

Emerging Identity

Sheree Anne O'Neill

A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2019

Faculty of Culture and Society

Abstract

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom”
Aristotle (c.384 BC–c.322 BC)

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the influences on the construction of my identity over a period of time, through reflecting on experiences within a variety of contexts. This ‘inward’ journey can be likened to philosopher Carl Jung’s (1875–1961) proverb “your visions will become clear, only when you can look into your own heart; who looks outside dreams; who looks inside, awakes”. I had decided from the outset that my doctoral thesis would be autobiographical, believing that my life experiences, spanning a period of 47 years had significance—not only for me in understanding my own identity development, but also in terms of stimulating resonance and debate for the readers of this work.

The study has drawn on the body of literature on human identity and the theorists who investigate this notion. The work of Erik Erikson (1968) and his psychosocial eight stage theory of human identity development, underpinned this investigation with relation to the construction of my identity, along with Goldberg’s (1990) five-factor model of personality.

In this interpretive study, which is positioned in the qualitative paradigm of research, autobiography provided a lens through which to explore my experiences, which have influenced the construction of my identity. Autobiography provided the broad data, from which “incidents” were selected that I believed have been influential in the construction of my identity. The methodology of reflective narrative is followed, which took the form of further deep reflection on those incidents, in order to extract their significance and meaning in the construction of my identity.

The significance of this thesis was twofold. Firstly, it makes a methodological contribution in two areas: through the use of an “incident” based perspective; and by tracking the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, “meaning” and “significance”—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present

moment. Secondly, this study offers “transportability” to a number of vocations such as teaching, nursing and counselling—any practitioner involved in the care of others. These professionals would face ethical challenges throughout their career and it is imperative that they are aware of who they are, what shaped their identity and the ethical values they bring to their profession. As reflective practitioners they would continue to reflect on this throughout their working lives, albeit their ongoing journey of self-understanding. This ongoing self-reflection will assist them in keeping in touch with who they are and will help them address ethical challenges, whilst remaining true to their values.

We learn from other people’s stories and my aim was to stimulate debate on identity construction from which new ideas will emerge, not to provide a definitive answer to the subject of identity which itself remains something of an enigma, but to share the emergence of my identity and encourage others to explore their own identities—with readers finding their resolve strengthened, to think about their identity development. The reader may relate to or recognise themselves in some of my experiences and my interpretation of it may be helpful to them, but ultimately it shares with the reader a unique process for exploring identity, namely my “incident” based approach.

I accept that many researchers believe that the main purpose of research is to inform policy and professional practice, but I subscribe to a different view as held by others such as Mason (2002), who states the most significant products are the transformations in the being of the researchers and secondly stimuli to other researchers to test out conjectures for themselves. Aristotle’s quote “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom” resonates with me in that as human beings, whatever vocation we choose to pursue or the fact of ‘just being’, it is important for us to reflect on our own identities—for we cannot hope to understand others, or undertake research on others, if we have not first reflected on who we are.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Sheree Anne O'Neill

Acknowledgements

*“Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions.
Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel
that you, too, can become great”*

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

I have been fortunate to have had the pleasure (and sometimes angst!) of many people crossing my path during my life; these people included family, friends, school teachers, dance teachers, students and work colleagues. Some of these people on a personal level, and some on a professional level. I have referred anonymously to many people in this study, choosing not to name them for privacy reasons and because they may not agree with my interpretations of our interactions. I acknowledge that this study is autobiographical and this is my interpretation of events and others may interpret it somewhat differently.

This doctoral journey was not an easy one to navigate. As an autobiographic inquirer, I engendered a wide range of criticism and accusations of narcissism and solipsism for employing this approach. Confirmation of candidature proved challenging, with the two reviewers and members of the Faculty Doctoral Committee questioning (a) the significance of studying my own identity construction and (b) the merits of autobiography as a valid methodology. I can appreciate the scepticism around ‘identity’ which stems from the vagueness and implicit complexity of the term itself. I can also understand the criticism around the significance of undertaking a self-study, which some critics regard as self-aggrandising. Whilst this thesis is a communicative text with tangential benefits that involve levels of self-actualisation and personal growth, it also makes a methodological contribution in two areas, firstly through the use of an “incident” based perspective and secondly by tracking the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, “meaning” and “significance”—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present moment.

It did come as a surprise to me that senior University scholars voiced scepticism about the use of autobiographical research methods, expressing doubts on the legitimacy of this method. Having read widely on autobiographical research methods, I understand them to

be an established and acceptable approach to research in both University and clinical circles alike and I can only assume that their reservations stemmed from their unfamiliarity with this research approach. I can only offer words of encouragement to those critics to be open to other methodologies that sit outside the dominant paradigms of academic consideration and furthermore, to not be afraid to examine their own personal identity and aspects which might underpin their own interactions with others.

There are some key people I would like to make special mention of, who have been instrumental in the completion of this study. In the beginning, Dr Erwin Losekoot allayed any initial fears I had about doctoral study and was supportive in helping me through the bureaucratic postgraduate process, which can appear somewhat daunting for the novice postgraduate student. Special thanks go to Dr Charles Johnstone for believing in my study and his words of encouragement through the PGR2 process and Dr Larry Powell, Research Mentor at the Auckland University of Technology, who helped me navigate the PGR9 process. Thank you to my supervisors at the Auckland University of Technology, Associate Professor Ineke Crezee and Professor Paul Moon who offered their time and support throughout the project. Thanks to Vice Chancellor Derek McCormack and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Rob Allen, from the Auckland University of Technology for awarding me a Vice Chancellor's Academic Staff Doctoral Study Award to assist in completing the final writing up of this research. Special thanks go to my parents Heather and Timothy O'Neill for the endless love and support they have given me throughout my life and also the crucial role they played as my first teachers and ongoing role models.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“One learns about education from thinking about life and one learns about life from thinking about education”

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 29)

Identity—an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self; my genetic make-up, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (Palmer, 2007, p. 38)

1.1 Introduction

It is not difficult to see how questions of ‘identity’ permeate our daily lives, as we ponder the question of who we are. As a fifth generation New Zealander, a woman, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a teacher, and a doctoral student, I realise that I inhabit multiple roles that had evolved over time, with my identity continuing to emerge and develop. This self-reflective narrative, is about how my identity has and is emerging, as a result of my lived experiences. This chapter explains the background and formulation of my research question, the methodological considerations and overview of the process, my aims of the study, the significance and rationale of the study, the use of artefacts, my positioning in the research and a summary of the ensuing chapters.

1.2 Background and the Formulation of the Research Question

Do we need identity? Identity seems to be an important ‘thing’ everyone needs to have, as a way to show others ‘who I am’ in our daily life as members of society. Identity can be thought of in singular terms (I am female), but also multifaceted in terms of the broader social, cultural and historical contexts that shape my values and defines who I am. Understanding how I fit in or do not fit in with other groups of people, extends beyond the question of ‘who am I?’ When we think about identity, we may focus on what we can

see, which includes our biology or physiology, or how we were born. However, identities are comprised of ideas, ideologies, and ways of seeing the world around us. This suggests that our identities are socially constructed. It is not easy to determine where these value systems or ideologies stem from, some of which we have learned and internalised over the course of our lives from family, work colleagues, role models, social groups and government to name a few. These values are influential because once adopted, we take them for granted, assuming they are usual and the way things should be and further because they can shape the way we see and understand the people, objects, practices, and institutions in our lives. If our identities are socially constructed, then they are not unbiased. Our gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and social class plays a significant role in determining whether we have social, political and economic power. Our identity can fundamentally shape our life experiences in terms of how we understand and experience the world, our treatment of others and our treatment by others, whom we befriend and the kind of education and employment we get. As we navigate our way through life, these experiences can be both positive and negative, the negative including being exposed to discrimination, inequity and injustice.

In education for example, identity has been researched extensively, with questions of teaching and learning in relation to identity explored through a variety of methods. Terms like ‘teacher identity’ and ‘learner identity’ appear in the practical field of teaching and learning. The growing interest in the topic of identity as it relates to education, suggests that studies of identity are becoming popular in relation to the theory and practice of education. It appears that education is linked to identity, playing a pivotal role in the personal development of individuals. This includes the formation, maintenance and management of the sense of self and the personal identity in a person’s living world. Education is the mechanism or facilitator for ‘socialisation’ which plays a fundamental role in the manifestation and reproduction of particular identities and social roles. Teaching and learning increasingly play a vital role in addressing questions of ‘who am I?’, ‘where do I come from?’, ‘where will I go?’ and ‘how do I fit in?’ These subtle but poignant questions for individuals, are becoming increasingly important in relation to the unpredictable and diverse society we find ourselves in. It could be argued that the questions of education in respect of identity has everything to do with the understanding of the notion of identity. This is because different approaches to identity from different disciplines that are applied to educational research, might lead to very different outcomes. The diversified understanding of this notion can explain why the landscape of educational

research in relation to identity appears somewhat fragmented, as demonstrated by the extensive body of diverse literature. However, understanding identity is a complex question and linking this notion to the broad field of education adds another dimension with its own complexities.

I have pondered the notion of my own personal identity for some time now, believing that the practice of self-reflection and understanding how our own identities are shaped, in terms of understanding who we are and where we come from, is an important part of our everyday lives in both personal and professional contexts. I see the subsequent findings of my study potentially informing numerous subject areas including social work, sociology and social psychology. Freeman's (2010) view is that "self-understanding occurs, in significant part, through narrative reflection, which is itself a product of hindsight" (p. 4). My view is that we are deeply driven by our sense of identity of who we are. We are in the middle of our individual world, where we place central importance on our sense of individual self and as the French Philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) said, 'I think, therefore I am'. The aphorism, 'know thyself', which began with the ancient Greeks, is the foundation of much modern thought and has significance to a number of different disciplines.

In terms of me exploring my own personal identity, I considered how the notion of 'knowing myself' has influenced me as an educator. We only have to reflect back on our own educational experiences to know that teachers have a significant influence in the teaching and learning process. Reflecting on my teachers (some good and some bad) throughout my primary, secondary and tertiary years, the teachers who made a strong connection with me as a student caused me to reflect on whether they were aware of the impact their personality, words and actions had upon me. In terms of me becoming an educator, I entered the University teaching profession 24 years ago without any formal teacher training or New Zealand teacher registration (I did hold a teaching qualification in pianoforte from the Associate Trinity College London). During my teaching career I had been awarded four University Distinguished Teaching Awards for excellence in teaching and continually achieved high ratings in the Student Paper Evaluation Questionnaires (SPEQ) completed anonymously by students at the end of each semester.

This made me curious to investigate how teachers develop their identity or what could also be termed as the 'essence' of being a teacher? Does having a 'personal understanding

of the self” shape teacher identity? I explored the literature further and found that content knowledge and educational practices are interpreted and transformed by the identity of the teacher and as Palmer (2007) who has been a prolific writer in this area states, “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and the integrity of the teacher” (p.154). For me having spent 24 years teaching in the University sector, I was interested in the views of Palmer (2007) and Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) in that ‘knowing oneself’ is an important part of being an effective teacher. It would have been worthwhile engaging in this ‘inward looking’ exercise prior to me starting out in my teaching career, but there was no teacher training requirement for entering the University teaching sector, let alone any opportunity to learn the act of reflective practice or consider those factors that influenced one’s practices and ‘ways of being’ in the classroom. Whilst teacher education programmes in New Zealand focus primarily on knowledge content, the mechanics of teaching and also the act of reflective practice, there is little that encourages teacher education students to understand themselves and consider those factors that influence their practices and ‘ways of being’ in the classroom. What is even more interesting is that any person currently engaged in or considering a teaching career in a New Zealand University, is not required to undergo any teacher education or teacher registration requirements to practice in this field and therefore has little or no opportunity to explore ‘ways of being’ in the classroom.

Law, Meijers and Wijers’ (2002) view on ‘ways of being’ suggests that in order to develop a professional identity:

A person must have the ability to draw upon personal feelings; be able to differentiate self from others; develop a personal narrative and represent experience in one’s own terms. They should be able to focus a point-of-view, build an inner life and relate all to one’s own purposes. (p. 432)

This notion of ‘personal understanding of the self’ is also supported by Barrett, Gross, Christensen and Benvenuto (2001) who state that people who know and can describe how they are feeling, are better able to understand their emotional responses and are therefore better able to deal with them. The act of teaching is charged with emotion (Gross, 1999; Cenkseven-Onder, 2009) and Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes and Salovey (2010) suggest that teachers face more emotional demands compared to many other professions.

Whilst the questions of “who am I?” and “what kind of teacher do I want to be?” have been addressed by teachers for many years, it is only recently that researchers have recognised the importance of these questions to the teaching profession as a whole (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). These authors suggest that identity construction means building a personal sense of the world, along with developing a clear understanding of how teachers see themselves interacting with others. Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) argue that teacher identity stands at the core of the teaching profession and thereby provides the framework for teachers in the construction of their own ideas of ‘how to be’ and ‘how to act’ as a teacher. The critical importance of identity is also expressed by Palmer (2007) who suggests that a strong sense of identity is the trait common to all good teachers and that teaching, like any human activity, emerges from one’s ‘inwardness’, knowing oneself is as important to good teaching as knowing one’s students and subject. Palmer (2007) states that our teaching experiences reveal who we are and that “teaching holds a mirror to the soul and we cannot know our students until we know ourselves” (p. 3). This raises the question as to whether teacher identity can be separated from personal identity. Most writers believe that this concept cannot be separated and that teacher identity is a construct that embraces who one is as a teacher, rather than what one does (Webster, 2005). An examination into teacher identity, is therefore also inviting the consideration of personal identity and the enmeshing of both (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006), to arrive at an attempt to examine the influences on the construction of who a teacher is, when she/he stands before a class of students.

Before embarking on this PhD journey of exploring my personal identity, my own view was that ‘knowing myself’ is an important part of being an effective teacher. Having since done some reading around this notion I found comfort in Palmer’s (2007) philosophical view which advocates that academics must listen as their lives are telling them who they are. He says:

I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity ... the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life ... if we want to grow as teachers—we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives—risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract. (p. 37)

Mason’s (2002) view concurs with Palmer (2007) in that “working to develop your own practices can be transformed into a systematic and methodologically sound process of

‘researching from the inside’, that is, of researching yourself” (p. 12). Palmer (2007) suggests that when face to face with students, only one tool is at our immediate command and that is our identity, our selfhood, our sense of this ‘I’ who teaches; without which we have no sense of the ‘thou’ who learns. The ability to connect with students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods we use, than on the degree to which we know and trust our selfhood and are willing to expose its vulnerability in the service of learning. Palmer (2007) believes that to reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves, building a barrier between inner truth and outer performance, play-acting the teacher’s part, becoming caricatures of ourselves. We distance ourselves from students and subject to minimise the danger, forgetting that distance makes life more dangerous by isolating the self.

Successful teachers have invested in their disciplines and are excited by teaching and learning in a dynamic, holistic fashion (Palmer, 2007). This humanistic approach relies on the teachers’ ability to truly reinvigorate the ‘know thyself’ motto; having a strong sense of personal identity infuses their work. Palmer’s (2007) view is that good teachers, the ‘weavers’, do not follow the same instructional approaches. Good teachers join self, subject and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a ‘capacity for connectedness’. Palmer (2007) states that creating a classroom that permeates a sense of connectedness and community, is essential to teaching and learning, by trusting and teaching from one’s true self, from the identity and integrity that is the source of all good work, by revealing rather than concealing who we were. Good teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. Conversely, poor teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching and in the process distance themselves from their students.

Palmer (2007) believes that good teaching involves the interweaving of three distinct elements. Firstly ‘intellectual’ which he describes as the way we think about teaching and learning, the form and content of our concepts of how people know and learn, of the nature of our students and our subjects. Secondly, ‘emotional’ in terms of the way we and our students feel as we teach and learn, feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us. Thirdly ‘spiritually’ which means the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life, a longing that animates love

and work, especially the work called 'teaching'. Palmer (2007) states that these three elements depend on each other for wholeness; reduce teaching to intellect and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual and it loses its anchor to the world. According to Palmer (2007), without connections, humans feel alienated and rejected. This is a form of teaching that transcends technique and comes from the heart, "meaning 'heart' in its ancient sense, the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self" (p. 3).

Reflecting on Palmer's (2007) perspective to my role as an educator, I see identity as a subtle dimension of the complex, demanding and lifelong process of self-discovery. Identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life. Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. Knowing myself is an important part of being an effective teacher, for how can I teach others if I do not know myself? When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are, or my subject, not at the deepest levels of embodied personal meaning. Teaching from an undivided self means that every major thread of one's life experience is honoured, creating a weave of such coherence and strength, that it can hold students and subject as well as self. Such a self, inwardly integrated, is able to make the outward connections on which good teaching depends. When I decided to explore teaching as a career, I made an intentional decision that I would pledge all my energies and abilities to ensure that every learner that crossed my path, young or old, rich or poor, would have a chance to discover the inner richness of knowledge. This richness is connected with understanding the essence of the adventure of being human with all the possibilities and flaws, with all the heartbreaks and joys. Drawing upon my personal experiences as a teacher, I realised that I could truly teach the students only when I was able to relate to them as people. I am aware that as a teacher there is inherently a power differential that exists between me as the teacher and the people I help. Understanding both the value and the many impacts of the power differential is the core of ethical awareness. The power differential that exists makes it imperative that teachers are aware of their identity and how their identity and values impact on others.

In a study of teachers preparing for diverse classrooms, Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1993) concluded that "prospective teachers need to examine their personal histories and educational biographies for clues to the ways their beliefs, images and experiences, when unexamined, are likely to limit their effectiveness in educating poor and minority

students” (p. 37). As Banks (1994) states, educators need to begin with their own knowledge by reflecting and writing about memorable life events in their family histories. This will create an awareness of personal beliefs and attitudes that form the traditions and values of cultural autobiographies. As demonstrated by Emig (1977) and Yinger (1985), writing is linked to the knowledge of self within a social context. As Progoff (1975) suggests, writing one’s life story seems to construct connections with universal human tenets and serves to diminish negative thinking about different groups of people. Consequently, teachers acquire an awareness of their own perceptions regarding race, gender, class and related social issues (Banks, 1994; Sjoberg & Kuhn, 1989).

In spite of the growing number of studies on teacher identity and my interest in Palmer’s (2007) work on teacher identity, this is not the focus of my thesis. My study is not an attempt to explore the construction of my teacher identity, but is a study of the construction of my personal identity, which in my view is the primary source of identity that permeates all facets of my life, both in personal and professional contexts. This study does not attempt to address the intersection of gender and identity but instead explores the questions around ‘knowing oneself’ including what kind of person am I? What influence has my family had on who I am? What influence has education had on who I am? What influence has my career had on who I am and how has my career as a teacher shaped who I am today? These questions shaped my thinking as I formulated and refined my research question. I did not see these questions as isolated from each other but realised that implicit in many of these questions was the notion of lived experience on the construction of my identity. Slowly, what I really wanted to research became clear to me: *how have my lived experiences influenced who I am today?* To help answer the research question, it made sense to do an autobiographical study of myself as I am the only one who knows all of my experiences and can make connections between these experiences and the emergence of my identity.

