siripipat et al., chapter "From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile").

One subspecialty within psychobiography has been recently labelled "careerography" (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2021). South African research teams led by Roelf van Niekerk were among the first to integrate career-specific theories into psychobiographical study (van Niekerk et al., 2015, 2019), and this line of research focus continues in this volume with a career development focus on Nonkuleleko Gobodo (Freedman & van Niekerk, chapter "Defying the Odds: A Psychobiographical Study of Nonkuleleko Gobodo's Career Development") and Albertina Sisulu (von Niekerk & Freedman, chapter "The Career Development of Albertina Sisulu"), with both studies anchored in the established career development theory of Greenhaus et al. Complementing the South African perspective is a North American perspective with the career development focus of author James Baldwin anchored in the "work as a calling theory" (Reynolds et al., chapter "In Search of a Calling: A Careerography of James Baldwin").

Psychobiography also serves as a test of theory to an individual lived life, and as such, this research can critique and expand theory in sociocultural context. And indeed, in our collection of psychobiographies a number of authors deconstruct, critique, and then advance developments in long-standing theories, such as Lodi-Smith et al.'s (chapter "The Pedagogical Value of Psychobiography as Illustrated by an Examination of Eriksonian Psychosocial Development in the Life of Flora Tristan") review of Erik Erikson's theory, Nel and Burnell's (chapter "The Moral Development of Albertina Sisulu Through Classic, Feminist and Indigenous Southern African Lenses") critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, and Mayer's (chapter "Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD") constructive critique of Murdock's Heroine journey model.

Importantly, this collection of studies contributes to expanding the range of theories psychobiographers rely on, and they model the application of more indigenous and culture-specific theories. Among newer Western theories are the feminist developmental model of Carol Gilligan applied to Albertina Sisulu (Nel & Burnell, chapter "The Moral Development of Albertina Sisulu Through Classic, Feminist and Indigenous Southern African Lenses"); Wong's positive psychology 2.0 in relation to Oprah Winfrey (Mayer, chapter "Oprah Gail Winfrey in Psychobiographical Perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy"); the Twardowski school's theory of "striving for power" applied to Socrates and Jesus (Citlak, chapter "Socrates and Jesus: Between the Honour-Shame Cultural Code and the Twardowski School"); Duffy et al.'s "work as a calling" theory in the study of James Baldwin (Reynolds et al., chapter "In Search of a Calling: A Careerography of James Baldwin"); and Murdock's model of the heroine's journey in the analysis of Angela Merkel and Graça Machel (Mayer, chapter "Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine's Journeys of Two Women Leaders Beyond WEIRD"). We expect future psychobiography research to continue the expansion and application of theories from not only psychology but from related disciplines as well.

A valuable contribution of this volume is the introduction and application of more culturally indigenous and culture-specific theories. Chief among these is Fouché et al.'s review and application of the integrated African psychology perspective (IAPP) model as applied to Zenzile Miriam Makeba (chapter "Zenzile Miriam Makeba: A Psychobiography of 'Mama Africa' from an Integrated African Psychology Perspective"); Mayer's integration of Attoe's African God-purpose theory in exploring the life of Oprah Winfrey (chapter "Oprah Gail Winfrey in Psychobiographical Perspectives: Meaning in Life in Existential and African Philosophy"); Black resilience models in the narrative identity profile of Lonnie B. (Hamlett & Singer, chapter ""Water the Plants, Not the Weeds": A Narrative Identity Study of Black Resilience in the Aftermath of the Great Migration"); Mayer's incorporation of social change theory and types in her study of Graça Eimbine Machel (chapter "Graça Simbine Machel: Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist"); and Cross's nigesence/Black racial identity theory and Rocquemore and Laszloff's biracial identity theory in the profile of Naomi Osaka (Siripipat

et al., chapter "From Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice Through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile").

Going forward, we highly encourage increased usage of indigenous and culture-specific theories in profiling a more culturally diverse subject base. Among important theoretical directions for psychobiography are racial and ethnic identity models, including biracial and multiracial identity; critical race theory; social justice orientation models; feminist theory developments; queer theory and gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity models; and transexual identity process models.

