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The self is both the story teller and the stories that are told: A case study using interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the self through personal narratives and life story

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ABSTRACT

The rationale for this study is to extend existing knowledge regarding the self, personal narratives and life story by gaining in depth insight into an individual's personal experiences. The research questions regarding the current study were twofold: the first of which identified and explored what themes emerged from a single participant's personal narratives and life story. The second established which of the six personal narrative and life story principles, advocated by McAdams (2008), were relevant to the case study being reported. This study reports data from a case study collected through a semi structured interview and was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The participant was a female mature student from Southampton Solent University. Two superordinate themes were identified within the data, *'focus on the self'* and *'focus on external factors'*. A description of these superordinate themes and the related subordinate themes is presented. Additionally, similarities and dissimilarities were established regarding McAdams (2008) personal narrative and life story principles. The findings are considered in relation to relevant literature of the self, personal narratives and life story. Results indicated the importance of researching personal narratives and life stories and the researcher proposes further clarification is needed regarding McAdams (2008) six personal narrative and life story principles.

KEY WORDS:	PERSONAL NARRATIVES	LIFE STORY	CASE STUDY	THE SELF	MCADAMS (2008)

Introduction

''The universe is made up of stories, not of atoms.''

-Muriel Rukeyser (1979)

This excerpt from Rukeyser's poem suggests everything in the universe, rather than just being an atom, has a much deeper meaning. As humans, our worlds are made and seen through the stories we tell. To be human is to have a story, to *be* a story. This story we create constructs our identity and gives meaning to our lives. The current study looks to explore the self through the investigation of a single person's personal narratives and life story.

The self is a topic that has burst onto the scientific scene in recent years (Wilson & Wilson, 2009). People love to ponder about their lives, contemplating their past, present and future, wondering who am I and what is my purpose? (Aihong, 2014). In Alice in Wonderland the author Lewis Carroll refers to that question as the 'great puzzle' and for many, the answer to this question is most important. Similarly, James (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) recognised the self as a very complicated topic and psychology's 'most puzzling puzzle'. The definition of 'the self' has yet to be set in stone as the word is so commonly used, additionally, it has been posited that the thousands of journal articles relating to the self have made the definition more elusive than clearer (Baumeister, 2010). In relation to psychology, the study of the self is the holistic exploration of one's identity and personal experiences (McAdams, 1993) and from early research on the topic came many branches, such as self-esteem (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt & Schimel, 2004), self-concept (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982), personal narratives and life story (McAdams, 2008) and the list continues (see Baumeister, 2010).

Regarding exploration of this 'most puzzling puzzle', the self was first researched in depth by William James (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) who famously suggested the self is split consisting of the 'ME' and the 'I', which became and still is an influential formulation (Baumeister, 2010). According to James (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) the 'ME' is what can be known about the self, for example, physical descriptions, behaviours, relationships: all things external that those around us can be aware of. Conversely, the 'I', is how the individual experiences the world themselves; their inner personal thoughts and emotions, also known as the soul (James, 1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981). This current study attempts to extend James's (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) research regarding how people narrative their selves.

James's (1980, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) proposition that the self is divided resonates with Higgins (1987) self-discrepancy theory which furthered the idea of separate selves. Higgins (1987) self-discrepancy theory proposes that there are three aspects of the self: the 'actual self', the 'ideal self' and the 'ought self'. The 'actual self' represents the characteristics that you possess, the 'ideal self' represents the characteristics that you wish you possessed and the 'ought self' represents the characteristics you believe you should possess. Furthermore, Higgins (1987) posited that inconsistencies in beliefs regarding different selves can have a negative impact on individuals. Higgins (1987) theory is evident in a recent article by Stanley and Burrow (2015) who established people experienced negative emotions such as anxiety if their perception of one's 'actual' and 'ideal' self were different. Due to the

previous work of the likes of James (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) and Higgins (1987), the concept of the self has emerged as a powerful entity. More recently, the self-system has been universally acknowledged as dynamic, consisting of multiple selves that emerge under different contexts (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007; Baumeister, 2010) supporting the previous research conducted by James (1980, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) and Higgins (1987). However, the question regarding how many and what 'selves' we possess is still debated, (Piotrowicz & Dyer, 2014; see Neisser, 1988) indicating what we know about our 'selves' is paradoxical.

From the extant literature on the self, developed the study of personal narratives and life story which intended to explore how people create and understand who they are. In the past, personal narratives and life stories have been thought of nothing but fairy tales with no scientific meaning (McAdams, 2001). However, this started to change heading into 1980's when researchers started to venture into broader topics of human experiences, as mentioned previously (McAdams, 2001). The study of personal narratives and life story challenges the traditional paradigmatic view of 'truth' relating to hypothesises, objectivity and control; rather, the study of personal narratives and life story emphasises human existence and explores an alternate way to conceptualise the self by exploring subjective meanings of personal experiences (Bruner & Bruner, 2009). It is widely understood that personal narratives are stories which include self-relevant events and personal experiences, including memories, feelings and emotions (Hermans, 1999). These personal narratives we tell collate to create our life story which is defined as an accumulation of personal narratives that are usually told relating to a timeline enabling the sense of a continuous self (Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne, 2010).

McAdams and McLean (2013) posit the primary motive for the construction of personal narratives is to create identity and self-understanding as people attempt to answer the question of who they are. Additionally, Habermas and Bluck (2000) theorised that the creation of personal narratives help individuals make sense of their worlds by organising different aspects of an individual life into a whole. The construction of personal narratives develops our self-concept (identity) which is constantly reinterpreted in the narrative process with our narrative identity constantly evolving, creating a new sense of our self (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Furthermore, Kenyon and Randall (1997) posit that through describing personal growth in our personal narratives we signal an identity change as we have altered our self and need to re-story ourselves.