I embarked on an autobiographical study of my life over 47 years, positioned in a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework. This study explored my experiences of life’s phenomena, woven together into a narrative of self-identity. My prior experience with narrative, was in the collecting of data to aid in the writing up of my dad’s autobiography. This experience was the catalyst for exploring further narrative research projects, namely this study.

I am aware that having the courage to explore my own identity formation, ultimately exposes one's identity, and creates a vulnerability to indifference and judgement by others. My narrative will become "social acts, points of public negotiation between self and others" (Kehily, 1995, p. 27), therefore making autobiography a version of a life ready for public consumption. The writing and sharing of this story has been an exercise in being psychologically honest with myself—an exercise in being real, genuine, expressing my real being, having the courage to be who I am, rather than being emotionally repressed.

1.3 Methodological Considerations and an Overview of the Process

Much has been written about the subjectivity of the autobiographical approach to life history and narrative research with Nelson (1994) stating that autobiography by its very nature is the making of a narrative. As Krauss (2005) states this method allows the reader to access the personal response of the author and the author's thoughts and actions. It is its very subjectivity that answers the truth claim. There are no claims at generalisations, or at universality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This approach offers an insight into the authentic, lived experience of one person. No one can know the intimate details, the thoughts and responses better than the one who is living them, providing the person is engaging in honest reflection. Levine (2003) suggests that the approach requires a preparedness to reveal and to expose the thoughts and events that have shaped the life of the author. As Bowers (2010) purports, autobiography has traditionally been considered, by writers as much as by readers, as the mapping of how the past has made the individual. Conversely, contemporary autobiography as observed by Anton (2001), Gossman (1990), and Zahavi (2005), has frequently situated the person not as having been made by the past, but as having made the past. In this hermeneutic phenomenological self-study I have explored my experiences of life's phenomena and woven them together into a narrative of self-identity.

Telling stories about past events is a universal human activity, one of the first forms of discourse we learn as children (Riessman, 1993). People convey their lives in stories and as Gudmundsdottir (1991) states:

Stories are part of our identity and our culture. We create stories about ourselves that we communicate in various ways to our colleagues. This self-narrative enables us to construe who we are and where we are heading in our lives. (p. 207)

All human interactions involve a process of constructing and reconstructing personal and social stories (Grimmet & Mackinnon, 1992). In our storied lives we think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures (Bruner, 1987). Story is the landscape within which we live as human beings and within which we can be seen as making sense (Elbaz, 1991). As Carter (1993) states, this is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit between the notion of story and our intuitive understanding of our life, it is an epistemological claim that our life, in its own terms is ordered by stories and can be best understood in this way.

According to Beattie (2009), the search for personal identity is rooted in the unity of life, the coherence of one's life story and an individual's choice to make one kind of unity rather than another in his or her life. Personal responsibility is involved in the plots we choose for our lives, however limited, imaginative, or expansive they may be. We have the choice of living our lives according to predetermined plans and narratives, or we can construct our own plans and narrative and choose to tell and retell our stories of who we are and what we are to be in them. The methodology employed in my study used reflective narrative—my story is a way of knowing, it is my individually and contextually situated story, as such it is life history or narrative (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) and it links experience and story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). It is both personal and subjective, yet also practical in terms of stimulating resonance and debate.

1.4 The Aims of the Study

The aims of this study were to:

- Establish autobiography as an approach to researching identity construction.
- Employ an autobiographical approach to interpreting my own identity construction.
- Employ an incident based approach to interpreting my own identity construction.
- Track the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, “meaning” and “significance”—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present moment.

- Share my experiences and thoughts on how my identity has emerged and continues to emerge over time. The research should help me by means of self-reflection to understand myself regarding finding the answers to the question: Who am I?
- Stimulate debate on identity development and encourage others to reflect upon their own life experiences in the shaping of their identity. I hope my writing stimulates and benefits my readers to think critically and participate in reflecting on themselves through reading my narrative.

1.5 Significance and Rationale of the Study

I can appreciate that some people may ask why is it of value to study the influences on the construction of one person's identity? Identity in the humanities and social sciences has in many instances been approached in both reified and impersonal ways. The significance of this thesis lies in it being written in an effort to fulfil the need for experiential accounts. Autobiographical approaches to academic contributions facilitate distinctively personal points of view that emphasise reflexivity and personal voice (Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997). My study offers a first-hand account of my own experience of my identity formation using autobiographical material. The intimacy of the material collected, offers advantages in the extent and depth of detail in the data collected that would not normally be available if conventional interviews with strangers were relied on.

This study has reciprocal significance for me as the writer of this work and for the readers of the resulting thesis. For me, the benefit of this research was the development of my research capabilities and the benefit of writing was in the writing process, rather than in the presentation of the result. This work was an attempt to understand the crafting of my personal identity which stimulated thoughts about my life and provided me with a fuller and better understanding of myself, a process of learning and reflecting, a process of enriching my own understanding of my identity and becoming more aware of myself. This in itself is a contribution to my practice both personally and professionally. I accept that many researchers believe that the main purpose of research is to inform policy and professional practice, but I subscribe to a different view as held by others such as Mason (2002) who states the most significant products are the transformations in the being of the

researchers and secondly stimuli to other researchers to test out conjectures for themselves.

There is nothing profound about my life history, I am studying myself as one example, but this study offers “transportability” to a number of vocations such as teaching, nursing and counselling—any practitioner involved in the care of others. We learn from other people’s stories and my aim was to stimulate debate on identity construction from which new ideas will emerge, not to provide a definitive answer to the subject of identity which itself remains something of an enigma, but to share the emergence of my identity and encourage others to explore their own identities—with readers finding their resolve strengthened, to think about their identity development. These professionals would face ethical challenges throughout their career and it is imperative that they are aware of who they are, what shaped their identity and the ethical values they bring to their profession. As reflective practitioners they would continue to reflect on this throughout their working lives, albeit their ongoing journey of self-understanding. This ongoing self-reflection will assist them in keeping in touch with who they are and will help them address ethical challenges, whilst remaining true to their values. Whatever vocation we choose to pursue or the fact of ‘just being’, it is important to reflect on our own identities. We cannot hope to understand others (human subjects), or undertake research on others, if we have not first reflected on who we are. An educational rationale would ask ‘is there interpersonal understanding without self-understanding?’

For me as a teacher, teachers who have self-examined, (know who they are) are inspirational teachers—this in turn helps students know who they are and to grow into these spaces. Teachers who have walked similar paths to their students, resonate with these experiences on a deep emotional level. This aligns with the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016) and Barkhuizen (2016) who argue that it is only by having a sense of common ground between mind in science and mind in experience that our understanding of cognition can be more complete. It may be possible that the reader takes something from my study that is personally relevant for them and that resonates with their own identity construction, but it does share with the reader a unique process for exploring identity, namely my “incident” based approach.

The process of writing an autobiography, sets the stage for learning about another person’s life story. Sharing stories can illuminate personal experience and understanding

and can create a sense of community. An analogy to describe ‘community’ is when I attend a theatre play, I sometimes feel connected to the story, as if my own life were being portrayed on stage. However, I have no desire to interject and respond to the actor’s words, or join the actors on stage. Sitting in the audience, I am already on stage ‘in person,’ connected in an inward and invisible way that we rarely credit as the powerful form of community that it is. With a good drama, I do not need overt interaction to be ‘in community’ with those characters and their lives. The same applies when reading an autobiography. The experiences that I shared, through the example of a distinct and intimate case study, may resonate with the reader, providing encouragement for them to reflect upon their own life experiences in the shaping of their identity. As Atkinson (2007) states “just witnessing—really hearing, understanding and accepting without judgement another’s life story can be transforming” (p. 235). Bowers’ (2010) view is that:

Readers of autobiography are always inevitably ‘truth testing’, even if they acknowledge that, by its very nature, autobiography is a negotiated space of understandings and interpretations, a spectrum, where agreed facts lie at one end, and invention at the other. Yet it is not the place of phenomena on this spectrum that validates the autobiographical project, as it is so often supposed: rather, it is the manner in which the object, person, event or place is described—how the tempero-spatial phenomena of your choice develops meaning beyond itself—that is the basis for the authentication of self. (p. 319)

With the above quotes in mind, I felt reassured that autobiography is an acceptable method of research and one that I was interested in using to explore my lived experiences and their influence on my identity. This study contributed to the understanding of identity, through the example of a distinct and intimate case study. My story is my reflection of my lived experiences so there was also a strong element of autoethnography. Roth (2005) describes autoethnography as research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, political and social. While some research exists that deals with these approaches in such a way, I believe that the added lens of autoethnography, offers an additional perspective. My study contributes to knowledge in the field by using an autoethnographic approach to view my emerging identity. The research question lent itself to a re-collective/reflective/interpretive research design, as it was anticipated that the data yielded will be rich and diverse. The question employed qualitative research, because it did not answer definitively, but instead aimed at providing

a greater understanding of the subject of identity, which is relevant to the research community.

1.6 The Use of Artefacts

As an ardent collector (others may suggest hoarder) since the age of five of memorabilia, photos, awards from dance and music competitions, dance costumes, old school exercise books, school projects, documentation from my working career (letters, emails), I had many objects to reflect on in order to stimulate my memory in the narrative process that I used to construct my self-identity. They served as personal reminders of specific incidents, including people and places that have been significant in the construction of my identity.

The use of artefacts in the research process is documented in the work of other writers. Mosselson (2010) argues that including artefacts develops the research process and Urrieta (2007) believes that artefacts bring the past into the present and help to make processes more personal and meaningful. These artefacts served a double purpose. Firstly, they served to remind me of events in my life and provided data for me as the researcher. Secondly, the artefacts were reflected upon in terms of their evidence in the construction of my identity. Drawing upon the work of numerous influential thinkers of the twentieth century, including Bakhtin, Goffman, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Schrag and Taylor, Anton (2001) in his text *'Selfhood and Authenticity'*, articulates the phenomenological constitution by which social construction is a real possibility. Authenticating one's life through one's relational history with 'objects', is a powerful tool used in writing autobiography. This use of objects, is referred to by Anton (2001) as 'symbolicity', in that we create symbols from phenomena around us and by lifting something out of its mundanity and by making a relationship with it, it becomes part of selfhood. Anton (2001) suggests that the self develops, indeed becomes fulfilled, not by focusing on a 'self', but in authenticating one's life in the processes of living. This is an intrinsically phenomenological process in which "people dwell in the things into which they meaningfully weave their lives" (p. 7).

1.7 My Positioning in the Research

As part of this study I need to discuss assumptions that underpin my thinking. These assumptions are to do with research. Firstly my assumption that all research is subjective; secondly research involving autobiography and hindsight is particularly subjective and thirdly, the main benefits from researching are related to the growth of the researcher. This study did not intend to provide an all-encompassing understanding of the notion of identity construction, rather it attempted to provide a personal insight into the development of identity through experience and to demonstrate that personal identity is a complex multifaceted phenomenon. Learning theories and practice in respect of identity construction therefore need to be developed with awareness of the complexities of this notion. By its very nature, this study was a subjective investigation of my lived experiences and my reflection on those experiences. Its data was the personal remembering of the way in which my identity has developed over time. My personal identity, my values and beliefs, my personality and my human nature have affected the writing of the narrative and also the selection of the incidents or key moments in the construction of my identity.

I hope that this research acts as a catalyst that stimulates discussions on the complexities of identity, extending to the field of education and beyond, and on the implications for learning and lifelong learning that can be drawn from our understanding of identity construction. I also hope that this study is thought provoking for readers and learners as they reflect upon their own identities, but also helpful for lifelong educators to guide learners to explore the subtle question of ‘who am I?’

1.8 Thesis Chapters

This thesis consists of ten chapters.

Chapter one provides the introduction, explains the background and formulation of the research question, the methodological considerations and overview of the process, the aims of the study, the significance and rationale of the study, the use of artefacts and my position in the research.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature which is relevant to the research question and also sets the scene with an explanation of the context of the study. The chapter identifies a gap in the literature that shapes the research question and aims.

Chapter three discusses the research philosophy that shaped the methodology and methods adopted to answer the research question, with a focus on autobiographical research as a valid approach to uncovering new knowledge. My philosophical position is explained and reflected upon and a description of how the data were collected and analysed is provided.

Chapters four to eight describe my experience of identity formation written in autobiographical form, which allows for the story to speak for itself and to have its own integrity. Each chapter focuses on a different stage in my life. Chapter four looks at my early years from 0–12. Chapter five reflects on my teenage years 13–19. Chapter six describes events in my 20s. Chapter seven focuses on incidents from my 30s up to my present age 47. Chapter eight is dedicated to my working career spent in education. At the end of each of these chapters is my reflection on emergent themes and aspects of the narrative.

Chapter nine is reflection on my findings from chapters four to eight, including my identity traits that have emerged along the way.

Chapter ten presents my thoughts on looking backwards and forwards with a reiteration of the research question and aims, a summary of the emergent themes and an explanation of my contribution to the body of knowledge. The thesis includes my reflection on the challenges of using lived experience as a means for exploring self-identity and future implications for study in this area.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the background and formulation of my research question, the methodological considerations and overview of the process, my aims of the study, the significance and rationale of the study, the use of artefacts, my positioning in the research and an outline of the ensuing chapters. Chapter two will now provide a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to the study of my personal identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

*“Identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person ...
self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted
reflexively by the agent”*
(Giddens, 1991, p. 53)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature that underpinned this study. The superfluity of approaches to identity construction, suggest that identity is a mixture of self-experiences—all of which are represented within various identity theories. Examining the notion of identity from its origins, one finds it is fundamentally a theoretical construct. Identity theory is both a personal and a social construct of personal reality; it is relevant to this study as it provides a particular focus on the formation of identity and sense of ‘self’ that are core elements of this study. Understanding identity theory was essential to my research on my own identity construction and development, which has been influenced through my own lived experiences, including those with my family and my work.

In order to achieve an understanding of identity in this study, it was important to clarify what it is to experience being one’s ‘self’ and then explicate how identity is encountered by the person in relation to the self. This chapter identifies the evolving factors that shape identity and provides the theoretical basis that underpins the conceptualisation of identity. A review of the literature examined the origins of human identity and the construction of human identity. This chapter goes on to review Erikson’s (1968) lifespan development theory which underpinned this study and although Erikson’s theory is rooted in structure, it provides a place from which to move and offers a base for the poststructuralist notions of identity. This is followed by a review of the use of life-story in identity construction, along with Goldberg’s (1990) five-factor model of personality, traits which Costa and McCrae (1994) state are important contributors to identity formation and may serve as expressions of identity as well as determinants of other factors that contribute to identity achievement.

2.2 Origins of Human Identity

The origins of the word ‘identity’ can be traced back to the 16th century, though it has been the subject of scholarship since the time of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, where notions of identity, ego and self were explored. Calhoun (1994) suggests that the earliest discussions on theories surrounding identity, appear to have emerged from Aristotle’s philosophical arguments on ‘essence’ and ‘appearance’. Usage of the term identity is ubiquitous and on a theoretical level is not confined to the field of philosophy, but embraces a number of domains including sociology, psychology, anthropology, politics, linguistics and art. The increasing interest in this topic among academics in different fields is contributing to an increasing body of literature, reflecting the fact that the notion of identity is multifaceted and complex in nature. Howard (2000) states that theorists have contemplated the notion of identity and agree on a small number of key theoretical features, however no single means of conceptualising identity currently prevails with very little agreement on how identity is defined (Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant, & de Levita, 1994). Existing approaches to identity, typically focus on one or more of three different ‘levels’ at which identity may be defined such as individual, relational, and collective (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).

The predominant view in the literature is of two dominating identity frameworks; firstly, the philosophical/psychological tradition of identity formation, that emphasises a process centred on the individual and her/his self-reflections through the mirror of human nature (personal identity) and secondly the anthropological/sociological view of identity, that emphasises an interaction between the individual and culture (social and cultural identity). Both of these views assume that one’s identity is knowable in itself and that it has a core. Identities within identity theory are linked to hierarchical social structures, in that individuals compose salient ranges of identity options demanded by circumstance (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Social identity theory examines common themes among people within a group and the differences between groups.

The definition of ‘self’ as ‘core being’ informs this study. The language used to describe ‘self’ is historically conditioned and as Taylor (1992) postulates “a sense of the term where we speak of people as selves, meaning that they are beings of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity” (p. 32). As Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), Rosenberg (1981) and Shibutani (1961) posit, the notion of the self-concept comprises everything a

person knows about themselves. This includes the totality of self-descriptions and self-evaluations individuals have available to them as a person and is traditionally conceived of as an internal frame of reference which guides the individual's behaviour towards the world outside. The concept of 'self', which connects to a sense of identity, is characterised by the crucial feature of human agency and "what I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me. A sense of self is constituted by our interpretations of ourselves, which are never fully explicit" (Taylor, 1992, p. 33–34).

Freud (1923) equated ego with our sense of self and portrayed ego more as a set of psychic functions such as reality-testing, defence, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning and memory. More recently Erikson (1946, 1959, 1968) built on Freud's notion of 'ego' and formulated the term 'ego identity' (Erikson, 1946) stating:

Ego identity concerns more than the mere fact of existence, as conveyed by personal identity; it is the ego quality of this existence ... Ego identity, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods and that methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others. (p. 22)

However, identity cannot simply be associated with ego-identity, there is also the sociological perspective to consider. Erikson's (1968) view on how a person's identity is shaped as a function of interaction between self and society, suggests that identity relates to how one is positioned relative to others and comprises a person's self-labels and group memberships. It could be contested that although ego-identity in principle might be described as how an individual him/herself, not others, feels about or senses him/her 'self', it is not a notion without social elements, since he/she 'internalises' the external socio-cultural influences that bear on one's 'core of self' (the ego) and puts others' views into considerations in constructing his/her 'sense of self'.

Oyserman (2004) points out that answering the questions of 'who am I?', 'where do I belong?' and 'how do I fit?' derived from French philosopher René Descartes' Latin phrase 'cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am) is central to conceptualising identity. This concurs with the views of Stryker and Serpe (1994) and Woodward (1997) who suggest that identity is located within two constructs, the self (individual identity gleaned through reflexivity) and how identity fits and is constructed within wider social institutions to provide a social identity. Woodward (2004) suggests that individual

identity also relates to identifying “with a nation or group, to take up a collective identity” (p. 10). Castells (2010) believes that people seek identity as a source of meaning and experience, whether it is through history, geography, religion, personal fantasy or collective memory. In the pre-modern age of the western world, identity on the social and the cultural levels was generally understood as something that was passively given to a person from one’s birth to death, for example, ancestral title, family business, local tradition, social role and social class.