## 3    Methodological Developments

Consistent with the history of modern psychobiography, the studies in this volume relied primarily on the intensive case study, or comparative case study model (e.g. Yin, 2018), anchored in the emergent, discovery-oriented constructivist research paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). Furthermore, most of the chapters relied on databases of publicly available information, particularly autobiographies, biographies, and historical and journalistic records. There were two noteworthy exceptions: Hamlett and Singer (chapter ""Water the Plants, Not the Weeds": A Narrative Identity Study of Black Resilience in the Aftermath of the Great Migration") relied on McAdams's more structured life story interview in their fascinating narrative identity study of Lonnie B., the son of Mississippi sharecroppers and a model of Black resilience after the great migration to the north regions of the USA. This study of Lonnie B. also highlights the value of the eugraphic (focused on strength, resilience, and adaptability characteristics) study of "ordinary extraordinary" research subjects as recommended most recently by Mullen (2021). Naturally ethical issues revolving around the study of private citizens (like Lonnie B.) versus public figures need to be addressed within country-specific legal and ethical guidelines. The bridging of traditional psychobiography on famous public figures, with McAdams's (1985) narrative identity model, as utilised in Hamlett and Singer's study (chapter ""Water the Plants, Not the Weeds": A Narrative Identity Study of Black Resilience in the Aftermath of the Great Migration"), is an important area for discussion going forward.

Second is Sollmann's (chapter "Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and "Learning"") innovative methodology where he relies primarily on adult observation techniques of body language and nonverbal communication to peer into the worldview and lives of two contemporary Chinese celebrities. Sollmann demonstrates how psychobiographers can cross cultures in their research despite language barriers. Sollmann also demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge and skill sets of the psychobiographer, tapping psychology, journalism, communication, and cultural studies.

In the final chapter of this volume, pioneering psychohistorian and presidential psychobiographer, Paul Elovitz, takes us on his own personal journey as researcher,

psychoanalyst, teacher/mentor, and journal editor (*Clio's Psyche*), using the autobiographical method (chapter "My Psychoanalytic Psychobiographical Methodology"). His discussion of psychobiographer empathy towards their subject and the importance of monitoring countertransference in the psychobiographer-subject relationship are central to competence in, and the impact of, psychobiographical research. Reading personal journeys of culturally diverse pioneers in the field is always interesting and informative. One suggestion our editing team has for future psychobiographical production is to extend Elovitz's autobiographical approach and gather the personal stories of other psychobiographers internationally. What personal, professional, and historically contextual factors have led these influential psychobiographers to devote much of their career to the field of psychobiography? What difficult life events and perhaps traumas have these psychobiographers experienced and that were perhaps transformed into a posttraumatic growth experience promoting their own career and personal development. Such work can be modelled after Elovitz's own book on the "builders of psychohistory" (Elovitz, 2021), which presents very short autobiographical sketches of some of the world's leading psychohistorians and psychobiographers. We recommend longer and more detailed autobiographies of psychobiographers, consistent with the respected book series published by the American Psychological Association and titled "A history of psychology in autobiography" (see, e.g., volume 9 edited by Garner Lindzey and the great psychobiographer, William McKinley Runyan [2007]).

## 4   Ethics in Psychobiography

Ethical issues a more recent focus in the psychobiography literature (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), and they are particularly relevant for studies of still living and recently deceased research subjects. Many of the historical figures profiled in the present collection lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago where ethical issues are of minor concern as long as the research is conducted with rigour and care, as was the case throughout this book. For the study of more recently deceased or still living historic figures, authors addressed a number of ethical care strategies. A few had their proposals reviewed by their institution's IRB and/or an outside expert panel of experienced psychobiographers. Most authors relied exclusively on publicly available information and no private medical or psychiatric information was uncovered and introduced, thus minimising risk or harm to "memory" and "identity" interests of our historic figures.

   Two chapters addressed ethical issues in more detail. Sollmann (chapter "Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and "Learning"") discussed the importance of "flexible ethical methods" that contour the demands and goals of the particular study. He reviews ethics in journalism and psychology and reflects on his prior experiences in profiling tennis superstar Steffi Graf and her father, and the care taken in his current study on Chinese actress Fan Bing and the standup comedian Zhou Libo. Finally, Siripipat et al. (chapter "From

Billie Jean King to Naomi Osaka: One-Half Century of Promoting Social Justice through Women's Tennis: A Multiple-Case Psychobiographical Profile") studying two living and active social activists and tennis personalities, one who is still only in her early 20 s, centre on an ethics model throughout the study. We anticipate that ethical issues and standards in psychobiography will continue to evolve as the field grows internationally.