Within the umbrella term 'identity' come many aspects of identity such as religion, sexual preferences, political and personality itself (McAdams, 2008). As mentioned previously, personal narratives are self-relevant therefore they reflect personality characteristics (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). As one would expect, research has established that those who are high in the trait neuroticism express more negative personal narratives (McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan & Machado, 2004). Conversely, those who are high in trait agreeableness tend to express more positive personal narratives (McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan & Machado, 2004). Additionally, it has been found that those who are open to experience, more extraverted, and less neurotic are more likely to explain their past as one that brought about personal growth (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakeda, 2005). Furthermore, it is widely accepted that personality develops across the life span (see meta-analysis by Briley & Tucker-Drob, 2014) and is fundamental for the holistic evolution of an individual

(Hounkpatin, Wood, Boyce & Dunn, 2014) corroborating the vast literature indicating the self is a progressive phenomenon.

The issue of language in personal narratives has received considerable amount of attention with Shinebourne and Smith (2010) suggesting we use metaphors as a way of making sense of our lives and a way of communicating experiences. As humans are symbolic creatures', personal narratives frequently include an abundance of metaphors to express visual imagery and play a fundamental role in constructing our world and our identity (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Furthermore, the authors propose that metaphors are used indirectly to express feelings that we may find hard to convey.

Additionally, language use regarding gender has been established to affect the way personal narratives reflect the self. For example, being female has been connected with elaboration and providing unique specifics (Reese & Fivush, 1993). This could be due to the ideology that parents are more elaborative from a young age with daughters than sons (Chance & Fiese, 1999) which consecutively causes daughters adopt this style of communication (Fivush & Buckner, 2003). In addition, studies such as Buckner and Fivush (1998) and Bauer, Stennes & Haight (2003) found that regarding personal narratives about the self, females mostly discuss internal states saturated with emotions and metaphors corroborating Shinebourne and Smith (2010) and Lakoff and Johnson's (2008) findings. Furthermore, it is proposed that females are more likely to mention themes of fear, sadness and communication than men (McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan & Machado, 2004).

Due to the architecture of the mind introspection or self-reflection may not be easy. However, it can increase self-knowledge and self-understanding which is evident within personal narratives (Wilson & Dunn, 2004). It has been established that with age comes an increase in metacognition which develops the ability to explore internal states and self-reflect (Dimaggio, Lysaker, Carcione, Nicolò, & Semerari, 2008). Self-reflection, within an evolving personal narrative allows for an individual to understand complex themes relating to their life stories, by being able to meaningfully engage with their thoughts and feelings (D'Andrea, 1999). Furthermore, it has been theorised that the cognitive ability to coherently produce personal narratives develops during adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). However, it has been established that adults have a more developed capability to produce intricate personal narratives by being able to construct and organise events and emotions in a more complex way (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). In addition, it has been found that when young adults (mean age = 19.2 years) and older adults (mean age = 72.2 years) were asked to make sense of the same story which had both literal meanings and interpretative meanings, the older adults formed profound interpretations whilst the younger adults created more literal interpretations (Adams, Smith, Nyquist & Perlmutter, 1997). This evidence establishes that older adults have the ability to self-reflect and look beyond the obvious (Adams, Smith, Nyquist & Perlmutter, 1997).

As discussed above, personal narratives and life stories are important because they are one of the ways of defining and exploring one's self. Additionally, the telling and analysis of personal narratives and life stories can be useful in clinical and counselling settings to help clients understand their worlds better (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). Within clinical and counselling fields, it is generally regarded that healthy personal narratives flow in a sensible order that is coherent and easily understood by the listener. This coherent flow is traditionally referred to as 'emplotment' (Polkinghorne, 1991). The

existing research has established that exploration and adjustment of individual's maladaptive personal narratives can help in the recovery from depression, anxiety and even serious brain injuries (Nochi, 2000) suggesting the importance of investigating personal narratives. More recently, expressive personal narrative writing therapy has been used as a form of counselling (Klein & Boal, 2010) as patients develop new adaptive personal narratives to overcome their personal issues. From a clinical and counselling perspective, the therapist needs to be aware of the role metacognitions (self-reflection) play within a person's narrative as this may fluctuate between contexts being spoken about. This may depend upon certain factors, for instance if there are internal conflicts between the 'actual' self and 'ideal self' relating to Higgins (1987) self-discrepancy theory and the ability to self-reflect (Dimaggio, Lysaker, Carcione, Nicolò, & Semerari, 2008).

More recently, after analysing much 'self' and personal narrative and life story literature including literature mentioned above, McAdams (2008) theorised that there are six main principles that keep appearing in the study of personal narratives and the life story. They are as follows; the self is storied, stories integrate lives, stories are told in social relationships, stories change over time, stories are cultural texts and some stories are better than others. The first principle 'the self is storied' refers to the theory that the self is the storyteller and we assign personal meaning to our life stories. This relates to James (1890, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) theory regarding the 'I'. The second principle 'stories integrate lives' implies that personal narratives assimilate characters and events that are not necessarily linked to create a constant flow. The third principle 'stories are told in a social relationship' suggests that personal narratives are told differently to different listeners through either dramatic storytelling (the use of intense words or the creation of scenes) or reflective storytelling, which relates to how the individual felt rather than the detail of the event. This can include the use of metaphors which validates Shinebourne and Smiths (2010) suggestion. The fourth principle 'stories change over time' puts forward the idea that over time peoples goals and opinions can change, for example, personal growth or career changes. This relates to the extant literature regarding the constant evolving self (Clark and Rossiter, 2008).

Principle number five 'stories are cultural' refers to the theory that our culture influences our personal narratives and that every personal narrative conveys some cultural aspects. The last principle 'some stories are better than others' relates to whether the personal narratives flow well, for example, on a timeline or whether the personal narratives are disorganised, for example, jumping back and forth between topics and times. This corroborates Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne (2010) theory that personal narratives are told regarding a timeline. Principle six can also be related to the morals shown in the personal narratives, for example, good vs bad.

The six principles establish a link between the personal and social world (McAdams, 2008) and personal narratives and the life story now regularly appear in mainstream psychological journal articles (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The personal narrative principles as suggested by McAdams (2008) have been used in many fields of research such as those mentioned previously: clinical psychology (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007), counselling psychology (Klein & Boal, 2010) and personality psychology (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakeda, 2005) suggesting its findings are widely valued and accepted.