2.3 Identity Construction

Identity construction occurs through exposure to a diverse collection of internal and external stimuli and contexts. Theorists define identity in a number of ways and work with different dimensions of self-experience (Breakwell, 1983). Identity can be viewed as a ‘sense of self’ which is complex and multi-faceted. Self is biological, sociological, psychological and cultural; all intertwined together. Descartes (1596-1650) view is that some of the traits that shape one’s identity are present at birth (heritable). Alternatively Locke’s (1632-1704) view is that the mind is a blank slate on which experience writes. Gregg (1991) states that “each individual develops a unique set of positions that especially shape all he or she thinks and does. The structure of the positions, personages, and arguments that make up this dialogue constitutes the system of self-representation” (p. 14).

The contents of a person’s identity can include not only his/her mind, body, friends, spouse, ancestors, and descendants, but also tangible elements including his/her clothes, house and car. Put simply, people view and treat as part of their identities not only social entities beyond their individual selves, but also material artefacts (Belk, 1988; Mittal, 2006), and significant places (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Thus, beyond individual, relational, and collective identities, people might be said to have material identities. Taken together, these four aspects of identity may provide the basis for an integrated operational definition of identity. Viewed through the lens of an individual person, identity consists of the confluence of the person’s self-chosen or ascribed commitments, personal characteristics, and beliefs about self; roles and positions in relation to significant others; and membership in social groups and categories (including both status within the group and the group’s status within the larger context); as well as identification with treasured material possessions and his/her sense of where he/she

belongs in the geographical space. For Collinson (2003) the sources and interaction of identities such as one's physical body, ethnicity, religion, family status, gender, age, class, occupation, possessions, nationality, sexuality, language and political beliefs, contribute to the differentiation and belonging involved in identity construction. These identities may be mutually reinforcing, or in conflict and therefore resulting in insecurity. Lewis' (1990) western perspective suggests that the sense of self, initially involves simply sensing that one's body is separate from that of others; that is identity begins with a physical sense of the boundaries of one's body and where it is in space.

Woodward's (2004) view of identity concurs with Collinson (2003) as multi-dimensional, with many different role identities (including nationality, ethnicity, gender, family, social class, occupation and sexuality) varying in salience depending on the environmental demands and associated requirements upon the individual to express them. Woodward (2004) maintains that it is essential to differentiate identity from personality and suggests that identity is something an individual actively claims in relation to their social position, while personality refers to a feature, such as a trait someone 'has' or what they are 'like' as a person. However McAdams (1993) suggests that personality psychology and life story offers another dimension in a person's identity. As Giddens (1991) maintains, self-identity is "reflexively understood by a person in terms of her or his biography" (p. 53) and is contingent upon the ability to keep the narrative of 'self' going. A person tries to validate the factual events that have shaped the self so far and to craft a meaningful life story.

Bosma and Kunnen (2001) state that familial interactions influence the initial status of identity development. The relationships with one's family are typically the first individual experiences, consequently providing a foundation for identity formation. They suggest the outcomes of earlier development crises impacts the search for one's identity, with positive outcomes from previous life challenges leading to a positive outcome in identity formation. In the early years, parents play an integral part in helping the individual develop a sense of trust, by providing resources for example food, water, shelter and comfort. In addition to this, the family also fosters autonomy and initiative in children when they allow children to make appropriate decisions and engage in new activities.

Identity construction of individuals occurs through personal and social-identity components. In the sociological field, the inter-influences between social reality/structure and the formation/development of 'self' have been recognised since the middle of the 20th century (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Parsons, 1968). Within social psychology the 'self' is conceptualised in a number of ways and it is difficult to find a widely accepted definition amongst academics. Originally the term was not applied to a person, but rather a theoretical construct that was introduced to 'do' something in the field of philosophy. The self-concept echoes a person's own mental image, implicit theory or perception of him/herself as an object that is unique. The need to be acceptable to one's self and to society is driven by one's self concept. The derivatives of the self-concept are the ideas of personal self and social self, self-identity and social identities, conceptualised in different ways according to various disciplinary research traditions.

Tyler, Kramer and John (1999) maintain that the social self considers the social groups a person belongs to, whereas the personal self can be considered as the idiosyncratic aspects of the self. Personal identity may be conceptualised in terms of I/me unique attributes and self-descriptions and self-diagnosed adjectival traits, relating to interpersonal characteristics, values, abilities and physical features (Turner, 1984). Turner and Onorato (1999) view the self-concept as stable individual differences, relatively fixed cognitive and personality structures, interpersonal orientations and styles, and enduring motives and predispositions. One of the key differences questions whether the 'self' by definition, remains the private perception of the individual alone, or whether it can be shared with others as a 'collective self'. Theories of self-categorisation and social identity theory suggest that social selves are shared, consensual, normative and context dependent forms of the self (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Individuals choose to self-categorise and take on group identities/social selves in common with others when there is benefit in doing so. Other theorists have written about the 'self' which is presented in social interactions and termed as identity. Goffman's (1959) view of identity highlights the identification of an individual from others, both in every day encounters between individuals (personal identity) and according to social categories (social identity). Goffman (1959) asserts that when individuals appear before others, being acutely aware of how they are likely to be perceived, anticipate unwanted treatment by managing the impression they make upon others. To do this, Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals create short-term situated identities, or temporary renditions of themselves, which are then adjusted according to the social context/setting.

The experience of the self is viewed in psychology as a cognitive, experiential phenomenon that involves a combination of the person's awareness of themselves as an object and as an actor in the social world. Early descriptions suggest that the self is socially derived and developed experientially through one's membership of social groups and experiences in the social environment. The fact that the self-concept is conceptualised as a social product that develops through one's relationships with others and what they see in one's self from a sociological perspective, was exemplified in the work of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1956), and in 1937 led to symbolic interactionism being developed by Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's. Mead's position was that the self is socially constructed and unlike the self-concept which is seen as an all-inclusive structure, identity relates to a specific kind of self-knowledge. This was demonstrated by Mead (1934) and Cooley (1956) who observed that because the self is an entity among others with whom they are similar or different, people have self-understandings which relate specifically to their social position and relative social standing. This suggests that we understand ourselves in relation to others around us and because of the similarities or differences between ourselves and others, interacting with a broader range of people in society allows opportunities for a wider range of the self to become apparent. Individuals engage in activities and interactions with others in society and those social experiences are essential to the development and reconstruction of identity. According to Mead's (1934) perspective, the self-concept is not static and a person's identity shifts across time. This concurs with Goffman's (1959) view which implies that different social identities provide individuals/actors with the possibility of taking on roles and identities that suit the circumstances, depending on the salience of any particular social identity.

Cooley's (1956) perspective is that the expectations of others in society are central to the development of self-understandings and therefore no individual exists apart from society and there can be no self apart from others. Cooley (1956) argues that humans use sympathetic introspection (mental reflection upon the perceptions of others) to imagine themselves as others see them and these views are then internalised (psychologically taken 'on board') as their own. Cooley (1956) emphasises that the self is developed within the context of small groups in which face-to-face interaction is likely to occur. This view is termed the 'looking glass self' where individuals form ideas about themselves that are consistent with the views of others around them.

Mead (1934) states that individuals exercise what he coined 'reflected appraisal', meaning that individuals acquire a sense of 'self' from what they believed other people thought of them. Mead stressed the importance of the self-motivated actions of the person for developing their own sense of self, rather than simply absorbing the views of others, employing a degree of agency in selecting the ideas about themselves they believe to be true. Mead (1934) argues that self-development is essentially an ongoing social process where the 'I' acts upon the 'me' shaping the social process itself. This comprises a mixture of what is expected of the individual by others and the ideas they choose to believe and internalise about themselves. Cooley and Mead differ slightly in their theories, however both see the 'self' as both a cognitive ('in the mind' of the individual) and experiential phenomenon (manifested through the exchange of words and the acting out of behaviours) that operated on and was affected by the world in which the person was a part of. The common element between the two, is that identity is primarily a social construction, socialised in familial networks through communicative activity in close interpersonal groups.

The role identity paradigm developed by McCall and Simmons (1966) highlights the importance of the individual's social networks in influencing their identities. McCall and Simmons (1966) see identity (self-definitions and self-meanings) as being constructed via passive internalisation of social expectations attached to social roles. These become stored in the mind of the individual as 'role identities' or sets of concepts that determine how one 'should' think and feel as well as behave as an occupant of certain social roles. In this view the extent to which individuals fulfil this social role appropriately determines their level of adaptability to the world 'outside'. Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987) builds upon the work of Mead (1934), Cooley (1956), Goffman (1959) and McCall and Simmons (1966) by seeking to clarify how people switch from identity to identity depending on social demands. Stryker does not see identity as exclusively situationally derived and maintains even though how we see ourselves and what we do is influenced by the presence of others, our behaviour should fundamentally be seen as a reflection of the content of an overarching 'real identity' inside our minds. In Stryker's view, an individual's expressed identity, does not reflect an unvarying or united set of features an individual holds, but instead, the identity that an individual portrays, emerges from a combination of role identities which are held in the individual's mind and selectively valued, expressed and experienced across social situations depending upon the degree of commitment and salience those identities hold. A study by Stryker and Serpe (1982)

highlights how people's identities are shaped through exposure to social norms around role occupation and group membership. Their study explored the importance individuals placed upon their religious identity, in terms of the behaviours related to being a member of a particular religion, which in essence related to the extent to which individuals valued relationships based on religion, the time they spent in religious activities and the salience of religious identities to them personally. This provided a valuable heuristic for understanding how people's identities are socially constructed, reflecting the broad cultural, social, ideological and historical conditions in which people live.

Stryker's (1968, 1980, 1987) ideas have provided a conceptual basis for a large body of research extending the relevance of role theory, by focussing on the relationship between identity and social relationships. Stryker combined the idea of social role with the impact of social contexts, pointing out the changeability and multifaceted nature of identity and that role-related behaviour, varies in relation to commitment and salience. Identity is a reflection of a person's social roles and people transition from identity to identity depending on social demands. In this sense, a person's identity may vary considerably along with the extent to which their daily activities are bound with other people who promote some identities over others. This prompts the question of whether people's identities are 'real' or whether they simply act in accordance with what is expected of them in different social situations. Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987) claims that people emphasise certain social group memberships, or role identities, in order to be socially accepted. This suggests that the emphasis placed on particular role identities depends upon the number of important relationships a person has established with that particular identity. As Stryker and Statham (1985) maintain, the more people who expect the individual to express a particular role identity, the more the person acts in accordance with and focuses on that particular role identity. This means that the role identities that are accepted and promoted within social networks, gain prominence (salience) to an individual, while those that are ignored, become less noticeable over time.

In the second half of the 20th century, there was a rising interest in 'collective identities' in psychological and socio-psychological field. Collective identity denotes membership in any form of social group or category, including nationality (Schildkraut, 2005, 2007), ethnicity (Taylor, 1992), religion (Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005), gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and smaller, face-to-face groups such as families and work groups (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). This theoretical development, namely social identity

theory, extends the role identity model by highlighting that identity emerges at the intersection of self and society, having both social and personal aspects and develops to understand and cope with intergroup discrimination (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory suggests that people do not develop identities simply by passively adopting social expectations associated with group or role membership, rather people's identities reflect a mixture of the features of groups and social categories to which they belong, the meanings that they give to these social groups and categories and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that result from identifying with them (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; De Fina, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It assumes that membership of multiple social groups is possible and this leads to the existence of not one, 'personal self', but rather numerous selves. According to social identity theory there is an individual-based perception of how we/us is defined in relation to any internalised group membership.

Self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) suggests that when individuals define themselves in terms of shared group membership, they redefine themselves moving away from unique and individual attributes towards more shared and collective stereotypes. An example being how moment-to-moment changes in inter-group contexts can shape people's self-conceptions, leading them to shift from viewing themselves as individuals to viewing themselves as group members. Individuals participate in a process of self-comparison (not merely interpreting reflections from others) but looking for similarities and differences between the self and the in-group. Subsequently individuals favour the in-groups they belong to, in contrast to the out-groups that they do not belong to.

Social identity theory asserts that group membership is an important component of one's identity and that individuals are motivated to view their groups as positive and distinct from other groups. In recent years, some theories have challenged the view of identity as an essential, permanent and unified quality of group categories. As Tajfel (1981) claims, the study of identity refers to the content of self-knowledge as it is represented to and by others. Brewer and Hewstone (2004) suggest "although the focus of these questions is on the 'I', the individual self-concept, the self is meaningful only in the context of one's relationship to others and one's position in social groups" (p. 3).

Identity is viewed as a set of self-concepts people internalise as a result of group affiliation. To elucidate the relationship between how the person sees themselves and their social roles, Tajfel (1981) makes an explicit distinction between personal identity and social identity. Focussing on the role of social group membership on identity, he defined social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership” (p. 255). Personal identity was conceived of as a general view of the self (including personal beliefs about the self, skills, and abilities) influenced by social identities, however, quite unique to each individual. By distinguishing between social and personal identities, social identity theory increases the relevance of role theory for understanding identity, because people’s identities are seen as being shaped by their group memberships, but not completely determined by them.

Tajfel (1981) suggests that identity represents the conceptual link between the individual and society as a whole. This approach is characterised as referring to a group label and categorisation in understanding identity. Social identity theory contends that a person does not just have a ‘personal self’, but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. The process of social categorisation is a social-cognitive process of membership. The difference between ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ is defined in a relative or flexible way that is subject to the activities one is engaged in. Different social contexts may cause an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his/her personal, family or national ‘level of self’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk (1999), the evaluative and affective dimensions of social identity need to be considered. Salice and Montes Sanchez (2016) highlight the emotional aspect of identity which includes subjective salience of the social identity, degree of attachment to the social identity, sense of belonging to the social group, social emotions of group pride, shame, embarrassment and self-esteem. These factors impact on whether an individual values a particular social identity and is motivated to identify as being part of an in-group.

Karreman and Alvesson’s (2004) view of social identity is similar to the concept of role, as it indicates identification and association to a particular social group, accompanied with emotional significance and personal meaning. A role aspect to one’s identity is considered vital by some observers (Wong, 2002). The social self includes all relevant

categories of group membership, ranging from sports clubs, social clubs, political interest groups, family, religion, neighbourhood, tribal and ethnic groups and national groups. As Brewer and Gardner (1996) suggest both interpersonal and collective identities are incorporated where the bonds between people may range from the personal, such as family, to the more impersonal such as national groups. Individuals generally desire to enhance their social selves through group membership which is important to healthy psychological functioning (Simon, 1999). Moreover, social selves take account of membership of low status, disadvantaged, stigmatised and minority groups. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue that some theories that challenge 'group' identity can be found in poststructuralist and sociolinguistic theories, linking identity with the idea of 'diaspora' and 'hybridity'.

Arnould and Price (2000) see the negotiating and rebuilding of identities through the development of satisfying, meaningful connections through social group membership, as an ongoing and active process. The post-modern literature conceptualises these problems as arising from the condition of fragmentation, whereby "traditional institutions which formally provided the basis of identity disintegrate" (Goulding, 2003, p. 154). Additionally, the insignificance of individuals' lives, stemming from a sense of disconnectedness from traditional communities, gives rise to a need for greater self-fulfilment. Brickson (2000) maintains this to be a consequence of modernity, a breakdown of traditional values around what were considered the binding elements of family, kin, church and state.

In modern sociology, the theory of structuration, suggests that self as a whole and society to some extent, shape each other (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Giddens devised a systematic theory and a detailed analysis of the problems of identity in relation to modern western society and focused predominantly on the negative impacts of social changes on the 'self'. Positioning his analysis in the connection between micro level (structure) and macro level (individual) of today's modern society, Giddens' suggests that we are neither in the conditions of 'modernity' nor 'post-modernity' now, but in what he terms as 'late' or 'high' modernity, maintaining that the 'self' has undergone immense change as a result of social transformations.

People derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organisations or work-groups to which they belong. For many people their professional and/or organisational

identity may be more pervasive and important than ascribed identities based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, or nationality (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 121). Adams and Marshall (1996) view the person in context and argue that:

The process of socialization and human development appears to be based on the paradoxical association between two seemingly opposing factors; that is, the duality between agency and communion, individuality versus collectively, self versus other. (p. 430)

The above quote suggests a state of conflict that exists in human identity by advocating this duality between the individual and their environment, whereby the individual influences the environment and vice versa. Adams and Marshall (1996) argue that the mechanics of identity formation and socialisation are influenced by processes that involve distress that could be associated with life stage changes, incompatibility, inconsistency, incompleteness or confrontation that are associated with interacting with the environment, followed by synthesis and/or resolution.

2.4 The Work of Erik Erikson (1902–1994)

Lifespan development is the study and theory of human development across a lifespan. It encompasses general tendencies, differences, and human adaptability in development and is generally framed either within person-centred or function-centred arguments (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999). The work of Erik Erikson (1968) on lifespan development underpinned this study of the construction of my personal identity. Although Erikson's theory is rooted in structure, it provides a place from which to move and offers a base for the poststructuralist notions of identity which follow. Erikson's influential writings and theories on lifespan development have inspired a number of research studies making him an influential figure in the field (Kroger, 2007). Erikson's (1968) conceptual and descriptive view of identity and concern with identity development in adolescence, sees identity from a psychosocial perspective of self in society. Identity is a psychological construct, an integrated set of self-understandings learned during childhood, consolidated during adolescent years and resolved by adulthood. Erikson believed that childhood identifications lay the groundwork for identity formation in adolescence but never defined a range of chronological ages for adolescence or other periods of life such as childhood and adulthood (Waterman, 1993). Erikson (1968, 1974, 1987) suggests, that during adolescence, the individual experiences uncertainty about their identity in terms of who

they are and what does it mean to be ‘me’ as a member of society. This heightened uncertainty is brought about not only by physical and physiological changes, but also as a result of a different set of social experiences and social pressures. Erikson believes adolescence is a time when young people explore, experiment and commit to certain ideological identities in a variety of life domains, including the political and religious beliefs, career choices and familial and gender roles.

Erikson’s ideas were greatly influenced by Freud’s theory regarding the structure and topography of personality. Erikson proposed a Psychosocial Model of Human Development (1950/1993) which revolutionised developmental thought (Hoare, 2002). Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality. The model was composed of eight successive psychosocial stages which span the course of life. During each stage, the person experiences a psychosocial crisis which could have a positive or negative outcome for personality development. Erikson placed major emphasis on the adolescent period, feeling it was a crucial stage for developing a person’s identity, representing an optimal time for identity development due to a variety of physical, cognitive, and social factors. Although Erikson believed identity was largely ‘fixed’ by the end of adolescence, he did suggest that identity continues to evolve throughout adulthood. Each of the eight stages is associated with an inherent conflict or crisis that the individual must encounter and successfully resolve to proceed with development. Erikson (1950/1993) uses the term crisis “in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (p. 96). The assumption is that each psychosocial stage has both a successful and unsuccessful outcome (e.g. trust versus mistrust, initiative versus guilt, intimacy versus isolation). Resolution of earlier stages is believed to directly affect the resolution of later stages (Marcia, 1993a, 1993b).