## 5 The Future of Psychobiography with Non-WEIRD Samples and in Non-WEIRD Contexts

The chapters of this book show that psychobiography anticipates a vivid future ahead of the discipline on theoretical, methodological, and ethical levels. In the future, it seems to be critically important that psychobiographers actively contribute to the discourse on WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples and contexts to contribute theoretically to the discourse, as well as to represent in-depth research approach to explore differences and similarities across WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples. Psychobiographies hold a key to balancing the predominantly quantitative studies in the WEIRD and non-WEIRD discourse by contributing qualitative, in-depth, underlying, and unconscious insights which are often missing in quantitative approaches. Further, psychobiographies of the future will be able to provide insights into the differences and similarities of individuals living their life spans across different countries and cultural contexts and dealing with developing transcultural identities across the life span. Psychobiography can therefore become a practical tool for transcultural studies with a special focus on identity development, intersectionalities, intercultural competence, and communication. This focus will expand Western scientific concepts through non-WEIRD theories, methodologies, and philosophical approaches, thus enriching psychological science through transdisciplinary, transcultural insights and newly created knowledge.

On a practical level, psychobiographies will become more relevant since they will reflect not only the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of WEIRD individuals but also of the majority of the world population in the non-WEIRD contexts. Therefore, practitioners in counselling and therapy can draw new insights from an expanded body of research and apply the newly learned knowledge in their daily work with clients.

It is our hope that the reader of this volume has enjoyed our collection of psychobiographical approaches, as well as our diverse array of historical subjects who span millennia in history and who vary in culture, vocation, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, language, religion, and nationality. For readers new to psychobiography, we can say that this form of research is challenging, yet exciting and rewarding. We invite you to contemplate historical subjects whom you are "called to study" and begin your own psychobiographical research. Thank you for joining us in the field of psychobiography!

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**Joseph G. Ponterotto** (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and Coordinator of the School Counseling Program in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University's Lincoln Center (Manhattan) Campus. His primary teaching and research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling, psychobiography, career counseling, qualitative research methods, clinical assessment, and the history of psychology.

**Paul J. P. Fouché** (DPhil) is a full-professor of Counselling Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, in South Africa. He serves on the Faculty Research Committee. Paul has published psychobiographical and psychohistorical articles in various journals. His interest is in the field of psychobiography and psychohistory and he acts as a research supervisor to post-graduate scholars undertaking life history research.

**Claude-Hélène Mayer** is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research. Further, she is an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management. She holds doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management, and Cultural Anthropology. Her Venia Legendi is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational, and Cultural Psychology from Europa Universität, Viadrina, Germany. Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and psychobiography. Her teaching areas are cross-cultural psychology, mental health, psychobiography, organisational theory, systems and design thinking, coaching, positive psychology, organisational behaviour and transcultural conflict management and mediation. She works as a licenced (Germany) systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), and hypnotherapist (TIM) in private practice. Contact: www.claudehmayer.com

**Roelf van Niekerk** (DPhil) is a registered Clinical and Industrial Psychologist as well as a Master Human Resource Practitioner. He obtained a BA Theology, a BA Honours (Psychology), and an MA (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch; an MA (Clinical Psychology) and a DPhil (Psychology) at the University of Port Elizabeth, and an MEd (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk is currently the Director: School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources at the Nelson Mandela University. He was previously employed at the Universities of Port Elizabeth, Free State, Fort Hare, and Rhodes University. Prof Van Niekerk's research focus is on psychobiographical research projects, particularly in the fields of personality-, career-, and leadership development. He teaches a range of modules including psychological assessment, career management, organisational development, professional ethics and practice, coaching and consulting, personality psychology, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

# Correction to: Beyond WEIRD: Psychobiography in Times of Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Perspectives

**Claude-Hélène Mayer** (ID)**, Roelf van Niekerk** (ID)**, Paul J. P. Fouché** (ID)**, and Joseph G. Ponterotto** (ID)

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The below chapters were inadvertently published under Part II "European Contexts" instead of Part I "African and Asian Contexts".

Graça Simbine Machel: Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist by Claude-Hélène Mayer

Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and "Learning" by Ulrich Sollmann

The correct chapter sequence under Part I is as follows:

Part I African and Asian Contexts

Defying the Odds: A Psychobiographical Study of Nonkululeko Gobodo's Career Development.

The Career Development of Albertina Sisulu

Zenzile Miriam Makeba: A Psychobiography of "Mama Africa" from an Integrated African Psychology Perspective

Tragic Optimism: A Psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai

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The Moral Development of Albertina Sisulu Through Classic, Feminist and Indigenous Southern African Lenses

Graça Simbine Machel: A Psychobiography of an Ultra-Committed Change-Maker and Global Woman Activist

Psychobiography of Chinese Celebrities: Body Language, Adult Observation and Learning History