The motive for this research is to extend the existing knowledge regarding personal narratives and to explore the relevance of McAdams (2008) personal narrative principles. Additionally, there are many quantitative studies regarding branches of the self that use a nomothetic approach to build common principles (see previously mentioned McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan & Machado, 2004). Therefore, the researcher believed it would be beneficial to have more idiographic research interested in the '*context of discovery*' (Reichbach, 1938 as cited in McAdams, 2012) which explores the details and richness of personal experiences. Hence, the researcher carried out analysis with a case study. The research questions were twofold: the first of which was to identify and explore what themes emerged from a single participant's personal narratives and life story. The second established which of the six personal narrative and life story principles, advocated by McAdams (2008), were relevant to the case study being reported. The study is unique in comparing the findings of the current study with that of McAdams (2008) principles. The data collected was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gain the best insight into the participants' experience of themselves and the meanings which those experiences hold for the participant (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Additionally, IPA was chosen as reliability and validity can be explored through Yardley's (2000) four stage criteria.

Methodology

Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the subjective experiences of an undergraduate student in relation to their personal narratives, creating a case study with the participant Amy (pseudonym). This approach cannot be addressed through quantitative methodologies alone and therefore the qualitative method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. Amy completed a semi-structured interview as it allowed for an open and informal dialog which was flexible, yet had some structure (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The sampling method used was opportunistic and the interview took place in an interview room in the Sir James Matthews basement at Southampton Solent University. The interview was recorded using a Dictaphone that was supplied by the university and the data which was collected was the verbal responses from Amy.

Participants

There was no specific criterion required of the participant; therefore recruitment was open to all in the Southampton Solent Psychology Participation Pool. The single participant was recruited through advertising on the Southampton Solent Psychology Forum and additionally a poster which was put up in the Psychology Laboratory. By presenting a synopsis of background information about the participant Amy, the researcher attempts for the reader to understand Amy's experience more completely. Amy is a 33 year old female mature undergraduate student and is currently in her first year studying BSc Hons Psychology with Education at Southampton Solent University. Amy was born in South Africa where she spent most of her childhood before moving to England and now lives in Southampton. After experiencing bullying during her early years of education, she excelled academically and is currently looking to become an educational psychologist. Additionally, after struggling with her sexuality for a long time

because of her religious beliefs, Amy is now in a long term relationship with her girlfriend.

Materials

The study used a recruitment post and a recruitment poster. Amy received an information sheet and debrief sheet before and after the interview respectively. Standardised verbal instructions were used and a Dictaphone was used to record the interview. During the interview the researcher used a sheet of A4 paper to refer to, which detailed the initial open question, a selection of prompts and some back up questions in case the interview came to a halt. The main question asked was 'This study is interested in exploring personal narratives; please tell me about yourself….' This question was chosen as it also allows the participant to give an answer relating to the first research question. Additionally, it is an open question which allows the participant to think, reflect, explore feelings and give opinions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). The two back up questions were as follows, 'Could you tell me about a time in your life when you felt you were having a positive experience?' and 'How do you think other people see you?' These questions were chosen because they are open questions allowing for a lengthy response including detailed information. They were also chosen as there was a positive aspect to them in keeping with ethical research (Angus and Kegan, 2013). Examples of the prompts were as follows, 'How do you mean?' and 'Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?' These prompts were chosen as suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), allowing the participant to go into more detail, explain further and for the researcher to gain clarification.

Procedure

After gaining ethical approval from the British Psychology Society, recruitment was advertised to the Psychology Participant Pool through a post on the Psychology Resources page and through the use of a poster on the Psychology Notice Board. When Amy decided she would like to take part in the study she emailed the researcher informing so. An information sheet was sent back giving more information about what the study entailed. Once Amy emailed back confirming with an electronic signature, a time and date was arranged to meet in the basement of Sir James Matthews at Southampton Solent University in an interview room for a one-one interview. Once Amy arrived the researcher tried to gain a quick rapport with her in hope she would feel at ease and would feel comfortable talking to researcher about herself (as suggested by Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009).

Using the main question prepared, the interview ran its course and was recorded using a Dictaphone. Although the question being posed appeared to be simple, it required a lot of self-reflection and was harder for Amy to answer than first thought. Therefore, Amy was given as long as she wanted to think and answer. Angus and Kagan (2013) theorised that when participants are asked questions such as the one posed in this study they may take longer than expected to answer because they have possibly never been asked it before. In this instance the prompts and back up questions were not used as the researcher did not a feel a comfortable opportunity arose. However, the primary aim was for the researcher to be an active listener, capturing richness, by allowing Amy to tell her story and not to merely be a respondent. The interview lasted for one hour and once the interview was complete Amy was given a debrief sheet

informing her why the interview was conducted and what the research questions relating to the study were. Additionally, the debrief sheet informed her she could withdraw her data up to the 27th of February and included helplines including the charity Samaritans and the University's 'students1st' where she could discuss her feelings if she believed she had been negatively affected by the study. Amy was also informed that she could have the findings to the study if she wished once complete. The data the researcher collected was anonymous in the write up through the use of a pseudonym and kept confidential.

Ethical Considerations

The study gained full ethical approval from the British Psychological Society, followed the guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010) and no deception was involved. The participant Amy was from Southampton Solent University (the psychology participation pool); was over eighteen, not cognitively impaired and gave full informed consent. Amy was offered participation time for taking part in the study but took part through her own choice and was informed that there would be no negative consequences if she decided not to. All of the data collected remained anonymous through the use of a pseudonym and confidential as all data collected was kept on a memory stick with a password. When the transcriptions were printed out to make notes on they were kept in the researchers' room which was locked. An ethical issue that needs to be addressed is that in the approved ethics form the researcher proposed that four participants would be interviewed; however, most of the participants did not talk for a period of time that the researcher thought was suitable for analysis. Therefore, the researcher conducted three more interviews making the interview total seven female participants of varying ages; all participants were over 18 and gave informed consent. However, as the study progressed the researcher chose to focus the analysis on one of the interviews to create a case study.

Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data as the method is consistent with the aims of the research question; to explore Amy's personal experiences and understand her world through analysing her personal narratives. Specifically, IPA was chosen over other akin methods such as Discourse Analysis (DA) or Thematic Analysis (TA), as although the beginning stages such as coding is similar, IPA takes the analysis further by exploring the researcher's own interpretation of the participants' interpretation of their experience. This is known as double hermeneutic (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA was additionally chosen as the approach is not prescriptive; instead the guidelines are flexible allowing the researcher to adapt them to fit their study (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

This study used an inductive approach or 'bottom up approach' as the researcher completed the IPA analysis with no specific theory in mind (Goddard and Melville, 2004), looking to explore themes that appear in Amy's personal narratives. Once the researcher had completed the analysis the researcher *then* compared the findings to McAdams's (2008) six personal narrative and life story principles which are as follows: the self is storied, stories integrate lives, stories are told in social relationships, stories change over time, stories are cultural texts and some stories are better than others.

The researcher will first summarise the themes found in the data to give the reader an elementary synopsis of what will be presented in the main analysis (as suggested by

Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The IPA analysis was completed taking into consideration Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson (2009) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested steps. For the steps that have been devised by the researcher see below, the steps were carried out as precisely as possible to ensure reliability. Firstly, the researcher transcribed the interview pertaining to Amy using line numbers to refer back to. Secondly, the researcher became familiar with the transcript by reading and re-reading the transcript underlining parts that could be of interest.

The third stage to analysing the data was to make annotations by commenting on the transcription, making a detailed set of notes. This process helped the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of Amy's personal narratives and life story. This involved looking at the language Amy used and thinking about the context of her personal narratives in relation to her lived world (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Fourthly, the researcher identified themes that were emerging in the data. In order to look for emerging themes there is a shift in attention from the transcript combined with exploratory notes to data reduction whilst maintaining the complexity and nuances of the data of Amy's personal narratives. Fifthly, the researcher restructured the data by creating a table of how the themes fit together to construct subordinate themes; this process is not prescriptive as some themes were included and some were discarded or merged into others.

In the sixth stage, the subordinate themes which were connected in the previous stage were then categorised through a number of ways into superordinate themes before coming up with the final superordinate themes. A table of superordinate and subordinate themes including quotes and line numbers was then tabulated. Finally, one of the superordinate themes was fully analysed, the other described and then compared to those advocated by McAdams (2008).

In the following analysis section the results obtained by the above stages are explored in the following three sections. Section 1- summary of themes; section 2- IPA analysis of themes; and section 3- comparison of the current study's findings relating to McAdam's (2008) six personal narrative and life story principles.

Section 1- Summary of themes

The researcher identified 13 subordinate themes within the data, capturing the researchers understood meaning behind each quote. The subordinate themes were then grouped to create two superordinate themes, '*focus on the self'* (S1); the participants' personal narratives relating to the internal self and '*focus on external factors'* (S2); the participants personal narratives relating to external factors. The superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* was developed to combine the subordinate themes '*personal identity'* (1.1), '*personal development'* (1.2), '*internal conflict'* (1.3), '*self-understanding'* (1.4) and '*health'* (1.5). The second superordinate theme '*focus on external factors'* was created to incorporate the subordinate themes '*travel'* (2.1), '*education'* (2.2), '*religion'* (2.3), 'health' (2.4), '*career' (*2.5)*, 'family'* (2.6), '*bullying'* (2.7) and '*culture'* (2.8).

Due to time constraints and sheer volume of information Amy shared within the interview it is not possible for this research study to give justice to all aspects of Amy's personal narratives. Therefore, the researcher chose to focus the analysis on the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'*. Additionally, this theme was chosen to keep the focus closest to the research question regarding exploration the self through

personal narratives. Furthermore, this allowed the researcher to analysis in depth giving great detail regarding Amy's sense of self which IPA promotes. A summary table is presented regarding the second superordinate theme although not fully analysed the researcher will make reference to it where justified to support Amy's story.

Section 2- IPA analysis of superordinate themes

Table 1

Theme 1- focus on the self

Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes	Evidence through quotes
Focus on the self **(S1)**	1.1 Personal identity (including personality)	'I have an accent which identifies me as South African'
	1.2 Personal development (positive SN)	'..I started coming out of myself as I had a couple of friends and really got out of my shell over summer..'
	1.2 Internal conflict (negative SN)	'.. a lot of conflict cause I had been battling for years with my sexuality, especially from a religious point of view..'
	1.4 Self-understanding	'I would actually say looking back on it, it was very privileged I must have had the exact definition of what childhood is..'
	1.5 Health	'.. I left so I went off for stress, the first time I went to the doctors saying I can't do this..'

The first superordinate theme that will be explored below is '*focus on the self*' which could perhaps be seen as anticipated as Amy was asked '*This study is interested in exploring personal narratives; please tell me about yourself*'. This theme addresses

the times Amy talked about her personal experiences assigning personal meaning relating to herself introspectively. Due to the vast amount of data collected the researcher chose to explore what the researcher interprets as poignant moments for Amy regarding her 'self'.

Amy offers a complex account regarding her personal life experiences and it can be seen that Amy's sense of 'self' changed spectacularly as Amy's identity and personality is woven throughout her story. In the beginning Amy recounts that in the past she was withdrawn:

'.. Growing up there (South Africa) I found out I was withdraw from my peers so I spent a lot of time on my own, I did suffer from bullying whilst going up, I found a passion for books so I had a hobby from helping out the librarians from a young age. I become quite fond of maths..'

The use of the words 'I found out' strikes the researcher as unusual as it suggests that up until this point Amy did not know that she found it difficult to socialise with others. Additionally, Amy used the word 'suffer' to describe the bullying she experienced which suggests for Amy this was painful time. Amy's description of herself is like she is describing a stereotype of a 'loner' who is self-sufficient, introverted and socially shunned. Perhaps Amy is over emphasising this stereotype to put across to researcher how she feels like she was the cliché lonely and different child. However, although Amy previously implies that she did not socialise she states that she did have a friendship group she called 'the disabled lot'. This could be interpreted that Amy lacked confidence and felt like she was 'disabled' in social interaction. This lack of feeling like belonging could be the reason Amy gets involved with the church and religion as there is a sense of community and support (which is discussed further on):

'..I kind of kept to myself and hung out with what I called the disabled lot..'