Erikson was the first to illustrate how the social world exists within the psychological makeup of each individual. Erikson (1950/1993) believes that the “individual cannot be understood apart from his or her social context. Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change” (p. 114). This is a theme that permeates throughout all of Erikson’s eight developmental stages and is especially relevant to the fifth psychosocial stage (identity versus role confusion) which occurs during adolescence. For the purposes of this study, the eight stages are outlined below:

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (0 to 1 ¹ / ₂)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ¹ / ₂ to 3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood (40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Figure 1: Erikson, E.H. (1950/1993). *Childhood and society*. New York, NY: Norton.

In each of Erikson’s stages, a resolution of two opposing states needs to be attained in order for the individual to move to the next stage. Erikson refers to the oppositional challenge as a ‘crisis’ which is the result of a time of growth and change. For the purposes of this study I have provided further explanation of each of the eight stages below:

2.4.1 Stage 1: Early infancy (0–1¹/₂) trust versus mistrust

Stage one asserts that the infant is uncertain about the world in which they live and looks towards their primary caregiver for stability and consistence of care. The infant learns the concept of *trust* through experiencing a dependable and maintained state of having their needs met which will carry with them to other relationships, and they will be able to feel secure even when threatened. By developing a sense of trust, the infant can have *hope* that as new crises arise, there is a real possibility that other people will be there as a source of support. Erikson (1950/1993) describes this stage of identity development as “I am what hope I have and give” (p. 107). Conversely, if the care has been severe or inconsistent, unpredictable and unreliable, then the infant will develop a sense of mistrust and will not have confidence in the world around them or in their abilities to influence events. They will carry them the basic sense of mistrust into other relationships. Failing to acquire the virtue of hope will lead to the development of fear, anxiety, heightened insecurities, and an over feeling of mistrust in the world around them.

2.4.2 Stage 2: *Early childhood (1^{1/2}–3) autonomy versus shame and doubt*

Stage two asserts that the child begins to experience personal agency and the first moment of independence from the maternal presence. The child is developing physically and becoming more mobile. Children begin to assert their independence discovering that he or she has many skills and abilities. Such skills illustrate the child's growing sense of independence and autonomy. The child functions between expressiveness and submissive conformity. This stage lays the foundation for an individual who can value his or her uniqueness and who can make and act upon decisions about the future. Success in this stage leads to the virtue of *will*.

Erikson (1950/1993) believes it is critical that parents allow their children to explore the limits of their abilities within an encouraging environment which is tolerant of failure. A delicate balance is required from the parent—not wanting to do everything for the child, but if the child fails at a particular task the parent must not criticise the child for failures and accidents. The parents need to encourage the child to become more independent while at the same time protecting the child so that constant failure is avoided. Gross (2015) regards this as self-control without a loss of self-esteem. If children in this stage are encouraged and supported in their increased independence, they become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world. It is important that the child is not criticised, or overly controlled, as this could manifest itself in the child feeling inadequate in their abilities and therefore becoming overly dependent upon others leading to a lack of self-esteem and doubt in their capabilities.

2.4.3 Stage 3: *Play age (3–5) initiative versus guilt*

Stage three is where children begin to assert themselves more frequently. Bee (1992) states that parents may view the behaviour demonstrated by the child as one that typifies aggression. The child regularly interacts with other children at kindergarten and central to this stage is play, as it provides children with the opportunity to explore their interpersonal skills through initiating activities.

Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *purpose*. Children begin to make up games, initiate activities with others and ask questions as their thirst for knowledge grows. When children are given this opportunity, they develop a sense of initiative and security in their ability to lead others and make decisions. However, if this inclination is suppressed by

parents in order to protect the child, or through control or criticism, children develop a sense of guilt. They may feel like a nuisance to others and will remain followers, lacking in self-initiative. Feelings of compounding guilt can make the child slow to interact with others and may inhibit their creativity. A healthy balance between initiative and guilt is important otherwise the child would not know how to exercise self-control or have a conscience.

2.4.4 Stage 4: School age (5–12) industry versus inferiority

Stage four explores the early school years of the child, who learns to overcome challenges and to achieve. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *competence*. The parents begin to lose their singular hold over the child as the world opens to include other important adults. Formal schooling is first encountered and the child experiences the teacher for the first time. Teachers begin to take an important role in the child's life as they teach the child specific skills. Erikson (1950/1993), p. 125) states that "the selection and training of teachers then, is vital for the avoidance of the dangers which can befall the individual at this stage".

During this stage, children begin to exercise their abilities to make and do things and want to make and do them well— they begin to feel industrious and feel confident in their ability to achieve goals. The child's peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child's self-esteem. The child now feels the need to win approval by demonstrating specific competencies that are valued by society and begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Wider society and culture also begin to play a larger role in the child's life.

If this initiative is not encouraged, if it is restricted by parents or teacher, then the child begins to develop a sense of inferiority, doubting his/her own abilities and therefore may not reach his/ her potential. A balance between competency and modesty is necessary as some failure may be required so that the child can develop some modesty.

2.4.5 Stage 5: Adolescence (12–18) ego identity versus role confusion

The adolescent mind is essentially a mind in moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult (1950/1993). This is a major stage of development where the

child has to learn the roles he/she will occupy as an adult. It is during this stage that the adolescent will re-examine his/her identity and try to find out exactly who he/she is. The individual begins to discover the beginnings of an individual identity. During this stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs and goals. During adolescence the transition from childhood to adulthood is most important with the adolescent searching for ideas and people in whom to believe, which revisits stage one of the model. They become more independent, and begin to look at the future in terms of career, relationships, and families. The individual wants to belong to a society and fit in.

The adolescent searches for the opportunities to have the free will to make personal decisions—this echoes the second stage of identity development. The adolescent searches for adult role models (either positive or negative) and this relates back to the third developmental stage of the model. The adolescent begins to think about career choices, about the choice of what work will work best for him/her and this builds on the fourth stage of identity development.

Erikson (1950/1993) suggests that two identities are involved: the sexual and the occupational. Bee (1992) states that what should happen at the end of this stage is a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one's appropriate sex role. During this stage the body image of the adolescent changes. Erikson claims that the adolescent may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and 'grow into' the changes. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *fidelity*. Fidelity involves being able to commit one's self to others on the basis of accepting others, even when there may be ideological differences.

During this period, they explore possibilities and begin to form their own identity based upon the outcome of their explorations. Failure to establish a sense of identity within society can lead to role confusion which involves the individual not being sure about themselves or their place in society. In response to role confusion or *identity crisis* an adolescent may begin to experiment with different lifestyles (e.g. work, education or political leanings). Erikson suggests that vocation, or career identity, which begins during this stage, might differ according to gender. Also pressuring someone into an identity can result in rebellion in the form of establishing a negative identity, and in addition to this feeling of unhappiness.

2.4.6 Stage 6: Young adult (18–40) intimacy versus isolation

During stage six, the formation of trusting and intimate relationships is highlighted. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *love*. Young adults explore relationships leading toward longer-term commitments with someone besides a family member. Erikson (1950/1993) stresses that although included, this discussion is not limited to sexual intimacy, but encompasses all forms of “psychosocial intimacy” (p. 135). As we use intimacy and relational understanding to further our identity construction, Erikson (1950/1993) describes this phase as being one in which “we are what we love” (p. 138).

Successful completion of this stage can result in happy relationships and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship. Avoiding intimacy, fearing commitment and relationships can result in isolation, loneliness and depression.

2.4.7 Stage 7: Adulthood (40–65) generativity versus stagnation

Adulthood is marked by a productive and positive life, as the adult establishes their career, settles down within a relationship, or begins a family. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *care*. If an adult is not able to achieve a healthy stage of being fully functional in this arena, it is possible that the individual will transition into a stage of stagnation and growth will be restricted. Erikson (1950/1993) contends that during this phase, generativity includes the ability of the human being to encounter and to attempt to satisfy the needs of a following generation, in a way that is able to rise above diversity and context.

2.4.8 Stage 8: Maturity (65+) ego integrity versus despair

Stage eight is the final stage in the model whereby the individual has the opportunity to reflect and evaluate their achievements in life resulting in a sense of fulfilment and peace. We contemplate our accomplishments and can develop integrity if we see ourselves as leading a successful life. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *wisdom*. Erikson (1950/1993) uses the word ‘integrity’ to describe the successful resolution of this phase and believes that it is a time during which one accepts accountability for one’s own life and for all that has happened in it. Erikson suggests we attach meaning and purpose to one’s past in order to achieve a state of wisdom. He concludes his discussion on identity

formation with the words “I am what survives of me” (Erikson, 1950/1993, p. 141). Wisdom enables a person to look back on their life with a sense of closure and completeness, and also the ability to accept death without fear. Erikson (1950/1993) believes if we see our lives as unproductive, have feelings of guilt about our past, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we become dissatisfied with life and develop despair, often leading to depression and hopelessness.

2.5 A Critique of Erikson’s Psychosocial Model

Having reviewed Erikson’s (1950/1993) psychosocial model there appears to be some vagueness about the causes of development. This leads me to wonder what kinds of experiences must an individual have in order to successfully resolve various psychosocial conflicts and move from one stage to another? The theory does not seem to have a universal mechanism for crisis resolution. Whilst Erikson (1950/1993) acknowledges his psychosocial model is more a descriptive overview of human social and emotional development, the model does not adequately explain how or why this development occurs. For example, Erikson does not explicitly explain how the outcome of one psychosocial stage influences personality at a later stage.

Erikson (1950/1993) emphasised that his theory was a tool to think with rather than a factual analysis. Its purpose then is to provide a framework within which development can be considered rather than a testable theory. One of the strengths of Erikson’s (1950/1993) theory is its ability to tie together important psychosocial development across the entire lifespan. Although support for Erikson’s stages of personality development exists (McAdams, 2001), critics of his theory provide evidence suggesting a lack of discrete stages of personality development (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

2.6 Adolescence and Identity Construction

Erikson’s (1950/1993) view is that adolescents establish an identity by drawing from self-understandings from childhood, along with the learnings about various role options and aspirations. According to Meeus, Oosterwegel and Vollebergh (2002), supportive family relationships and the quality of these interactions, provide a valuable resource for individuals in the process of identity formation. High quality relationships which

demonstrate love, acceptance, support and encouragement are linked with increased levels of competency in adolescents (Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, & Silsby, 2002).

Meeus et al. (2002) state that families play an important role in providing the foundation for the beliefs and values an individual holds. Adolescents are exposed to their parents' and other family members' values and belief system which they use as a starting place in the exploration of their own values. Competent adolescents are better prepared to explore options and make commitments regarding their beliefs and values. Adolescents make a commitment to this new set of self-definitions, self-descriptions and self-evaluations which are consistent with their anticipated social role, enabling them to enter into their chosen social niche. This state of identity attainment was coined by Erikson as 'identity fidelity', whereby adolescents had a specific view of themselves and their future. Those who could clearly and confidently articulate their future life choices and identities had higher self-esteem, were more confident and were orientating themselves to their place in the world. Those individuals who had failed to resolve their identities and who were feeling confused and uncertain about the future, were experiencing what he termed an 'identity crisis' and would seek to rely upon others for direction and a sense of purpose.

Marcia (1966, 1967, 1976, 1980, 1993a, 1993b, 2002a, 2002b) concurs with Erikson's view on the formation of identity, as being a socially constructed psychological structure. Marcia elaborated on this Eriksonian perspective by developing the 'identity status model' of psychological identity development. Marcia's view is that an individual's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain personal and social traits. Marcia's identity status paradigm argues that two distinct parts form an adolescent's identity: crisis (a time when one's values and choices are being re-evaluated) and commitment. He defined a crisis as a time of upheaval where old values or choices are re-examined. The end outcome of a crisis leads to a commitment made to a certain role or value. The identity status model consists of four psychological statuses based on the amount of exploration and commitment to an identity the individual had experienced. 'Identity diffusion' status is where the adolescent does not have a sense of having choices, nor is attempting or willing to make a commitment. 'Identity foreclosure' status is where the adolescent has not experienced an identity crisis and tends to conform to the expectation of others regarding their future. 'Identity moratorium' is a state of crisis, where the individual explores and actively experiments with possible identities, but has not committed themselves to a specific identity. 'Identity achievement' status is

where the adolescent has gone through an identity crisis and has settled upon and made a commitment to a sense of identity.

Waterman's (1985) view is that identity is developed mainly during adolescence. This approach implies that the static child is a malleable object, which evolves into the adult. Such an approach implies stagnation beyond puberty. This view is challenged by Marcia (2002a, 2002b) and others who state that identity construction is an ongoing developmental experience throughout an individual's life and that adolescence does not exclusively impact on an individual's identity. Other influences may include aging, experiences and a changing environment in the workplace (Knights & Willmott, 1999; Kroger, 2002; Lopes, 2002). Calhoun (1994) concurs with Marcia's view, highlighting that individual constructs and identity, are always under threat and therefore prone to change, no matter how much people attempt to maintain the status quo (Knights & Willmott, 1999).

2.7 Beyond Adolescence: Adult Identity Construction

Both Erikson (1950/1993) and McAdams (1988, 1993) agree that identity develops during the adolescent and young adulthood years. Erikson (1968) asserts that the major developmental task facing young adults as they transition from adolescence to adulthood is the development and strengthening of identity. According to Erikson (1950/1993), human development passes through key stages, with each stage posing new and difficult challenges that need to be achieved. The primary achievement of the adolescence period according to this perspective involves answering questions of identity, that is, "who am I" and "how do I fit into the adult world". Answering these questions involves careful consideration of the various roles, ideological and religious beliefs, attitudes and personal characteristics one can and wants to hold (identity exploration), and making a commitment in terms of self-definition and action that satisfies these characteristics and virtues (Waterman, 1985). Thus identity, from this early (Eriksonian) perspective, comprises the consortium of individual's thoughts, beliefs, values and goals held in relation to various life domains, and the actions and behaviours taken by the individual in accordance with these.

Erikson's theory of identity has been difficult to validate empirically and no evidence has been found for the presence of set developmental stages. Rather, indicators of identity

achievement have been shown to increase across adulthood (Whitbourne, Sneed, & Skultety, 2002). Conversely McAdams (1988, 1993, 2001) suggests that identity is developed through the life story; and McAdams further states that the life story is an internalised narrative that individuals construct in order to “make sense” of, or understand, who they are and how they developed into the person they are today. According to the model, in late adolescence and young adulthood, people start to psychologically organise and make meaning of their lives by creating ‘inner’ personal histories that reconstruct their own past and anticipate their future. To do this they draw upon all the events that have happened to them in the past, tie them together in a meaningful sequence and use the ‘story’ to explain who they are, what that means and where they are going.

2.8 Life Story and Identity

Life-stories are inherently powerful in conveying events which have influenced a person’s life and the formation of their identity. These events hold a high level of personal significance for the individual, in terms of their sense of well-being and the subsequent psychological relief through the open expression of strong emotions, which one experiences upon writing their story and sharing it with others. Life-stories are intricately associated with our perceptions and beliefs about who we are as individuals. The emergence of identity within life stories offers a different viewpoint on identity, in a way that no other perspective has been able to achieve. This is due to the life-story incorporating the various aspects of self-experience labelled ‘identity’ by theorists, into one process of continuous identity construction and self-development. McAdams’ (1988, 1993, 2001) contribution of the life-story model is holistic and conceives of the individual as constructed by social networks, and inextricably understood as part of a community of meaning that exists within time and space. As Atkinson (2007), Ezzy, (1998), Kenyon and Randall (1997) and Sarbin (1986) state the use of personal life-stories are the best available structure to make sense of how individuals come to experience and understand themselves as individuals in time.

The personal life story has been considered as an ‘inner’ identity in that life stories are private and comprise an accumulation of the person’s own personal understandings of why they are and how they fit into the world (McAdams, 1988, 1993, 2001). McAdams’ (2001) view is that a person’s life-story carries explanations for the origins of a person’s

identity, requiring the individual to explain themselves with reference to the social world, relationships and events that have shaped them in some way. Atkinson (2007) sees the process of ordering one's life meaningfully in this regard is achieved through the weaving of an internal narrative or 'inner story' that amalgamates the person's self-knowledge, associates that knowledge to life experiences they have had and orders those experiences within an intelligible autobiography. Bluck and Habermas (2000) suggest that events included in the life story often provide an explanation for changes or developments in the individual. According to Pillemer (1998, 2001) these events also carry with them life lessons that continue with the individual long past the initial experience which can either reinforce an individuals' belief system or provides the impetus in terms of influencing or changing the individuals' long-term goals or direction in life.

The key theoretical basis of McAdams' Life Story Model of Identity, that narrative identity is the life-story, was formulated in relation to Erikson's (1968) early developmental theory. McAdams suggests that the function of the life-story is equal to that of Erikson's (1968) identity theory, namely, to answer the question of 'who am I?' McAdams (1988, 1993, 2001), suggests that identity takes the form of a personal life story in which life phases may be considered 'chapters' in the individual's evolving autobiography. McAdams (1988, 1993, 2001) and Pillemer (1998, 2001) suggest that the events that comprise the life story are the most personally relevant experiences of an individual's life. Singer and Moffitt (1992) suggest that life story events are those which are 'self-defining', events which cause strong emotions, have been thought about many times, feel important and help individuals understand who they are. McAdams (2001) suggests we strive for causal coherence in that we have a tendency to focus on events from the past which we believe to be causally linked. We have a tendency to view our own traits, attitudes, competencies, beliefs and preferences, as products of the experiences and events that preceded them.

Narrative identity is conceptualised as multifaceted in the sense that individuals do not simply have one life story. That is, the life story may comprise any number of experiences an individual has had over their lifetime, the life story is continually updated as individuals gain new experiences, and the life story that is shared with others may depend on the social context in which it is told (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1988, 2001; Pasupathi, 2001). Autobiographical memory and story-telling capacities may start to develop in childhood, from a theoretical perspective, the ability to construct a 'life story'

does not emerge until adolescence or young adulthood (Habermas, 2010; McAdams, 1988). Habermas and Bluck (2000) suggest that the ability to construct the life story coincides with developmental changes that take place during this lifetime period. McAdams (2001) states that the life story continually changes over time, reflecting the changes in the person's self-understandings, social environment, social roles and relationships. As individuals, we experience a large number of events both in our everyday lives and over our lifetime yet only a portion of autobiographical memories for these experiences are included in the life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Thus while autobiographical memories provide the raw material from which the life story is based, the construction of the life story is considered to be more complex than the simple recollection and recounting of autobiographical memories.