Feeling like you fit in when you are young is almost crucial for a positive sense of self; therefore, it would seem likely that Amy's adult sense of self would be a negative one. However, in context of Amy's life story her sense of self appears to change into that of one more positive when her and her family made the move from South Africa to England:

'..I was a year older than everyone else but it was a period of great happiness in my life in respect because females in South Africa you were limited to home ec and architectural drawings so I came along and I was doing IT and things like graphic design oh I didn't know myself, absolutely had a whale of a time, didn't really make any friends at school cause I was just doing everything, did quite well, came out with an A average and at that time I starting coming out of myself as I had a couple of friends and really got out of my shell..'

From this excerpt it can be seen the move created a new confident and happy Amy. Amy's use of the metaphor *'I started coming out of myself'* almost sounds as if Amy's happiness couldn't be contained, she was becoming a new person leaving her old body for new and exciting experiences. Additionally, Amy uses another metaphor, *'I had a couple of friends and really got out of my shell',* suggesting that Amy felt how she was acting previously (withdrawn) was not really who she was. The use of the word 'shell' indicates there was just a barrier holding her back which could easily be

cracked. This personal progression could have been due to many factors. For example, Amy states that in South Africa *'I was the only white throughout my education'.* It is possible Amy felt like she couldn't fully relate to her peers in South Africa. Furthermore, this could have been why Amy was bullied. Amy adds that South Africa *'was a violent country'* and she divulges that she lost her father due to this violence and her mother classed England as home. Therefore, this move may have signalled a fresh start for Amy from all the pain of her past.

However, Amy does indicate at points that she still feels some separation from others as she explains at university *'it got to the point where I was called mum'* suggesting that she and others were aware the she is different from her peers. This knowledge of separation from others is additionally acknowledged from a young age as she recalls:

'..I enjoyed looking round the temples, my friend she had a different idea she went to the beaches and did some shopping so we went our separate ways so anyways but I think at the point I think I did learn a key thing about myself that I fell in love with architecture and graphical design and then I wanted to be a designer..'

For Amy, the fact that she is not interested in the 'usual' actives that young adults take part in does not appear to bother her. Amy is more interested in exploring different cultures which brings about the exploration of who she is and the want to learn about herself.

This concept of learning is repeatedly mentioned by Amy throughout the interview. Amy explains many times how she has gained a wide range of both interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge throughout her life; this learning appears to be very important to Amy due to the frequent use of the word. Amy explains that learning about something externally, such as working in teams, affects her internally, by resulting in her having better social skills and having developed personally:

'..I learnt a lot working in teams and also independently, it meant I had better social skills..'

Additionally, even the diagnoses of Amy's Asperger's syndrome increases her personal development and self-understanding as Amy continued to have troubles socially and was aware that she was 'quite standoff' with those around her. This appears to be troublesome for Amy, however, when she was diagnosed with Asperger's she was able to understand why she may be antisocial and turned the situation into a positive as the diagnosis answered a lot of questions and concerns she was experiencing relating to being antisocial. Furthermore, this diagnosis presents its self as a poignant moment for Amy as she now allows herself to create relationships with others as she becomes more self-aware and self-assured:

'.. I was diagnosed with Asperger's so that explained an awful lot but because I was aware of it I let people into my life and had become more confident to speak out personally..'

The researcher proposes that having this explanation led to Amy's increase in confidence with socialisation throughout the future:

'..I learnt a lot working in teams and also independently, it meant I had better social skills..'

Although regarding how Amy talked about herself and her experiences were generally positive, the next extract gives a moving account of the distress Amy was experiencing internally and her specific set of circumstances regarding her belief in the church and her sexuality. Amy specifies she was experiencing 'a lot' of conflict and says it had been going on for 'years' suggesting that Amy's sexuality was not accepted by the church and this was a big concern she struggled with for a lengthy period of time. There was a strain between who she was and who she thought she should be creating an uncomfortable sense of self:

'..at about that point I met my future partner, a lot of conflict cause I had been battling for years with my sexuality, especially from a religious point of view but this girl had known me since I was 19, she'd always been in the background and we went our separate ways..'

It sounds like there is an evident struggle between the want to belong but experiencing discrimination by the group she wants to belong to and the group that previously gave her a sense of community and happiness from her previous feelings of separation from her school peers. Amy's 'actual' self and 'ideal' self are conflicting. Additionally, it can be seen this internal conflict led to the separation from her partner as she chose her belief in religion over her belief of her sexuality. As this discord continued it appeared the conflict was too much for Amy as she explained that she left the church as her sexuality and the church could not proceed in harmony. Amy spoke a really powerful sentence which carried an overwhelming symbolic influence:

'That was the time I left the church cause I had had enough of fighting, it was like fighting two halves of yourself basically..'

This extract illustrates the complex nature of Amy's emotions showing how her sexuality and the church were polar opposites using a metaphor to describe how she was internally fighting a battle with no sense of wholeness or inner peace, almost like she had a divided soul. Additionally, this suggests that she feels she has more than one self, the self that believes in religion and the self that believes in her sexuality. By the adding of the word 'basically' on the end of the sentence Amy puts forward the idea that the conflict was simple and she understood what she had to do (leave the church). Furthermore, it could be interpreted that Amy was merely giving the researcher a brief account of what is a more complex situation that she did not want to divulge. The metaphor of 'fighting two halves' of herself conjures strong imagery to portray to the researcher what the experience was like possibly because she found the experience too hard to share using more explanatory emotive words. This experience regarding her sexuality and her belief in religion caused Amy to have *'unravelled'* suggesting that she felt she was put together and this struggle took everything out of her until there was nothing left.

Despite the conflict Amy had with the church she says it was her *'whole life'* and that she still '*strongly believes in religion'* which adds to the ongoing struggle Amy must feel believing in something so much and not able to be part of it. Additionally, the idea that this internal conflict is ever continuing is evident as after Amy changes topics she then goes back to religion and her sexuality explaining *'I was very heavy into the spiritual side of things it was my whole life and I had to walk away'*.

Like Amy's personal narratives which seem to always go back to her progressing positively after negative events, this next extract explores a more positive experience

for Amy. Amy explains regarding her job *'I decided I had enough of financials, I was in a very unhappy place so I decided to go into caring'*:

'.. I went straight into caring for about three years, I loved it I really did <..>I finally found the balance; I found I needed to work with people to keep myself open. I expanded by being around other people and realised that if I worked on my own I would go back to being anti-social so I've found that I need to be around others as I would quickly digress..'

Amy's sense of self appears to at last come to a happy level where the use of the word 'finally' suggests this is something she has wanted for a long time, after a long battle of internal states of who she is and who she wanted to be. As Amy says she expands by being around other people this would suggest she enjoys other peoples company and could possibly now be an extravert which is reiterated later on in the interview as she explains she *'joined the council', 'became a rep'* and is *'in many societies'.* Additionally, the extract shows Amy's impressive self-understanding.

Amy ends her interview stating *'..okay so that's the end.'.* Throughout the interview Amy told her story on a strict time line once again reflecting her ability to self-reflect and explain who she is and her experiences suggesting she has a continuing and evolving sense of self.

In summary Amy's life story can be interpreted as a quest for knowledge, identity and personal growth. The superordinate theme *'focus on the self'* has highlighted positive and negative emotional aspects of Amy's personal narrative as well as her personal identity and her understanding of herself and her life experiences.

Below the second superordinate *'focus on external factors'* and subsequent subordinate themes are presented in a table.

Table 2

Theme 2- focus on external factors

Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes	Evidence through quotes
Focus on external factors (S2)	2.1 Travel	… I have moved around quite a lot'
	2.2 Education	'..I err went to a private school..'
	2.3 Religion	'..till this day I strongly believe in religion..'

	2.4 Health	'..I was diagnosed with Asperger's..'
	2.5 Career	'.. I had a year with Lloyds building society and they were fantastic in a way cause there was a lot training and I fell into training with them so in one respect I found a love for training other people..'
	2.6 Family (including friends and partner)	'…the relationship between my father and mother breaking down'
	2.7 Bullying	'.. I did suffer from bullying whilst growing up..'
	2.8 Culture	'my mum had made the decision because we lost my dad through violence to move to the UK because we had an English background and lived there before and classed it as home'

Section 3- Links to McAdams (2008) six personal narrative and life story principles

The first principle suggested by McAdams (2008) 'the self is storied' can be interpreted to relate to the superordinate theme *'focus on the self'* where Amy assigns personal meaning to her personal narratives.

The second principle put forward by McAdams (2008) is 'stories integrate lives'. This can be seen to relate to both superordinate themes '*focus on the self'* and '*focus on external* factors' which integrate previously separate characters and events into one flowing story.

The third principle McAdam (2008) offers is that stories are told in different ways to audiences by using both dramatic and reflective ways of storytelling. The researcher found evidence of reflective storytelling through the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* where Amy explored how she felt and the meaning behind her feelings with the use of metaphors. Dramatic storytelling was not specifically found by the researcher.

The forth principle 'stories change over time' suggests that as time passes attitudes, goals and motives change. This principle appears to be highly relatable to the superordinate theme *'focus on the self'* as Amy's personal narratives imply her sense of self (identity and personality) have transformed from a withdrawn young girl who experienced bullying, to a confident woman who is fiercely involved in society. Additionally, it is evident in the second superordinate theme *'focus on external factors'* as Amy's career is constantly changing as she wants to explore new things.

The fifth principle McAdams (2008) proposes suggests every story expresses some cultural information. Within Amy's personal narratives two different cultures were captured, South Africa and England. The fifth principle resonates highly with both the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* as Amy expresses cultural knowledge through her identity and through the superordinate theme *'focus on external factors'* which explores cultural differences between the South Africa and England.

The sixth principle put forward by McAdams (2008) is 'some stories are better than others'. McAdams (2008) proposes the principle is based on moral terms good/bad stories or the coherent/disorganised personal narratives. Relating to the current study the researcher interpreted Amy's personal narratives to include both positive and negative factors through the superordinate theme '*focus of the self'.* Additionally, it was found that Amy told her story relating to a timeline suggesting its coherency.

To conclude, the researcher postulates that there are similarities and dissimilarities between the themes found within the current study and the principles posited by McAdams (2008). The superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* appears to be highly relatable to the principles. However, the second superordinate theme '*focus on external factors'* does not appear to correlate so well. Hence, the principles could be considered good as they are flexible and inclusive. Nonetheless, the researcher concludes the principles are rather broad and ambiguous, supposing anything anyone said ever could be construed to relate to one of the principles in some way. The researcher proposes the tightening up on the six principles is needed.

Discussion

This study adds to the existing knowledge of personal narrative and life story research concluding that it is an important area to investigate as the phenomena is how we create and portray our identities. The research questions were twofold: firstly, to use a single persons' personal narratives to explore what themes emerge from their life story; and secondly to establish which of the six personal narrative and life story principles, advocated by McAdams (2008) were relevant to the case study being reported. The main findings from analysing the data through IPA were the two superordinate themes *'Focus on the self'* and *'Focus on external factors'*. In relation to McAdams (2008) six principles the researcher concluded that there were both similarities and dissimilarities and additionally suggests that further clarification of the principles is necessary.