Ricoeur's (1991, 1992) theory of 'personal identity' deals with paradoxes of personal identity and places a considerable emphasis on temporal factors and on the notion of personal identity. He reveals the complex dialectics between 'sameness', 'selfhood' and 'others' on temporal dimension, from which the concept of personal identity can be better articulated and theorised. Stressing the temporal dimension of personal identity in the dialects between sameness and selfhood is where his theory of 'narrative identity' develops from. This theory permits the possibility for allowing human beings to come to terms with the temporality of their existence throughout their lives, from which the 'lifelong' dimension of the meaning of life can be examined. The significance of the notion of narrative identity not only lies in its structural function as a mediator in the dialectic relationship between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood at the conceptual level, it also lies in one's self-understanding of one's life as human experience. This is because one's recognition of his/her personal identity through narrative of one's life can be regarded as one's understanding of the meaning of his/her life and of being a certain kind of person through one's interpretation of his/her life story. This is an approach that is rooted in hermeneutic philosophy. All these aspects of Ricoeur's (1991, 1992) theory of personal identity are therefore of great value in the exploration of the role of learning and aspects of lifelong learning in relation to one's personal identity.

2.9 Goldberg's Five Factor Model

In addition to Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial model of personality development, another prominent model in contemporary psychology is Goldberg's (1990) five-factor

model of personality. Goldberg refined Cattell's (1957) 16 'fundamental factors' of personality into five primary factors (which are all interconnected) as a way to determine what a person is like. The validity of this model was confirmed by two renowned personality researchers, Paul Costa and Robert McCrae (1994) and is a widely accepted framework for describing personality. The five factors are not necessarily traits in and of themselves, but factors in which many related traits and characteristics fit. The factors are *openness to experiences*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness* and *neuroticism*. Each of the five personality factors represents a continuum between two extremes, with most people lying somewhere between the two polar ends of each dimension. For the purposes of this study I have provided further explanation of each of the five factors below. A review of Goldberg's (1990) framework is necessary in my study as Costa and McCrae (1994) state that personality traits are important contributors to identity formation and may serve as expressions of identity as well as determinants of other factors that contribute to identity achievement. I will explore the emergence of my personality traits in relation to Goldberg's (1990) framework in chapters four to eight.

2.9.1 Openness to experience

Openness to experience has been described as the depth and complexity of an individual's mental life and experiences, often called intellect or imagination. Openness to experience concerns an individual's intellectually curiosity, their willingness to try new things, and the ability to think outside the square. An individual who is high in openness to experience is likely have a love of learning, enjoys the arts and engages in a creative career or hobby (John & Srivastava, 1999). An individual who is low in openness to experience usually prefers routine over variety, and prefers less abstract arts and entertainment. Douglas, Bore and Munro (2016) suggest that openness is also connected to universalism values, which include encouraging peace and tolerance and seeing all people as equally deserving of justice and equality. Common traits related to openness to experience include: creative, curious, perceptive, intellectual, complex/deep imaginative, insightful, preference for variety.

Research undertaken by Schretlen, van der Hulst, Pearlson and Gordon (2010) has linked openness to experience to broad intellectual skills and knowledge, which tends to increase with age. This indicates that openness to experience leads to gains in knowledge and skills, and naturally increases as a person ages and has more experiences to learn from.

Openness to experience is the trait that is least likely to change over time, and perhaps most likely to help an individual grow (Soldz & Vaillant, 1999). Ones, Viswesvaran and Reiss (1996) state that in relation to the other four primary factors, openness to experience is weakly related to neuroticism and extroversion, and is mostly unrelated to agreeableness and conscientiousness.

2.9.2 Conscientiousness

John and Srivastava (1999) state that conscientious people work within the rules and demonstrate a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behaviour. Conscientiousness has been linked to achievement, conformity, and seeking out security and a tendency to be organised and mindful of details. Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz and Knafo (2002) state that those high in conscientiousness are also likely to value order, duty, achievement, and self-discipline, and consciously practice deliberation and work towards increased competence. Traits associated with conscientiousness include: persistent, ambitious, thorough, self-disciplined, consistent, predictable, controlled, reliable, resourceful, hardworking, energetic, persevering, planner.

Someone who is high in conscientiousness is likely to be successful in school and in their career, to excel in leadership roles and pursue their goals with determination and forethought. A person who is low in conscientiousness is much more likely to procrastinate, to be erratic and impulsive. Conscientiousness is also strongly related to post-training learning (Woods, Patterson, Koczwara, & Sofat, 2016), effective job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and intrinsic and extrinsic career success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). A long-term study by Soldz and Vaillant (1999) found that conscientiousness positively correlated with adjustment to life's challenges and the maturity of one's defensive responses, indicating that those high in conscientiousness are often well-prepared to tackle any obstacles that come their way. Conscientiousness was found to correlate somewhat negatively with neuroticism and somewhat positively with agreeableness, but had no discernible relation to the other factors (Ones et al., 1996).

2.9.3 Extroversion

This trait is concerned with where an individual draws their energy from and how they interact with others. Extroverts draw energy from interacting with others and are assertive, active and sociable. They are likely to value achievement and stimulation, and unlikely to value tradition or conformity (Roccas et al., 2002). Conversely, introverts demonstrate lower social engagement, they are more likely to be quiet and reserved and get drained from interacting with others. They replenish their energy in the form of seclusion. The traits associated with extroversion are: sociable assertive, outgoing, energetic, talkative, articulate, fun-loving, affectionate, friendly, social and confident.

A study by Soldz and Vaillant (1999) found that extroversion was fairly stable across the years, indicating that extroverts and introverts do not easily shift into the opposite state. Because of its ease of measurement and general stability over time, extroversion is an excellent predictor of effective functioning and general well-being (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006), positive emotions (Verduyn & Brans, 2012), and overconfidence in task performance (Schaefer, Williams, Goodie, & Campbell, 2004). According to Ones et al. (1996) in relation to the other four factors, extroversion correlated weakly and negatively with neuroticism and weakly positively related to openness to experience. Those who are high in extroversion are likely to form friendships easily and enjoy interacting with others. Conversely they often need to pay extra attention to making well thought out decisions and give some consideration to the needs and sensitivities of others.

2.9.4 Agreeableness

This factor concerns how well people get along with others. While extroversion concerns sources of energy and the pursuit of interactions with others, agreeableness concerns one's orientation to others. It is a construct that rests on how one generally interacts with other people. Traits within agreeableness are: altruistic, trusting, modest, humble, patient, moderate, tactful, polite, kind, loyal, unselfish, helpful, sensitive, amiable, cheerful, and considerate.

People high in agreeableness tend to be likeable, respected, and sensitive to the needs of others. They likely have few enemies, are sympathetic, and affectionate to their friends and family, as well as sympathetic to the plights of strangers. They are more likely to have positive peer and family relationships, model gratitude and forgiveness, attain

desired jobs, live long lives, experience relationship satisfaction, and volunteer in their community (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006), but there is a slight risk of consistently putting others ahead of themselves and missing out on opportunities for success, learning, and development. Roccas et al. (2002) state that agreeable individuals tend to value benevolence, tradition, and conformity, while avoiding placing too much importance on power, achievement, or the pursuit of selfish pleasures. Agreeableness may be motivated by the desire to fulfil social obligations or follow established norms, or it may spring from a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Whatever the motivation, it is rarely accompanied by cruelty, ruthlessness, or selfishness (Roccas et al., 2002).

In the long-term, high agreeableness is related to strong social support and healthy midlife adjustment, but slightly negatively related to creativity (Soldz & Vaillant, 1999). Those who are friendly and endearing to others may find themselves without ample motivation to achieve traditional measure of success, instead focusing on family and friends. People on the low end of the agreeableness spectrum are less likely to be trusted and liked by others. They tend to be blunt, rude, antagonistic, and sarcastic. Agreeableness correlates weakly with extroversion and is somewhat negatively related to neuroticism and somewhat positively related to conscientiousness (Ones et al., 1996).

2.9.5 Neuroticism

Neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions. It encompasses one's emotional stability and general temperament. The traits commonly associated with neuroticism are: pessimistic, moody, jealous, fearful, nervous, anxious, timid, wary, self-critical, insecure, unstable, and oversensitive.

Those high in neuroticism are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress, showing signs of anxiety, sadness, worry and a low self-esteem. They tend to be self-conscious and unsure of themselves. Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen (2002) found that neuroticism related negatively to self-esteem and general self-efficacy, as well as individual locus of control. Neuroticism has also been linked to poorer job performance and motivation, including goal setting and self-efficacy related motivation (Judge & Ilies, 2002). Individuals who score on the low end of neuroticism are more likely to feel confident, sure of themselves, and adventurous, they may also be unencumbered by worry or self-doubt. In a study by Ones, Viswevaran and Reiss (1996), neuroticism was found to

correlate negatively with agreeableness and conscientiousness, in addition to a weak, negative relationship with extroversion and openness to experience.

2.9.6 Personality Traits and Identity Formation

As noted by Costa and McCrae (1994), personality traits are important contributors to identity formation and may serve as expressions of identity as well as determinants of other factors that contribute to identity achievement. For example, Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne and Ilardi (1997) found that the Big Five traits were related to which roles people identify with and derive satisfaction from. Recognising an opportunity to extend our knowledge about personality traits and identity, Clancy and Dollinger (1993) investigated the relationship between Costa and McCrae's Big Five measures and Marcia's (1980) four categories of identity development. In justifying the rationale for their study, Clancy and Dollinger (1993) made three observations: (a) personality traits "may influence or provide the foundation for identity-development processes" (p. 225); (b) when considered as a whole, much of the prior literature on the relationship between identity and personality traits (e.g., Adams, Abraham, & Markstrom, 1987; Dellas & Jernigan, 1987; Tesch & Cameron, 1987) is fragmented and piecemeal; and (c) the Big Five model of personality represents an 'organising scheme' for understanding identity and personality trait relationships. With regard to the latter point, the Big Five model of personality traits of *conscientiousness*, *openness*, *agreeableness*, *extraversion*, and *neuroticism* is widely accepted as a unified, parsimonious model of normal personality that has been validated in many different cultures and across several research settings (De Raad, 2000; Digman, 1990, 1997; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997), with supporting studies based on many different demographic and personal characteristics of individuals (Costa & McCrae, 1994).

The results of Clancy and Dollinger's (1993) study indicated that there "was significant overlap between the five-factor model of personality" (p. 238) and identity achievement. Their findings are important in that they further elucidate the nomological network for identity; in particular that identity-achieved students displayed higher levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness as well as lower levels of neuroticism. In addition, students in the diffusion group scored lowest on conscientiousness, students in the foreclosure group scored lowest on openness, and students in the moratorium group scored lowest on extraversion. No significant differences between the four identity groups

were observed for agreeableness. Clancy and Dollinger's (1993) results provided empirical support for identity theorists who discuss the importance of such factors as social relations, new experience, and managing stress (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968).

2.10 Summary

This overview of the literature on identity theory demonstrates that identity includes elements which are expressed and private that work together to endow the individual with a sense of who they are and how they fit into the world. As Calhoun (1994), Giddens (1979, 1984) and Knights and Willmott (1999) state, self-identity is actively, but perhaps subconsciously, constructed from an individual's own assignments of social-identity and in response to external stimuli. This may be performed as part of life stage changes, as a quest for self-esteem and status, or as a quest for meaning, but is done so as part of interacting with one's environment and in a quest for belonging and differentiation.

Identity is not inherited or given, but is vulnerable and subject to challenge and enhancement (Knights & Willmott, 1999; Wong, 2002). While identity may be active or passive, its construction is an ongoing (Adams & Marshall, 1996) and socially negotiated process (Arnould & Price, 2000). There are a number of approaches to identity which emphasise different dimensions of identity formation and therefore contribute to our understanding of identity in a variety of ways. These approaches include role theory and social identity theory which account for how identity is socially constructed (that is people learn what it 'means' to define themselves in certain ways according to socially constructed norms). Stryker's (1968, 1980, 1987) interpretation of identity illustrates how the importance people place on certain identities depends on the extent to which those identities are valued and accepted by those around them. Individuals actively construct their identity from interacting with their surroundings, as well as their perceptions of how others see them. Identity construction proceeds according to the abilities and orientations of the individual, is based on relationships with others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) and is a function of an individual's social setting (Knights & Willmott, 1999) and environment (Woodward, 2004), which may include group participation (Tyler et al., 1999). Goffman's (1959) situational treatment of identity suggests that identities are contextually influenced, while Erikson (1959, 1968) and Marcia's (1966, 1967, 1976, 1980, 1993a, 1993b, 2002a, 2002b) developmental approaches demonstrate that people desire a sense

of integration and continuity in their identities, but have the capacity to develop and change substantially over time.

A review of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial model suggests that Erikson placed a great deal of emphasis on sociocultural factors because he believed these strongly influenced the development of identity. Such factors are especially relevant in the process of identity formation. Erikson (1968) believed that childhood identifications lay the foundation for identity formation in adolescence. The process of forming an identity involves creating a coherent sense of self and who one is in relation to the world. Adolescence represents an optimal time for identity development, due to a variety of physical, cognitive and social factors. Although Erikson believed identity was largely fixed by the end of adolescence, he did propose that identity continues to evolve throughout adulthood but gave little detail on what this process looks like.

McAdams' (1988, 1993, 2001) work in the area of identity development, namely the life-story model, built upon Erikson's (1968) developmental theory, in terms of offering an additional perspective on the formation and development of identity. McAdams' (1988, 1993, 2001) suggests that life-stories are central in the emergence of an individual's identity. The life-story is comprised of autobiographical memories that are considered highly personally relevant to the individual. One of the key ways through which autobiographical memories gain personal significance is through autobiographical reasoning, a process of reflection in which individuals construct links between past life experiences and descriptive/evaluative statements about their current self.

A review of Goldberg's (1990) five-factor model of personality suggests that it is a widely accepted and useful framework for describing personality. The five primary factors (which are all interconnected) are not necessarily traits in and of themselves, but factors in which many related traits and characteristics fit. Each of the five personality factors represents a continuum between two extremes, with most people lying somewhere between the two polar ends of each dimension. The applicability of Goldberg's (1990) five traits in terms of my own identity development will be explored in chapters four to eight. The following chapter examines the research process I used in exploring the construction of my personal identity.

Chapter 3: Methods

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing”
(Socrates c.469–399 BC)

3.1 Introduction

This thesis developed from my interest in using narrative inquiry, to explore my own lived experiences through the application of identity theory. In considering these experiences and how my identity has emerged, this work was a case study and because I wrote it, it was autobiographical, covering 47 years of my life. In order to gather and make sense of narrative, I reviewed the literature relating to identity theory, along with my reflections on incidents drawn from my autobiography. My story was a reflection of a lived experience, so there was also a strong connection to autoethnography. Roth (2005) describes autoethnography as research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, political and social. Through autoethnography, I examined my personal reflections and life-story and explored the emergence of my identity.

The use of autobiography, namely an “incident” based perspective represents a unique methodological contribution that others can employ in the exploration of their own identity development. The intimacy of the material collected offers advantages in the extent and depth of detail in the data collected, something that is not normally available when conventional interviews with strangers are used for data gathering. The other methodological contribution is the value of narrative inquiry in helping me and the readers of this thesis understand the impact key experiences had on my identity development, by tracking the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, “meaning” and “significance”—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present moment.

This research, drawing on identity theory, contributed to my understanding of identity, through the example of a distinct and intimate self-study. While some existing research uses these approaches, I believe that the added lens of autoethnography, provided an

additional and unique perspective. Prior to this study, the use of life-story (narrative) to explore identity had been limited. Thus, this study, using an autoethnographic approach to viewing my emerging identity has contributed to the field. The research question lent itself to a re-collective/reflective/interpretive research design, as I had anticipated that the data yielded would be rich and diverse. The research employed qualitative methods, aimed at providing a greater understanding of the subject of identity, which is relevant to the research community. As Kraus (2006) states, those researching identity need to embrace the use of the narrative. He suggests that narrative inquiry is vital to comprehend the changes that have taken place within a person and how a person has found meaning. Riessman and Speedy (2007) argue that narrative inquiry has become a cross-disciplinary and widely acceptable research method within education, psychology, history, anthropology, social work, sociology, and counselling.

3.2 Design of the Study

This research emerged from my interest in exploring how my identity has been and is emerging, as a result of my lived experiences. As I alluded to in the introduction, my only experience with narrative prior to this study, was in the collecting and writing up of my dad's biography. This was the catalyst for exploring further narrative research projects, namely this self-reflective study.

In this study I posed the question: *how have my lived experiences influenced who I am today?* This research question lent itself to an interpretive, non-positivist methodology, namely qualitative research and specifically, narrative inquiry. Rather than answering the question definitively, I aimed at describing meaning and providing a greater understanding of the subject of my identity. Narrative as an expression of embodied experience, gives shape and meaning to human life in terms of understanding oneself and one's place in the world. Examining the intricacies of narrative identity construction through autobiography, demonstrates how the construction of selves, memories and life-worlds are interwoven in one narrative fabric.

Having chosen to use narrative inquiry as the primary method of data collection, I began gathering my rich narrative (autobiography)—my life-story. I found van Manen's view (1997, p. 121) on the potential of using stories as an approach to gather and present research data reassuring. He states that stories should:

- (1) Compel: a story recruits our willing attention;
- (2) Lead us to reflect: a story tends to invite us to a reflective search for significance;
- (3) Involve us personally: one tends to search actively for the story teller's meaning via one's own;
- (4) Transform: we may be touched, shaken, moved by story; it teaches us; and
- (5) Measure one's interpretive sense; one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretive sense.

The decision to use autobiography was confirmed for me when I read Walker (2005) who states "It is from our stories that we will remake the world ... Also, there is an easy distrust of 'information'. There is too much of it. Knowledge supplies the facts; stories give sensation to the heart (p. 223).

The above quote encapsulated my feelings; my intention was to communicate with readers, not merely provide information, but appeal to their minds and hearts. The emergence of my identity as a result of these lived experiences was explored through my personal reflections on selected incidents throughout my life. In order to gather and make sense of the life-story, the research for this thesis began with an examination and reflection on the literature relating to identity theory and to life-stories. The data was analysed using inductive analysis, to identify significant themes and categories that arose from the literature and narrative.

The rationale for limiting the study to one rich intimate case, was that the qualitative approach of the research lent itself to an in-depth study, which provided an opportunity to intently examine the data being collected. Eisenhardt (1989) argues that a single case study is not enough to generate theory with much complexity, however Dyer and Wilkins (1991) argue that a good single case study can be valid and useful in the process of building new theories. Dyer and Wilkins (1991) state that using the approach of one case study will allow the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon being studied.

3.3 Philosophical Underpinnings

Before embarking on my study it was important to determine the paradigm or philosophical lens through which I was viewing my research, as this provided a body of theoretical and methodological beliefs that underpinned the study. Alasuutari, Bickman

and Brannen, (2008) confirmed for me that a paradigm or philosophical lens is a belief system (or theory) that guides the way we do things, or more formally, establishes a set of practices—this can range from thought patterns to actions. A lens can be defined as a research paradigm and a requirement for choosing a research paradigm is that it must be coherent with the research processes chosen. A paradigm is a set of concepts, values, and basic beliefs concerning an individual's place and relationship to the world or environment and their view of the world. The term 'paradigm' may be defined as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 22) or "the philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 38). Alternatively, MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) provide a definition of paradigm which include three elements: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology and a criteria for validity (p. 32). Some authors prefer to discuss the interpretive framework in terms of 'knowledge claims' (Creswell, 2003); epistemology or ontology; or even research methodologies (Neuman, 2000) rather than referring to paradigms.

As Hale and Napier (2013) state there are two main research philosophies, although there can be an overlap between the two and both positions may be identifiable in any research project. Positivistic approaches to research are based on research methodologies commonly used in science. A positivistic approach is based on the premise that the study of human behaviour should seek to identify, measure and evaluate any phenomenon and to provide rational explanation for it. For the most part positivistic methodologies are quantitative. Typically a phenomenological approach views research from the perspective that human behaviour is not so easily measured and people place their own meanings on events; meanings that do not always coincide with the way others have interpreted them. Phenomenological methodologies are typically qualitative.

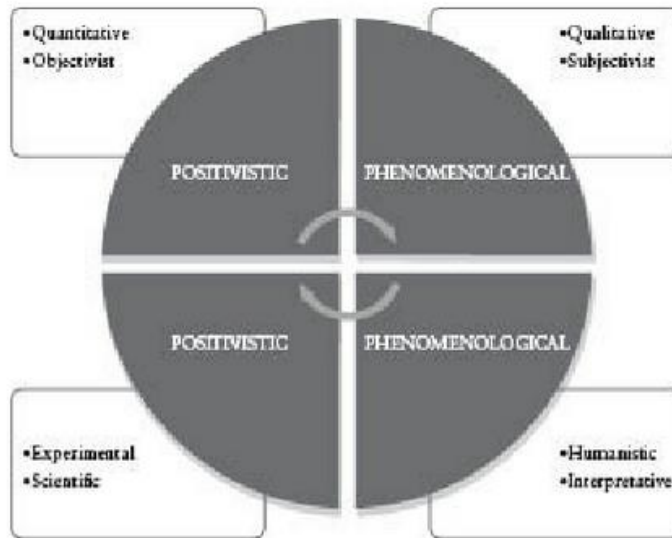


Figure 2: Hale, S., & Napier, J. (2013). *Research methods in interpreting: A practical resource*. New York, NY: Continuum

Guba (1990) states that the research process has three major dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. According to him, a research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of inquiry along these three dimensions. These characteristics create a holistic view of how we view knowledge: how we see ourselves in relation to this knowledge and the methodological strategies we use to discover it. In the world of social science research, the tension and debate between competing ontology and epistemology requires one to consider one's own orientation to knowledge and truth. The fundamental question addressed by ontology is *what types of things actually exist?* whilst the main question of epistemology asks *what are the rules in discovering what does exist?* And methodology asks *how do we go about finding out?* (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). These questions can sit within many different philosophical paradigms that depend on basic belief systems. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that one set of answers to these questions has prevailed for the past several hundred years and have labelled this as a conventional paradigm (the positivist or scientific). This contrasts with the constructivist paradigm also called naturalistic, hermeneutic or interpretive (with slight variations on the meanings) which has been in existence for several hundreds of years, but has not dominated philosophical thought, particularly in English speaking countries until the twentieth century (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 83). As Hyde (2000) states the traditional view is that quantitative

researchers subscribe to a 'positivist' paradigm of science, while qualitative researchers subscribe to a 'relativist' paradigm.

Huberman and Miles (1994) state that "the paradigms for conducting research seem to be shifting beneath our feet and an increasing number of researchers now see the world with more pragmatic, more ecumenical eyes" (p. 5). It is important to acknowledge that one paradigm may not fit a particular research project. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss this problem, suggesting that "the open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella-like paradigm over the entire project" (p. 15). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), "inquiry paradigms define for the inquirers, what it is they are about and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry" (p. 108). The research paradigm reflects the researcher's philosophical assumptions or stances that determine the way in which the research is undertaken. Crotty (2015) explains the importance of revealing particular approaches "to understanding and explaining the human world" (p. 3). Collis and Hussey (2003) refer to research paradigms as "the progress of scientific practice based on people's philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge" (p. 46). These philosophical assumptions include the researcher's ontological beliefs about the nature of reality and their epistemological beliefs concerning the relationship between the researcher and the research. The ontological and epistemological beliefs of the researcher then result in their beliefs about the research methodology (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Therefore, before discussing my research design and methods, the research paradigm should be clarified.

After careful consideration of the above theoretical paradigms, I came to understand that the central focus of my study was to apply aspects of identity theory to an intimate case study; thus, I was situating my research in an interpretive paradigm and an interpretivist approach (also referred to as a constructivist approach) which generally operates using predominantly qualitative methods. This was confirmed for me after reading Bogdan and Biklen, (2006); Burns, (1997); Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007); Glesne and Peshkin, (1992); Mertens, (2010); Silverman, (2013) and Wiersma, (2000). Likewise, Burrell and Morgan (1979) identify and distinguish between the two extreme research stances: objectivist (commonly referred to as positivist or quantitative) and subjectivist (commonly referred to as interpretivist or qualitative). Although disagreeing in the basic assumptions, the two research stances share a similarity in that they do not exhaust any

other paradigmatic possibilities. This was confirmed for me after reading Guba's (1990, p. 81) quote which suggests: "Accommodation between paradigms is impossible ... we are led to vastly diverse, disparate, and totally antithetical ends ... qualitative and quantitative research paradigms including their associated methods cannot and should not be mixed".

I was interested to read that the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm grew out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mertens, 2010). In thinking of 'objects' as phenomena, Husserl's (1964) quest was to understand their boundaries and permeabilities. What made them 'them' and not 'us', was in part an attempt to understand this core. Paradoxically but in keeping with modern scientists, the closer one looked, the less certain about the core one became. Ricoeur (1992) in his book *'Oneself as Another'*, brought a hermeneutic frame to configuring self, emphasising language and narrative as central to identity formation, conceiving a relational, situational, multiple, evolving self.

Zahavi (2005) built on Ricoeur's work, by attempting to map the various models of the self that derive from philosophical and psychological epistemologies. In his examination of the relationship between experience, self-awareness and selfhood, Zahavi combined the phenomenological and hermeneutical dimensions of selfhood. Unlike many philosophical considerations of selfhood, Zahavi understands the interaction of place, time and experience and the ongoing relationships of these phenomena, as they evolve from experience to narrative stating "I want to suggest that the narrative or hermeneutical take on self must be complemented by an experiential or phenomenological take on the self. To put it simply, it takes a self to experience one's life as a story" (p. 114).

Interpretivist approaches to research have the intention of understanding "the world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 36), and suggest that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2010, p. 12). The interpretivist researcher tends to rely upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8) and recognises the impact on the research of their own background and experiences. Interpretivists do not generally begin with a theory (as postpositivists do) but instead "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003, p. 9) throughout the research process. The interpretivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data

collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). Quantitative data may be utilised in a way, which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description.

Unlike the positivist approach that seeks to “generalise universal applicable social laws, the interpretivist approach seeks to learn what people know and how they understand their lives” (Schutt, 2012, p. 75). Interpretive paradigms are used to develop a sense of the subject through interpretation, whereby interpretivist theorists seek to understand what it means to be human, how those meanings are formed and what meanings people attach to the events of their lives (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Interpretivists argue that “social reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to reality, not to determine how reality works apart from their interpretations” (Schutt, 2012, p. 75). This paradigm allows researchers to understand the social world by interpreting, clarifying and constructing meaning from social phenomena. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) more specifically, researchers are “concerned to explore and understand the social world using both the participants’ and the researcher’s understanding” (p. 17).

The interpretivist paradigm considers the understanding of human behaviours and actions (Bryman, 2004). In addition, the interpretivist paradigm focuses on subjective individuals’ experiences and human enquiries, rather than directly measuring the phenomena and events (Bryman, 2004). The interpretivist approach seeks to solicit the participants’ “claims, concerns and issues” about this topic and to reach ‘consensus’ among them (Schutt, 2012, p. 77). Moreover, interpretivists let the participants construct their own meanings, rather than making meaning through the researcher’s own judgements. Huberman and Miles (1994) state “that this approach does not lead to covering laws, but rather a practical understanding of meanings and actions” (p. 8). Therefore one does not set out to prove an answer but to understand the subject better. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) state the researcher commences his/her study with an open mind to the possibilities of the data and the perspectives of the subjects. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) confirm this by stating that a qualitative study seeks to identify underlying concepts and the relationships between them.

3.3.1 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with what is real and potentially knowable. Cresswell (2003) defines ontology as “the nature of reality” (p. 75). There are two contrasting ontological positions, namely a realist or relativist view. As Tolich and Davidson (2011) state a realist position is where the researcher believes that objects in the world exist independently of human imagination and that these phenomena can be known for what they are. Fundamentally, the realist believes that reality is governed by pre-existing laws which are true. The ontological question is answered by asserting that there exists an objective reality out there that goes about its business, irrespective of the interest that an inquirer may have in it. This illustrates a single reality that is independent of any observer’s interest in it and which operates according to immutable natural laws, many of which take the form of cause-effect. Truth is defined as that set of statements that is isomorphic to reality.

Conversely, a relativist stance asserts that there is no absolute truth, only that which is subject to perspective, construction and opinion (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). Relativists believe that knowledge is a social reality, value-laden which only comes to light through individual interpretation. Relativists believe in the existence of multiple realities and that these realities are constructed and can be altered by the knower (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Reality is something that is specifically and locally constructed and not just something that is out there. Realities are not less or more true, they are simply less or more informed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Our knowledge of reality is obtained only through social constructions such as shared meanings, language, consciousness, tools, documents and other artefacts (Klein & Myers, 1999). Duncan (2004) suggests an important assumption held by autobiographic and qualitative researchers in general is that reality is neither fixed nor purely external. Instead it is “created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer” (p. 4). A relativist ontological position is implied throughout my study, indicating that the perspective which me as the researcher presents, may be very different from that of the readers. I approach reality and my interpretations of my lived experiences, in terms of my own understanding of these experiences.

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology looks at the ways knowledge is created and the practices that this involves, including the relationship of the knower to the known or the knowable. An objectivist epistemological stance involves the belief that objects that exist are inherently true. As Crotty (2015) states, things exist whether or not anyone is aware of their existence or not. Conversely subjective epistemological views maintain that objects are subject to personal interpretation and a constructionist view purports that meaning is constructed in social interaction between people and environment. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) conventional belief epistemology asserts that it is possible (indeed mandatory for an observer) to epitomise the phenomena studied, remaining detached from it and excluding any value considerations from influencing it. This is referred to as subject-object dualism.

Constructivists assert that an ‘inquirer’ and the ‘inquired into’ are interlocked in such a way that the findings of an investigation are the literal creation of the inquiry process. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that this position effectively destroys the classical ontology-epistemology distinction. For what there is that can be known does not exist independently but only in connection with the inquiry process, making the ontology and epistemology questions impossible to answer independently. Compounding this dilemma are issues of values (including those of the inquirer), theory, value dissonance, stakeholders and respondents. Conventional beliefs adapt an interventionist methodology that strips content of its contamination (confounding) influences (variables) so that the inquiry can converge on truth and explain nature as it really is and really works, leading to the capability to predict and control.

Constructionists on the other hand adapt a hermeneutic methodology that “involves a continuing dialectic of iteration, analysis and reanalysis, leading to the emergence of a joint (among all the inquirers and respondents, or among inside and outsider perspectives) construction of a case” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 88). I found it interesting that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) do not distinguish between constructivism and constructionism. Although both social constructionism and social constructivism deal with ways in which social phenomena develop, they are somewhat distinct. Crotty (2015) notes “that the term ‘constructionism’ and particularly ‘social constructionism’ derives largely from the work of Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) a German sociologist and Berger and Luckmann” (p. 60). Berger and Luckmann (1966) introduced the term social construction into the social

sciences. They argue that person and groups interacting together in a social system, form over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalised. With this process, meaning is embedded in society. Knowledge and people's conception (and belief) of what reality is, becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). With this in mind, social constructionism refers to the development of phenomena relative to social contexts while social constructivism refers to an individual's making meaning of knowledge within a social context. Constructivism is based on the idea that reality is a product of one's own creation; each individual sees and interprets the world and their experiences through personal belief systems (Raskin, 2002).

Burrell and Morgan's (1979) work confirmed for me that the epistemological stance of my research was an interpretive one which understands the subjective meaning of social action. The reality of the world becomes meaningful in terms of intentionality, consciousness and essential relationships. Consequently, interpretive methods, based on an approach of understanding were used to comprehend the subjective meanings of both actions and communications from the perspective of the particular actors (agents). This is often referred to as the principle of *Verstehen* (Weber, 1978) whereby understanding meaning and intentionality is emphasised over causal explanations (Prasad, 2005).

3.4 Revealing My Position

Throughout this study I referred to the term 'story' rather than 'autobiography', to acknowledge an aspect of story-telling or narrative that awakened my curiosity, namely how incidents are chosen. I considered how does one reconstruct one's own reality when researching oneself? In addition, which incidents should I select or discard when life is multifaceted and incidents are intertwined, and also which incidents have I forgotten?

My choice reflects the research instrument, which is myself. In research, one usually addresses the research instrument, hence, I will describe myself and my position within the research. Describing oneself is not easy; to address this I asked my family how they saw me. In summarising my characteristics in terms of my relationship with my family,

a number of adjectives emerged: compassionate, confident, sociable, non-confrontational and rational. The Dalai Lama, famous for engaging in dialogue with scientists made a plea at a press conference in Australia in June 2013, for more leaders with compassion. He said “in that respect, biologically, females have more potential ... females have more sensitivity about others’ wellbeing.” (“Dalai Lama: women better leaders because of potential for compassion; Next Dalai Lama may be female”, 2013). This raises the question as to whether science supports his argument, but this is not within the realms of this thesis.

My confidence can be seen as being self-assured—I am always willing to give a point of view without being arrogant. Linked with confidence is being sociable, and I relate well to most people, even on an emotional level. My non-confrontational disposition means that I tend to deal with situations calmly and diplomatically, without the use of aggression or hostility. My rationality has been seen as having sound judgment or good sense. Whether this trait is related to ‘wisdom’ is a question, perhaps rationality develops over time with age and experience.

I was interested in the work of German sociologist Max Weber who distinguished between four different idealised types of rationality. The first, which he called *zweckrational* or purposive/instrumental rationality. This is related to the expectations about the behaviour of other human beings or objects in the environment. These expectations serve as means for a particular actor to attain ends, ends which Weber noted were ‘rationally pursued and calculated’. The second type, Weber termed *wertrational* or value/belief-oriented. Here the action is undertaken for what one might call reasons intrinsic to the actor: some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other motive, independent of whether it will lead to success. The third type was *affectual*, determined by a person’s feelings and emotions, to which Weber himself said that this was a kind of rationality that was on the borderline of what he considered ‘meaningfully oriented.’ The fourth was *traditional* or conventional, determined by ingrained habituation. Weber emphasised that it was very unusual to find only one of these orientations: combinations were the norm. His usage also made it clear that he considered the first two as more significant than the others; and it is arguable that the third and fourth are subtypes of the first two.

3.5 Qualitative Research

I was mindful that the approaches used for the study, were strongly influenced by the paradigm positioning, the nature of the phenomena and the research question being addressed. The overall intent of my study was to explore the influence of my lived experiences, on my identity, using identity theory framework. It was important to have a methodology that invited an interpretive and personal response, and the broad decision was qualitative. Lincoln and Guba (1986) define qualitative research as an inquiry that is disciplined, and seeks to find an answer to a problem so that understanding can be gained, or so that action can be taken. As the researcher I was part of a contemplative outcome research process that unfolded and this aligned with the work of Ironside (2005). My own personal reflections and life history were examined and I explored my lived experiences and how my identity has been and continues to emerge, all the time needing to be aware of the possibility of reconstructing with hindsight.

Qualitative research also termed naturalistic or interpretive research, underpins this methodology because it invites the investigation and the understanding of the human being in a lived experience, embracing complexity and unpredictability. It seeks to develop theories that enable understanding of social phenomena in natural, living settings rather than in experiment. It takes into account the contexts, interpretations, subjective experiences, and life-worlds of its subjects. It embraces no particular methodology, and has no theory or practice that belongs entirely to this approach, which may be used in many disciplines and subject matters (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). According to Bailey (2002), meaning rather than truth is what one seeks with qualitative research inquiry. It is important to identify a methodology and method that adequately addresses the research question in this study. The terms ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ are often used interchangeably, however both terms have separate meanings in their own rights. As Wainwright (1997) suggests, methodology is concerned with how the researcher goes about finding out knowledge and carrying out the research. It is considered as the strategic approach, rather than the techniques and data analysis. As Crotty (2015) states, methodology is the “particular research design that guides a researcher in choosing methods and shapes the use of the methods chosen” (p. 3); and he defines the term ‘methods’ as “the concrete techniques or procedures we plan to use to answer the research questions” (p. 6).

3.6 Narrative Inquiry

The examination of my life so far, set the context for my study by describing experiences that have led me to the place I exist in now. Narrative focuses on making meaning of one's experiences. I found Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) work on narrative helpful in terms of their view that narrative is the making of meaning from personal experience through a reflection process in which storytelling plays an important part. The narrative mode leads to good stories, believable, though not necessarily true historical accounts. Much of our self-narrating is a matter of becoming conscious of the narrative that we already live with. Narrative creates its meaning by noting the contributions those actions and events make to a particular outcome, and then configuring these parts into a whole episode.

Because my purpose was to explore the influences over time on the construction of my own identity, I considered the inclusion of narrative methods; because narrative understandings of knowledge and content are linked to identity. Clandinin and Huber's (2002, p. 161) view is that "identity is storied life composition, a story to live by". Narrative inquiry developed from the growth in qualitative research at the turn of the 20th century and the concept of narrative or story as a research methodology, has been the subject of much debate ever since, due to its highly subjective nature (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). In the field of social science research, narrative methodology is an emerging and ubiquitous practice (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Having read Botterill and Platenkamp (2012) I learned that the narrative approach is not without its critics who question the approach in terms of its validity and reliability. My concerns were allayed after having read Czarniawska (2004) who wrote "but worries about the status of the narrative material are relatively small compared to the worries about 'narrativized' social science—does anything go in social science writing?" (p. 132).

I was reassured after reading Botterill and Platenkamp (2012) that the telling and recording of 'stories' has gained ground as a legitimate form of inquiry in academic research. Narrative inquiry draws from many disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, and can be described as research into lived experience within the form of written, verbal, or visual (including music and dance), presentation; for example, autobiography, field notes, letters and pictures. Polit and Beck (2006) state that narrative inquiry is the contextual analysis of stories that focus on the

life story, or a particular event in the subject's life. Riessman and Speedy (2007) state that "narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a 20th century development; the field has 'realist', 'postmodern', and 'constructionist' strands, and scholars and practitioners disagree on origin and precise definition" (p. 429). As Bal (1997) suggests, narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events and cultural artefacts that 'tell a story'. Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living, for as long as we have engaged in dialogue. Lived and told stories, and the sharing of these stories, are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. As Geertz (1983) states in his idea of 'blurred genres' in which he challenged anthropology and literacy criticism to cooperate, the narrative approach has now entered the social sciences. The notion that language use, or rather discourse, is "always an intertwining of different discourses coming from a variety of backgrounds and termed the dialogic principle" (Bal, 1997, p. 64) which lies behind the much discussed 'interpretive turn' in the social sciences.