Literature evaluation

This section explores some of the analytic observations already made by considering them regarding previous theoretical research. The theory of the self as multiple was

explored by James (1980, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) who distinguished between the 'ME' and the 'I'. The 'ME' consisting of what can be known about the self, for example, one's body, relationships: all things external that those around us can be aware of. Although not fully analysed this is consistent in the interview with Amy within the superordinate theme *'focus on external factors'* as she discusses topics such as '*education*' and *'family'*. The 'I' incorporates intrapersonal factors existing within the individual self or mind which is evident within the superordinate theme *'focus on the self'*, as Amy explores personal experiences interweaving her emotions and feelings throughout. Furthermore, the idea of 'separate selves' is evident in the current study as within the subordinate theme *'internal conflict'* as Amy talks about fighting two halves of herself suggesting she experiences different selves. The researcher proposes for the current case study perhaps James's (1980, as cited in Swann & Read, 1981) theory on the self fits the superordinate themes found within Amy's personal narratives most strongly and the research adds a more current exploration of the 'ME' and the 'I'. However, like McAdams (2008) principles the 'ME' and the 'I' are broad aspects of the self.

As Amy expressed high levels of *'internal conflict'* in her personal narratives through her belief in religion and her sexuality, there is evidence that her 'actual' self and 'ideal' self were incompatible, even contradictory. This can be compared to Higgins (1987) self-discrepancy theory outlining inconsistencies in beliefs regarding different selves can have a negative impact on individuals (as seen in Stanley & Burrow, 2015). Additionally, this reflects the theory that regarding personal narratives females discuss internal states, emotions (Stennes & Haight, 2003) fear and sadness (McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan & Machado, 2004) as Amy explored internal states within the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'*.

The analysis of the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* confirms the theory that personal narratives and life stories convey identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013) and personal characteristics (McLean, Pasupath & Pals, 2007). McAdams and McLean (2013) outlined that identity is one of the main outputs of our personal narratives; this is evident within the subordinate theme *'personal identity'* which included when Amy communicated aspects of her character (personality). Additionally, McAdams and McLean (2013) posit our identity is constantly evolving which can be seen in within the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* as the researcher suggests in the analysis that Amy's sense of self including her identity and personality changes throughout her personal narrative. Furthermore, this corroborates Clark and Rossiters (2008) theory that the self is a constantly evolving phenomenon.

Moreover, the analysis supports Hounkpatin, Wood, Boyce and Dunns (2014) belief that personality develops across the life span as in the beginning Amy describes herself as a withdrawn child with no friendship group and her life story ends with her being heavily involved in many societies (superordinate theme *'focus on the self'*). Additionally Amy discussed personal development throughout the interview and the researcher suggested Amy is open and possibly extraverted due to her busy social life. Although the researcher did not collect a personality test from Amy, the interpretation could be seen to support Bauer, McAdams, & Sakeda (2005) and McLean & Fournier (2007) findings that those who's personality traits are high in openness to experience, more extraverted and less neurotic interpret their past and who they are through change and personal growth.

The wealth of empirical evidence concludes that the use of metaphors and the discussion of the self go hand in hand. Amy used a variety of metaphors in her personal narratives in the interview within the superordinate theme *'focus on the self'*. Shinebourne & Smith (2010) suggest people use metaphors as a way of how people make sense of their lives and a way of communicating and reflecting on their experiences. The researcher interpreted that Amy's use of metaphors reveals emotional perception and reflection on her experiences within the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'*. Additionally, this supports Buckner and Fivush (1998) and Bauer, Stennes & Haight (2003) findings that females use metaphors in their personal narratives when exploring who they are.

The study found a wide range of subordinate themes within both superordinate themes suggesting that Amy has the ability reflect on many aspects of her life. This can be seen to give evidence for Habermas & Bluck (2000) findings who suggest that older adults have a capability of producing complex personal narratives with the ability to encompass who they are through a wide range of topics.   Additionally, the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* suggests Amy has the ability to self-reflect on her own internal experiences regarding her feelings and emotions which supports Adams, Smith, Nyquist & Perlmutter (1997) theory that older adults have the ability to engage in introspection. Additionally, self-reflection is related to metacognitions, which allow for the exploration of internal states (Dimaggio, Lysaker, Carcione, Nicolò, & Semerari, 2008) suggesting Amy has metacognitive abilities.

The analysis demonstrated that Amy made associative links between her personal world within the superordinate theme *'focus on the self'* and external world within the superordinate theme '*focus on external factors'* corroborating McAdams (2008) theory that personal narratives and life stories connect both the personal and social world. However, relating specifically to the six principles put forward by McAdams (2008) the researcher found both similarities and dissimilarities. Although, the researcher believes the principles are too broad and vague and a theoretical implication of the current study is suggested to be the tightening up of the six principles with more clearer and specific definitions. However, the researcher acknowledges the principles could be considered good as they are flexible and inclusive. Additionally, if the researcher was being more restrictive or if another researcher was conducting the comparison then perhaps the analysis would have been different. Furthermore, if the researcher conducted a deductive approach perhaps a higher comparison rate would have been established.

Polkinghorne (1991) theorised that a healthy life story is one that flows in an order connecting events (known as emplotment). This emplotment is evident within the superordinate theme '*focus on the self'* as Amy tells her life story on a timeline beginning from when she was born, through her childhood and adulthood to the current day. Additionally, this flow of a timeline signifies a continuous self as suggested by Reese, Yan, Jack and Hayne (2010). Furthermore, the findings of the current study has both practical and theoretical implications in the counselling and clinical field as any exploration of personal narratives gives insight into how people create and express their identity (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007).

Self-reflexivity

When using a qualitative method such as IPA it is theorised that the researcher may impose their beliefs on the data which could influence the analysis (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to self-reflect in a personal statement, including background knowledge on the phenomenon being studied so the reader can interpret how these factors may have affected the analysis (Watt, 2007). These factors will also be considered throughout the rest of the discussion by the researcher.

When the study was conducted the researcher is a 22 year old white female studying a BSc Psychology (Counselling) degree at Southampton Solent University. The researcher grew up in East Sussex and has always resided in the South of England. The researcher has been in a heterosexual relationship for the past four years and has a close relationship with her family and friends. The researcher has no religious connection but would say she is 'spiritually curious'. The researcher has always been interested in the 'the self' and had some basic previous knowledge on the topic including the interest in life stories. The researcher had undergone mindfulness training in the month previous to completing the analysis. Finally, the researcher is hoping to become a counselling psychologist.