Narrative inquiry uses a narrative voice (the voice of the author), and it is the author who selects what is included in the story. Narratives have particular structures which affect what may be included, and equally importantly, what is left out. For example, western-style narratives usually have a particular way of beginning and ending and other narratives have moral lessons to be learned, whilst others tell traditional myths and legends that eulogise particular moments in history. Botterill and Platenkamp (2012) assert that "a narrative approach sees storytelling as a promising new, qualitative approach to the understanding of subtle questions of identity, life history and social dynamics" (p. 130). It is an investigation into how people tell each other stories and create meaning and understanding in their lives, through interpreting events which have happened to them. Such stories can also be used to establish identity and connection to others. It is a methodology and method which acknowledges the idea that humans are social creatures, who create narratives about events in their lives or their histories, as a way of making meaning of things which they or others may not fully understand (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) offer a distinction between story and plot. They view story as a sequence of events narrated in a linear, chronological order, a simple straightforward telling of events. A plot however, is a sequence of events that has been arranged in order to evoke in readers a keen sense of emotional engagement. The authors state "that most self-studies that rely on autobiography embrace the story form rather than the plot lines of fiction" (p.17).

Narratives are reconstructions of events, therefore they are open to personal perspective in the order and meaning of events. The particular perspective of the narrator and the listener may inevitably impose their own interpretation and evaluation. As Lamarque (2004) states “this renders some facts and contingent interpretations more important than others” (p. 398) and inherently changes the intended meaning of the story for both the narrator and the listener. This study is undertaken and presented by one researcher, who will share their story and will inevitably identify the themes (Bailey, 2002) and this will privilege the researcher’s interpretation (Riessman, 1993). The collection and interpretation of my lived experiences and the construction of knowledge from theorising and analysis was clearly subjective. The ordering of acts, with certain events given prominence over others and relationships being postulated and closure perhaps intentionally imposed, where there was none, meant that the ensuing data would never be objective or neutral. The research required an approach that embraced the subjective nature of the lived experience and the search for personal meaning.

According to Somers and Gibson (1994), the imparting of the participants’ perceptions, stories and metaphors, form the foundation of how they view themselves, the world they live in and their place in the world. They do not represent what is ‘out there’, rather the narrative is entrenched in relationships, culture and the context of institution. The narrative represents what the participant assumes, interprets and believes, therefore the role of the researcher is to listen attentively and interpret this expression. The use of narrative inquiry requires the researcher to listen to what the participant has to say and not attempt to subjugate their contributions into a researcher-defined matrix of viewpoints that either confirms or rejects the researcher’s bias. Furthermore, narrative inquiry requires the researcher to start with an open mind, to listen to what the participant says and to engage with them as people in context. To listen to people talk, the researcher according to Riessman (1993) “makes real the phenomena in the stream of consciousness” (p. 22). Riessman’s (1993) view that “narrative based inquiry is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (p. 5) resonated with me in that the interdependent nature of narrative and identity make the former the best way of investigating the latter. This view is also supported by Benwell and Stokoe (2006) who maintain that narratives are a useful tool for analysis of identity because of the storied nature of ourselves. Somers and Gibson (1994, p. 61) state that:

Stories that social actors use to make sense of—indeed, in order to act in—their lives and are used to define who we are; this in turn is a pre-condition for knowing

what to do. This ‘doing’ will in turn produce new narratives and hence new actions; the relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually constitutive. Both are conditions of the other; neither are a priori. Narrative location endows social actors with identities—however multiple, ambiguous, ephemeral, or conflicting they may be ... narratives are social and interpersonal.

Roberts (2002) states that narrative is used to collect and interpret the lives of others, as part of human understanding. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) use the word ‘narrative’ to mean both the phenomenon (people lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives) and the method (researchers describe those lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience). The value of storytelling as an approach to extracting new meanings and new learning has now been well established (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). This method can lead to increased insights and knowledge for both the listener and the teller. It is deeply grounded within the cultural context in which stories are told, for example through the personality of the teller and perspective of the audience, therefore it allows humans to create negotiated transactions of knowledge and perception. It builds a knowledge base of conceptual narrative frameworks that inform the social condition.

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are, and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. As Clandinin and Connelly (2004) state narrative inquiry as a methodology, necessitates a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.

In essence, identity, narrative and context are interlinked, and incorporate social forces, social interactions and engagement with the environment. As Somers and Gibson (1994, p. 65) state:

Joining narrative to identity introduces time, space, and analytic rationality—each of which is excluded from the categorical or ‘essentialist’ approach to identity.

While a social identity or categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act predictably, the narrative identity approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and thus precludes categorical stability in action. These temporally and spatially shifting configurations form the relational coordinates of ontological, public, and cultural narratives. It is within these temporal and multi-layered narratives that identities are formed; hence narrative identity is processual and relational.

As Bochner (2007, p. 203) states “in the gathering and telling of ‘stories’, we are gathering knowledge *from* the past and not necessarily knowledge *about* the past” thus:

Making stories from one’s lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively, and when we do we are engaged in processes of languaging and describing that modify the past. What we see as true today may not have been true at the time the actions we are describing were performed. Thus we need to resist the temptation to attribute intentions and meanings to events that they did not have at the time they were experienced.

Narrative inquirers see change as part of the process of narrative inquiry. Linking back to personal, practical and social justification, change is seen as possibly occurring in multiple dimensions. Through engaging with participants, narrative inquirers see themselves and participants as each retelling their own stories, and as coming to changed identities and practices through this inquiry process. Change also occurs as phenomena under study, are understood in new ways and, in this way, new theoretical understandings emerge. In the midst of this, much possibility exists for social change, that is, for the creation of shifted social, cultural, institutional and linguistic narratives. Polkinghorne (1995) believes it is often only retrospectively that we come to understand and give meaning to events as memory is always selective and plays tricks on us—it lurks in the shadows waiting to catch us out.

3.7 Autoethnography

The aim of this study was to identify and reflect on the lived experiences that have shaped my identity and I decided that this could be achieved using autobiographic narrative and autoethnography. Foster, McAllister and O’Brien’s (2006) view of autoethnography is:

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that connects the researcher's personal self to the broader cultural context. Evocative writing, where the writer shares personal stories on their experiences, is used to extend understanding of a particular social issue. Autoethnography therefore ranges from starting the research from one's own experience, to studies where the researcher's experience is explored alongside those of the participants. (p. 44)

Because my story was a reflection of my lived experience, it was strongly connected to autoethnography, which is a variant of ethnography. Autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography and refers to writing about the personal experience and its relationship to culture (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). It is an "autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Ellis (2004) elaborates on this definition further to highlight the richness of this method and variability in representational forms it can utilise, which includes books, essays, poems, plays, novels and performance pieces.

Spry (2001) states that this approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. Roth (2005) describes autoethnography as research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, political and social. Ethnography studies a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture (Maso, 2001). The goal of autobiographers is to "produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better" (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764).

The central criterion for autoethnographic text appears to be that the explicit voice of the author (researcher) must be embedded into the broader social context. Reed-Danahay (1997) made this point explicit in her definition of autoethnography as "self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (p. 9). The researcher's experiential account is juxtaposed against academic and popular discourses. As an ethnographer, one becomes a participant observer in the culture.

3.8 Phenomenology

This interpretive study was positioned in a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework, within the interpretive social science mode of inquiry—this fitted with my intention which sought to explore the influence of lived experiences on my identity. Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen because it is “a human science which studies people and focuses on describing human experience as lived and interpreted” (van Manen, 1997, p. 6). Through the phenomenological component I attempted to understand my own lived experiences and through the hermeneutic component, multiple interpretations of my experiences emerged. The study draws on the ideas of Heidegger (1889–1976) and Gadamer (1900–2002), but predominantly van Manen (1942–) who developed methodological and inquiry approaches to phenomenological research and writing. It was van Manen’s approach to human science research that guided much of my research approach for this study.

As van Manen (1997) states, phenomenological research is a lived experience for researchers as they attune themselves towards the ontological nature of phenomenon while learning to ‘see’ pre-reflective, taken for granted, and essential understandings through the lens of their existing pre-understandings and prejudices. Phenomenology is a way of researching the essence or essential meanings of phenomena. Simply, phenomenology is “the study of essences” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 7). The term essence refers to the essential meanings of a phenomenon; that which makes a thing what it is (van Manen, 1997). Heidegger (1977) describes the essence of a phenomenon as “the way in which it remains through time as what it is” (p. 3). Van Manen (1997) states that:

A good phenomenological description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way. (p. 39)

The goal of phenomenology is to increase understanding through exploring everyday experience and as Grant and Giddings (2002) state, it is a study of “the things themselves” (p. 15). Van Manen’s (1997) view is that phenomenology provides the means of discovering and describing the essence of a phenomenon, its being-ness, what makes it what it is, allowing it to speak for itself. Life experiences are seen as related to the context

within which they occur, and are influenced by the social, political and cultural contexts (Willis, 2007; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Phenomenology is also closely linked to symbolic interactionism. The key assumptions of symbolic interactionism are that people transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact; they create and act on perceptions of each other and social settings; and the perceptions they form of themselves and others are based on these interactions (Neuman, 2000). According to Krathwohl (2009, p. 242) “people act according to the meaning they attribute to things and persons; their reality is socially constructed ... it is necessary to see the world through their eyes”.

3.9 Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics, derived from the Greek word meaning ‘to interpret’; was used by Christians as a way of interpreting the bible. It is an interpretive methodology for interpreting text. Nowadays, it is now used widely, Davis and Hays (2003) regard it as the “art of interpretation” (p. 18). Heidegger (1927/1962) firmly believed that as humans we cannot separate ourselves and our views from the context, which is at the basis of his best known theory of ‘*dasein*’, also known as ‘being in the world’, or ‘being there’ (Harman, 2007). Heidegger (1927/1962) suggests that it is through language that the meaning of *dasein* can be uncovered. Heidegger uses the term *dasein* to describe human existence; he restricts the term *dasein* for human beings alone, since he believes that it is only human beings that truly exist and interpret the world (Harman, 2007). Language is not just used to express what we see, but also when we speak, others see what we mean. For Heidegger it is language that makes humans what they are since humans are always interpreting and articulating the world, even when no words are used (Harman, 2007). Gadamer (1976) built upon Heidegger’s notion of language. For Gadamer, language is the interplay between speaker and interpreter, understanding being reached through dialogue within a background of prior understandings of what language means. As van Manen (2014) states, writing is not just translating speech into text. In writing and reading, one inevitably adopts a relation to language that is reflective and that Gadamer (1976) and Ricoeur (1991) describe as distanciation:

What happens to discourse when it passes from speaking to writing? ... What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies ... Thanks to

writing, the ‘world’ of the text may explode the world of the author ... The text must be able to ‘decontextualize’ itself in such a way that it can be ‘recontextualised’ in a new situation—as accomplished, precisely, by the act of reading. (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 83)

For me ‘interpreting’ meant deriving understanding, meaning, and significance. What is interpreted are phenomena which are situations that are observed to have occurred but usually have some elements of repeatability or similarity with other phenomena. Van Manen (1997) states that to research from a phenomenological perspective is “to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). As the writer of this work I was describing and interpreting phenomena in this study. Hermeneutics has connotations of looking for different meanings so that we can think differently about ourselves and question the traditional or surface meaning, while phenomenology has connotations of describing experiences from a pre-suppositional stance. This meaning for hermeneutics fits with my aim of stimulating debate. As the phenomenologist writer of this work and reflecting on the words of Ricoeur (1991) in his statement above, the writing experience transported me to that writerly space, where meanings resonated and reverberated with reflective being. More importantly for the reader, my intention is that they will be moved at the realisation of being touched by the human insight that a powerful and vocative text can induce. I do have difficulty with the pre-suppositional stance for descriptions of incidents, because as Mason (2002) suggests, “the describer is in fact part of the description” (p. 236) and a describer always comes to a situation with prior experiences/learning that influence how what is seen or heard is understood. My concerns were somewhat eased when I read the words of van Manen (1997) “The methodology of phenomenology posits an approach towards research that aims at being presuppositionless ... tries to ward off any tendency towards constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would govern the research project” (p. 29).

Van Manen uses the word ‘aims’ at being presuppositionless. Therefore my aim was to minimise presupposition while acknowledging that what is noticed is always observer/describer dependent.

3.10 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Van Manen's (1997) view on hermeneutic phenomenology is comprehensive. It covers a wide range of practices with a typical focus on the concerns of pedagogical worth in a typical phenomenological writing pattern, which demands for a writing to serve pedagogy, that can even illuminate the silences. In order to devise the phenomenological writing, van Manen (1997) emphasises the use of anecdotal narrative with a creation of hybrid text to provide justice to the life world stories of the research participants. A distinction needs to be made between philosophical concerns and the engaged issues one faces as one actually goes to 'do' the research. For example, van Manen (1997) distinguishes between phenomenology as a branch of philosophy and 'engaged phenomenology' as a social science endeavour.

Van Manen (1997) writes about hermeneutic phenomenology in the context of autobiography and stated that "phenomenology does not solve problems, but asks meaning questions", (p. 23) and this fits with my aim to understand my own lived experiences, as phenomena. A hermeneutic investigation has me iteratively delving between the literature, the field and analysis and allows a reflexive approach which incorporates a refocusing and changes in the direction of research as new developments and insights come to light. This avoids the hindering of the investigation in an attempt to meet inappropriate measures of validity. Klein and Myers' (1999) view on the hermeneutic approach is one where "we come to understand a complex whole from preconceptions about the meanings of its parts and their interrelationships" (p. 71).

Phenomenological human science research endeavours to understand the structure of the human life world and the meanings we ascribe to everyday situations (van Manen, 1997). It is hermeneutic because it attempts to present understandings of these experiences through interpretations, which are complex and are different for each individual (van Manen, 1997). According to van Manen (1997, p. 101) lived experiences are unique to the individual and they present "multiple and different life worlds that belong to different human existences and realities". Van Manen (2002, p. 121) states that:

Methodologically speaking, story is important because it allows the human science text to acquire a narrative quality that is ordinarily characteristic of story. A hybrid textual form is created, combining the power of philosophic or systematic discourse with the power of literary or poetic language.

Therefore, as the researcher I acknowledge that while my interpretations of my own lived experiences provide an insight into identity, these understandings have been influenced by the life worlds inhabited by me at the time.

3.11 Writing Autobiography

The overall methodological approach for this research was based on my understanding of the value of narrative to make sense of my own lived experiences, as a way of exploring both the topic under investigation and my relationship with the research. The research question gave rise to the collection of my life-story (autobiography) from which to explore the phenomenon of identity. The term 'autobiography' is derived from the Greek language *autos* (self), *bio* (life), and *graphos* (to write) and when translated becomes 'self-life-story' (Johnstone, 1999). There have been some theses that have utilised autobiography as an approach to research, however no theses that I have been able to access have used specific autobiographical material as a basis for interpreting aspects of personal identity construction.

Denzin's (1989) view is that autobiography is an account of a person's life as lived, as experienced, and as recorded or told by that person. In a similar vein, Leggo (1997) states that autobiography is not only recording and reporting and repeating the lived story as known and as written by the subject; autobiography is recoding and restorying and restoring the lived story as unknown. When employed as a research method, the aim of an autobiography is not to achieve 'truth' in absolute terms, but to render an account of the lived experience of the self that increases our understanding of the human experience. As Richardson (2000) states, writing an autobiography is itself a process of discovery, a way of knowing. The researcher repeatedly revisits the autobiography re-reading, revising and re-telling the story in order to make changes that allow for new insights, understandings and interpretations of the meaning of the story. It is always a retelling because the life to which it supposedly refers is already a kind of narrative construct (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 22) state that "life and narrative are inextricably connected". The self and story continue to evolve through ongoing lived experience. The autobiography is 'reflective' when it gives expression to a deep inner contemplation (introspection) of subjective experiences and provides an interpretation of those experiences.

Autobiography can be used to reach back into the past to analyse identity formation and self-definition (Eakin, 1985). However as Stanley (1992, p. 9) states, “the choice of subject is located within political processes in which some people’s lives, but not others, are seen as interesting and/or important enough to be committed to biography” with the tendency for biographical material to be in respect of ‘great’ or ‘important’ people. Stanley (1992) argued that the dominant form of the autobiography in popular culture is the ‘*bildungsroman*’, the tale of the progressive travelling of a life from troubled or stifled beginnings in which obstacles are overcome and the true self actualised or revealed” (p. 11), in which lives are “linear, chronological, progressive, cumulative and individualist and follow highly narrative conventions” (p. 12). This popularised and romanticised model presupposes the fame or ‘importance’ of the subject and the celebration of their success over adversity. However there is also a move towards capturing the lives of ‘ordinary’ people through historical projects, which assumes that all lives are intrinsically interesting and challenges the orthodoxy that autobiographies should be produced by important people (Stanley, 1992). This study which was closely related to a quest for knowledge about my *own* self, the use of my own autobiography was central. Narratives, whether autobiographical or biographical, offer a valuable means of understanding and interpreting the identities of individuals.

Autobiography as an appropriate research approach became evident to me after reading *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). I had also read a number of autobiographies including *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1993), *Dying to be Me* (Moorjani, 2012), *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt, 2014), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Haley, 2010) and *Louise Nicholas My Story* (Nicholas & Kitchin, 2007). These authors had no intention of writing for fame, but their stories are symbolic of the struggles of life. They are auto-ethnographic accounts of events that really matter with their stories having significance to society and humanity. For me, these works show the ability to overcome a set of circumstances and find meaning in all that has happened. These stories reinforced for me that autobiography was an appropriate lens for interpreting my own identity construction.