Methodological evaluation

This section explores some of the methodological issues the researcher believes is important to explore. The researcher analysed the data of a singular interview in keeping with the ideographic nature of IPA. This can be seen as a strength of the study as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) propose reduced participant numbers allow the researcher to create a richer more complete analysis. However, there are some limitations for completing a case study; for example, the findings will not be generalizable to the wider population. Relating more specifically to the limitations of the current study, the researcher reflects on the use of a case study addressing the fact the researcher became immersed in the participants' world and at times felt overwhelmed attempting to do the participant justice. Additionally, as the researcher suffers from anxiety researching the self and identity at times was hard and perhaps the analysis could have been tainted by this anxiety.

The use of IPA to explore Amy's personal lived experiences through her personal narratives could be seen as a strength of the study as the primary use of IPA is to explore personal worlds (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Additionally, how the researcher carried out the steps for analysis was rigorous. Amy's interview was analysed in great detail by one researcher, however, it is advised that IPA analysis is completed with another person or a group to create inter-rater reliability ensuring rigour (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This was not feasible due to the restrictive time limit, confidentiality and the double hermeneutic nature of the study. The researcher suggests the analysis and themes may have been different with other researchers input. Additionally, even without other researchers contribution the researcher did select some themes over others which would have had an implication on the analysis. The importance of recognising that there may have been another outcome because of the theme section is proposed as critical when using IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Continuing with theme section, as mentioned in the method section the researcher conducted seven interviews, however, the majority of the interviews did not go on for long enough to create an in-depth analysis. Therefore, the researcher chose to create a case study using the interview that went on for the longest gaining the most data to analyse. The researcher posits that if the researcher had chosen a different interview to analysis the themes that were found may be different and there may be a different similarity established between McAdams (2008) personal narrative and life story principles. Additionally, the other participants were young adults, the interview which was analyzed (Amy) was an older adult therefore the themes that were found may have been completely different to that of a younger adult. Furthermore, another point to explore is what was lost by not fully analysing the second theme. Although the superordinate themes overlap what is lost is how external factors have an impact on Amy. Additionally, this may have had an impact on the similarities between McAdams (2008) six principles.

A further identifiable strength of the study is that it used an inductive approach as at first the researcher analyzed the data separate from any theory before comparing the findings to McAdams (2008) six principles. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that this correct procedure rather than approaching the analysis with a pre-existing theoretical perspective.

The researcher proposes a limitation of the study could be that during the interview when Amy was seen to be 'going off track' the researcher didn't feel she could interrupt to take the interview back 'on track' as she was very passionate about what she was talking about. The self is a very personal topic by nature; therefore, the researcher didn't want to offend Amy by possibly inferring that what she was talking about was not important. Additionally, Amy talked so continuously the researcher did not feel able to interrupt and ask any of the prompts. The researcher recognises that if the prompts were used more in-depth data may have been collected changing the analysis. An open questionnaire could possibly have been used to stop the participant for 'going off track' so easily; however, the researcher does not think that the same amount of rich in-depth data would have been collected. Although, Amy may have felt more comfortable to reveal other things about her life that she did not want to share face to face.

The researcher looked to explore the quality and validity of the study using Yardley's (2000) four principles relating to qualitative research (as recommended by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The researcher endeavoured to display 'sensitively to context' throughout the interview process by being aware of Amy's needs discussing such a personal topic and understanding that it may be hard for her to discuss certain personal aspects of her live. Before the interview took place the researcher attempted to gain a rapport with Amy by asking her about her day in hope to make her feel comfortable. Additionally, the researcher was sensitive with the analysis attempting to stay true to the participants lived experience by supporting interpretations with carefully selected quotes.

The second principle 'commitment and rigour', can be seen through the researcher attending all dissertation meetings and lectures and additionally reading up on the method of analysis to gain in-depth knowledge. Overall the researcher believes that the findings stay close to the lived experience of Amy, although the researcher acknowledges that as she is new to using IPA therefore may not have been able to

develop the deepest interpretations of the data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The third principle 'transparency and coherence' has attempted to be covered by the researcher completing a self-reflexively (see above) and through the use of tables and appendices showing clearly how the researcher came to the interpretative conclusions. The last principle is 'impact and importance', as this study is a third year project the researcher can only infer few implications however, the researcher believes the findings are interesting and the topic is important. Additionally, the researcher proposed to have Amy read the analysis and comment on whether the researcher portrayed her lived experience which would improve the studies quality and validity; however, ethical approval was not gained.

Suggestions for future research

Following completion of the study the researcher contemplates that there are a number of possible avenues that could warrant further investigation. For example, data collection could also include not only an interview but diaries which would improve triangulation enhancing the knowledge of the participants lived experiences. The researcher could complete a longitudinal exploration of the participants' experiences which could allow for a more in-depth understanding of their experience. A quantitative study could also be carried out based on the current findings to see whether the themes that have been found in the data relate to a wider population. The researcher could carry out an interview with a male in a similar position of the female in keeping homogeneity (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and explore any similarities or differences in themes presented in their personal narratives. Additionally, the researcher collected other interviews, therefore, for future research the researcher could analyse the said interviews.

Conclusion

By focusing on a single case the researcher has been able provided a comprehensive account of Amy's life experience through her personal narratives relating to the self. The research questions were twofold: to explore themes that appear in Amy's personal narratives using IPA to increase in-depth understanding, in addition, the researcher compared the findings for evidence of McAdams (2008) six principles. The main findings were the two superordinate themes *'focus on self'* and *'focus on external factors'* which reflect themes that were talked about in Amy's life story. The study is unique in the use of a case study comparing the findings with that of McAdams (2008). The comparison produced both similarities and dissimilarities with the suggestion that other theories related to Amy's personal narratives more. A theoretical implication of the current study is suggested to be the tightening up McAdams (2008) six principles with more clearer and specific definitions needed. Additionally, the current study reaffirms many themes prevalent within the self, personal narratives and life story literature.

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