Begg’s (2008) autobiographical study of how his concept of the mathematics curriculum emerged and changed for him over time, influenced me in terms of the power and value of autobiographic writing. His study provided an autobiographical account of his personal philosophies and his resulting actions, requiring considerable reflection which I assume

was accompanied by personal growth for him but also stimuli, debate and resonance for the reader. I believe that personal growth and stimulus for others are necessary properties of good research. Academics may question is *writing autobiography research*? Historically, autobiographic inquiries have engendered a wide range of criticism of being indulgent self-examinations of oneself, but Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) argue that autobiography, like self-study, “represents a trend away from modernism and its assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production toward a broadening of what counts as research” (p. 13). Personally, I interpreted the term ‘research’ widely and assumed that it included autobiographic writing. Autobiographical writing as ‘research’ was confirmed for me as I read the works of van Manen (1997, 2002, 2014), Molloy (1991), Anderson (2001) and Swindells (1995). These books stimulated my thinking regarding the use of autobiography as a possible method for interpreting the development of one’s identity. As Raunft (2001) states with reference to autobiographical studies of art educators:

Autobiographies, through their narrative emplotments and reflections of the authors, give order and meaning to life and are different than experience. A specific autobiography ... has specific focus, range and limitations, yet reflects the uniqueness of each lecturer with regard to their personal and professional lives. With every autobiography, we see an author’s self-awareness being structured into some order that mediates between subjective and objective reality. The question of reality forces the reader or researcher to look at an autobiography in the context of memory and self. (p. 13)

Raunft’s (2001) view spurred me on to consider using autobiography as a method for exploring personal identity. This led to me to reading the work of Moustakas (1973) who states that life-story is written from one’s deep involvement with one’s whole state of being, in an experience or set of experiences, in particular those involving existential moments of life discovery. Life-story is written from the perspective of a storyteller, who has plunged deeply “into an intensive and timeless experience of the self” (Moustakas, 1961, p. 9). The aim of the autobiography is achieved when “readers are able to read themselves into, and be touched by the final report which is characteristically presented as the formal telling of the self-life-story” (Johnstone, 1999, p. 25).

Using life-story as an interpretive method in this study, enabled me to explore how my lived experiences have influenced my identity. I chose to reflect upon positive and

negative life experiences to better understand their influence on my identity. In particular, one sees in Malouf (1985), Conrad (1988, 1990), Riemer (1992, 1995, 2012), Modjeska (1990), Rose (2001), Alison (2009) and many others precisely this hermeneutic phenomenology, whereby the experiences of life's phenomena are woven together into a narrative of self-identity. Configuring history has always been central in autobiographical writing. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, history has become as decentred as autobiography, following, as Gossman (1990) noted, certain parallels with fiction, "among them, the repudiation of realism, the collapse of the subject or character as an integrated and integrating entity, and an increasingly acute awareness of the fundamental logic or syntax of narrative" (p. 244). However, the autobiographical project impels us to reconcile our version of history with the other phenomena that it takes "to experience one's life as a story" (Zahavi, 2005, p. 114).

My story was based on my perception of the truth and I must acknowledge that my recount may not be accurate in the eyes of others. This aligns with the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2004) who state that any piece of autobiographical writing, is a particular reconstruction of an individual narrative and there could be other reconstructions. Leggo (1995) states that our writing can only be true to ourselves because our stories as thought and written, are based on our perceptions. I appreciate that my autobiographical writing will expose me and ultimately subject me to interpretation by others, but in order to truly understand how my lived experiences have contributed to the emergence of my identity, it is a risk I am willing to take. As Kolbenschlag (1988) highlights, autobiographical writing interrogates and examines both the joy and sorrow of our lives and forces us to look at the myths, reality frames, worldviews and biases that motivate us consciously and unconsciously.

3.12 Data Collection

Having drawn on hermeneutic phenomenology as an appropriate research methodology for this study, it was necessary to develop an appropriate method for the collection and analysis of the data. In keeping with the essence of qualitative research, I recognise *data* as 'lived experience material'. Van Manen (1997) devised this term, believing that the traditional meaning has quantitative connotations associated with behavioural and more positivistic social science approaches and relating to measurement and discovery of facts. For the sake of brevity, I use the word *data* but apply van Manen's definition. I also

acknowledge Bochner's (2001) approach and qualitative reflection of *data*. With a narrative perspective, he says "think of the life being expressed not merely as data to be analysed and categorised but as a story to be respected and engaged" (p. 132).

The data for this thesis lies within my autobiography. This is traditionally drawn on material from journals for the years to which the study relates, but I had not kept journals or diaries, so my first task was to reconstruct my memories of my life associated with my being (in the broadest sense). I considered how I might select and describe significant moments or events which were meaningful and signified an influence on the shaping of my identity, so that the significance of these past experiences could be probed.

I mined my memory banks to recall the incidents that seemed to signify or have some influence on my identity. I organised my recollections, and collected artefacts from my past that stimulated my thinking. These artefacts included photographs I had accumulated from the age of five, artefacts or as Anton (2001) labels 'symbols' such as photos, school exercise books and projects, awards from dance and music competitions, documentation from my working career (letter, emails) which were used to stimulate my memory of signifying events in my life. I had to rely on my memories of events and reflections on these memories, acknowledging the selectivity of memory. I began drawing a time line and slowly accumulated a large collection of incidents that had occurred, then filtered these for relevance. Some incidents were initially forgotten, yet over the period of writing this thesis I recalled more. I conceptualised the major time periods of my life and mapped the incidents onto my timeline, and put the names of those people associated with each incident. I looked for themes and selected the incidents that I considered as possibly *significant* or *critical*.

I was interested to read the work of Sir Francis Galton (Day & Gu, 2010), who laid the foundation for the *Critical Incident Technique* (CIT), and also the developmental work of Colonel John Flanagan (1954) that resulted in the present form of the CIT. Critical incidents are used in many disciplines and have become a widely used qualitative research method, recognised as an effective exploratory and investigative tool. Evidence of its use lies in the fact that its influence ranges far beyond its industrial and organisational psychology roots, having been employed across a diverse number of disciplines, including communications, nursing, medicine, marketing, psychology and social work (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Malio, 2005).

My personal interpretation was that the concept of *critical incident* was interpreted differently by scholars and researchers (Angelides, 2001; Francis, 1997; Woods, 1993). Tripp (2012) states that the term *critical incident* was first used in biographical research, where it referred to some event or situation that meant a significant turning point or change in the life of a person, an institution or in some social phenomenon. Tripp (2012) expanded on this definition by including in it very commonplace events and applying it in an educational context, namely everyday classroom practice. In terms of Tripp's (2012) use of the term *critical*, I felt the term *signifying incidents* to be a more appropriate label, which acknowledges the complexity of influences on decisions and the notion that while the incidents may signify change, they did not necessarily cause it—they impacted on me along with other relevant influences. Chase (2005) writes of such moments as *particular phases or incidents*. These moments give cause for reflection and can influence the way in which one sees one's individuality and one's practice. My interpretation of signifying incidents are those that either strengthened my resolve, or contributed to the change that occurred in my understanding and consequently my identity. These events have an effect on my thinking and action and ultimately influenced my identity. My decision to use these incidents as a focus of and as a tool for reflection is based on the idea that it is neither reasonable nor even possible to reflect on every event in my life and that I have to select what to focus on. I knew I could not possibly build a complete version of what Tripp (2012) calls a critical incident file, but Tripp made four points that are relevant for signifying incidents:

1. Incidents happen all the time—it is a personal decision as to which are *signifying* for one's development.
2. To say an incident is *signifying* is to put a value on it and attach meaning to it and reflect on it.
3. *Signifying* incidents are not usually dramatic or obvious, they are commonplace and occur as part of routine professional practice, but the identified ones are indicative of trends, motives and structures that are personally relevant.
4. Having called an incident *signifying* and recorded it, one must reflect on it with a professional awareness and sensitivity and not merely in the everyday way of looking

at things, that is there is a need to describe the incident (the *what*), then to explain it (the *why*).

In terms of my study each incident was assigned a number and heading, followed by an inset giving my immediate thoughts, interpretations and reflections on the incident at the time (in terms of its influence on my identity). Further insets indicate later reflections and comments with the benefits of hindsight. These were my descriptions and interpretations of the events and may not reflect how the other participants viewed the incident. I decided to use incidents that would be described, interpreted and reflected upon with hindsight. I saw these incidents as the phenomena and the interpretation as hermeneutics, therefore situating the study within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. Through conscious recall, spontaneous recall and quiet reflection I was able to identify incidents that seem to signify an influence on my identity.

One might ask, is autobiographical narrative real or fictional? Secondly, does that matter? I acknowledge that neither a historian's view nor that of a novelist is true, though I assume that my accounts of a lived experience represent reasonable approximations. I see writing narrative as reporting, reinterpreting and reconstructing what seems to me to be my past, and my story is therefore not a record of what I did, but rather a record of what I think now that I did. The incidents I presented may be causal, correlative, or co-incidental in the shaping of my identity, but for me they are related. I am not trying to find causes—all I can say is that the incidents might be influential. I hope the incidents are reported with fidelity and accept that some minor details might be incorrect, but even if they are post-incident re-constructions of the past, they are nevertheless significant to me. If any incidents are simulations rather than reports of what occurred, then readers may still resonate with them as they are my attempts to closely re-present incidents.

After examining the signifying events, I attempted to extract common themes that require greater understanding. A good narrative must move beyond narrow notions of reliability, validity and generalizability. In narrative recollection, fact and fiction can become blurred and what seemed like fact is more and more memory reconstruction. The narrative writer must always be cautious to avoid simplistic plots, one-dimensional characters and narcissistic, idiosyncratic embellishment (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). One must be cautious to avoid narrative massaging, which is writing in a 'happily ever after' fashion. One must acknowledge that one's perceptions, thoughts and writing, are never completely

neutral but always interpretive in nature. How we tell our story is based on our perspective and shaped by the world around us, so that we can never be totally truthful with ourselves or our readers in an absolute sense. This project is about ‘getting it all out’, so that I can extract the truth in the sense of what I hold to be true based on my experiences and environment from fantasy and extract meaning and relevance. Narratively writing the past is an interpreting activity, not a simple mirroring of the past.

Clandinin and Connelly (2004) state that ethics and anonymity are considerations with narrative inquiry and I had to give thought as to maintaining the privacy of those that I have included in my autobiographical writing. It was challenging to deconstruct an experience without identifying heroes and villains. I know that my descriptions of behaviour and my interpretations of events could potentially be argued by the characters involved. How could I have obtained consent from everyone I had come into contact with? I had not solicited consent from everyone because I have done my best to disguise their identity, although I am sure that they would recognise themselves if they chose to read my writing. Although I have related these incidents, the people within the incidents have a right to confidentiality and anonymity and there is a risk that they may be identified. Because of this potential risk, people and places referred to in this thesis were de-identified. For example, people and places within the education system were identified as ‘Head of School’, ‘colleague’, or ‘tertiary institution’. Family members were identified as my ‘mum’, my ‘dad’ or my ‘sisters’. I focused my writing on the experiences that have shaped who I am at this point in time. I chose to focus on both positive and negative experiences because I believed that juxtaposing them would allow me further insight into answering the question ‘who am I?’

3.13 Data Analysis

The two major approaches to theory development are deductive theory testing and inductive theory building. Deductive theory testing is primarily the domain of quantitative research methods, employing a positivist paradigm that seeks to be objective. Conversely, an inductive approach is typically used by qualitative studies as a method of “developing conclusions from specific observations” (Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood, & Axford, 1999, p. 39). Inductive models allow the development of theories about the collective reality of the people who experience the aspects of the phenomenon being studied, to be developed directly from the data that is collected (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Inductive

analysis was used in this study to generate from the narrative, themes and categories from which theoretical explanations might be drawn.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue that there is no correct or singular way of analysing narratives, and accordingly, that it is up to the interpretation of the researcher to engage with an individual narrative as a natural act. This is reinforced by Riessman (1993) who states that “nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do. Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations. There is no hard distinction in postpositivist research between fact and interpretation” (p. 2). Riessman’s (1993) view confirmed for me my assumption that research is subjective in nature, particularly narrative inquiry; it is based on the researcher’s perspectives and experiences. As Hickey and Austin (2007, p. 21) state, the telling of life stories “pens possibilities for the development of a critical reflexivity wherein senses of self and agency might be understood in terms of the social processes that mediate lived experience and the material realities of individuals”.

These ideas from Benwell and Stokoe (2006) and Riessman (1993) fitted well with my view of autobiography in that it is personal, subjective, multi-layered with connections between layers and writing a complete autobiography is impossible. I acknowledge that it was challenging ensuring that the depiction of these lived experiences, their context and interpretations of them, satisfy appropriate quality criteria. Eco (1992) highlights the issue of over-interpretation. How could I ensure that I would not over-interpret the text of my life? It is important to focus on the question—am I imputing an interpretation to an incident when the interpretation may be of the incident with other associated ones? Perhaps the notion of ‘signifying’ as a descriptor for incidents excuses such extended interpretation. The essence of reflecting on my own lived experiences provided insight into the significance of specific experiences, allowing significant themes to emerge from the data (van Manen, 1997). I could only present my subjective interpretation of these incidents and their influence on my identity.

3.14 Quality Criteria

Both a major strength and a significant difficulty of narrative inquiry is its inherent subjectivity (Greenhalgh, Russell, & Swinglehurst, 2005) and as Baumeister (1991) and Burr (1995) state, life story as a factual and reliable data source has been criticised by a

number of scholars. The major concerns relate to the individual's recollections of their past becoming somewhat distorted and an inability to maintain consistency (McAdams, 2001). McAdams (2001) went on to suggest that life stories do not necessarily 'lack authenticity', because they rely on 'actual events' and, as such, are a product of real personal experiences. However, there is support for the validity of using stories as a primary source of data and according to van Manen (2002), "combine systematic discourse and literary language" (p. 115). He states that:

A common rhetorical device ... is the use of anecdote or story ... All human science has a narrative quality (rather than an abstracting quantitative character). And the story form has become a popular method for presenting aspects of qualitative or human science research. (p. 115)

Van Manen's (2002) view reinforced for me the value of stories but I was mindful that stories have been challenged as lacking the traditional quality constructs of reliability and validity as data in the human sciences. Van Manen (2002) states that "biographies, autobiographies, personal life histories are all potential sources for experiential material" (p. 71). This is further qualified in that "lived experience descriptions are data, or material on which to work" (p. 55) and it is the lived experiences of the participant in this study that form the primary source of data collected. According to van Manen (2002):

The 'data' of human science research are human experiences. It seems natural therefore, that if we wish to investigate the nature of certain experience or phenomenon, the most straightforward way to go about our research is to ask selected individuals is to write their experiences down. (p. 63)

Van Manen's (2003) quote highlighted for me the value of writing up one's autobiography, however Foster et al., (2006) state that when using researcher self-narrative, "the method uses the researcher's self, it requires them to use particular qualities and skills" (p. 49). Examples of these qualities and skills include openness, honesty and an ability to clearly demonstrate conclusions drawn. In addition, the researcher must also be able to maintain a strong focus on the central issue of the study. Van Manen (2002) states that "unless the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question or notion, there will be many temptations to wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations..." (p. 33). For some writers, research credibility of qualitative studies is established by adopting the concepts and

terminology of positivist research. Sandelowski (1993), states that issues of validity in qualitative studies should be linked not to truth or value, but to trustworthiness. The traditional quality constructs of reliability, validity and generalizability are rejected by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who believe that one can establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data research, using criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility relates to faithful descriptions or interpretations of the human experience so that people having the experience would immediately recognise it. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the inquiry fit with contexts outside the study situation. Dependability allows another to clearly follow the decision trail used by the investigator. One must arrive at a comparable but not contradictory conclusion, given the researcher's data, perspective and situation. Confirmability relates to the relationship between the researcher and the participant and measures how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The difficulty I experienced in applying Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria was that credibility, in terms of an accurate identification and description of the subject, was difficult because of the personally constructed nature of my study and my acknowledgement that alternative constructions of a subject are always possible. Transferability was unlikely to be possible because the study is a contextually situated story, undertaken in a context that was specific in terms of me, the researcher. Dependability usually relies on triangulation, but this account was my personal reflection and interpretation, not that of others and I assume that others could well have constructed somewhat different realities from the same lived experiences. As van Manen (1997, p. 31) states "a phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description". Similarly, Moustakas (1990) asked "does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experiences?" (p. 32).

I find comfort in van Manen's (1997) notion of the validating circle of inquiry which says "a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects

lived experience—is validated by lived experiences and it validates lived experience” (p. 27).

I explored Grumet’s (1988) alternative criterion for truth in autobiographical research, namely *fidelity*. Grumet states that:

Fidelity rather than truth is the measure of these tales and in this distinction said, truth is what happened in a situation while fidelity is what it means to the teller of the tale, (or perhaps what other would or could recognise). (p. 66)

In using Grumet’s concept for fidelity as a quality criterion for autobiographical research I accept that the criterion is subjective because the researcher/autobiographer determines meaning for themselves. This property is accepted by others, for example, Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) said “truth treats a situation as objective while fidelity is subjective” (p. 26), and writing about narrative research Heikkinen (2002, p. 17) rejects objectivity and says “research from this perspective, perhaps has an ability to produce some kind of authentic view of reality, although the belief in the potential attainment of an objective reality is rejected.”

In this situation, rather than thinking of truth, validity or reliability, Heikkinen (2002, p. 25) uses the term *verisimilitude* (having the appearance of truth, and being very probable) and suggests that:

When a narrative is verisimilitudinal, the question of whether the events actually happened in some real place to some real individual is not so important Simulation as a criteria of truth does not, however, mean that reality is excluded from narrativity. Quite the contrary: reality is precisely included in a simulation.

Finally confirmability, like credibility and transferability, discounts the notion of personal interpretation in the construction of knowledge. In this form of research, credibility and transferability, seem important and together they can both be summarised by the word ‘*resonance*’. Resonance is a musical term but in this context is described as a richness or significance, especially in evoking an association or strong emotion. Having an audience, and in this case ‘readers’ of the work resonate with a story, implies that the story strikes a meaningful chord, stimulates interest and connection and seems reasonable. However, one story will not resonate with everyone, but such is the nature of storytelling. Stories,

like theories, models and histories, are not truths; they contain elements of possible truths that are formed and reformed through storytelling and reading; they are complex; they evolve; they ‘become’ over time; and they have their time. Whilst stories provide a picture of reality, it is just a picture. Reality is much more than what we perceive. This idea of resonance is reinforced by other researchers for example Mason (2002) with respect to *noticing*, as a quality criterion for autobiographical research. Noticing is usually an informal word for observation and/or listening but Mason uses the word in the context of practitioner research with a deeper meaning. He talks of the ‘discipline of noticing’ in terms of developing sensitivity and awareness within professional practice, and as “a collection of practices both for living in, and hence learning from experience, and for informing future practice” (p. 29).

3.15 Ethics

Because this is a self-reflective study, an application for ethical approval to undertake the research was not required from AUT University’s Ethics Committee but I was aware of a number of issues related to ethics in terms of preserving other people’s privacy.

3.16 Summary

In conclusion, the focus throughout the design stage of this research was to ensure that the overall methodology and the chosen method of data collection aligned. Narrative inquiry was the most appropriate methodological approach, because it best encapsulated the essence of the research, which was to collect the autobiographical memories and to interpret the meanings of these experiences. At the same time, the research process itself was a series of experiences, a journey. The paradigm position of this research was that meaning and understanding were socially constructed. This resonates with the idea of creating narratives to construct knowledge, as narratives are interpretations of events and therefore subject to the perceptions of those involved as to what is included. I have included a discussion on the quality criteria employed in this study and the steps taken in my own efforts at employing an ethical and transparent approach. The following five chapters are an account of the incidents that for me, have in some way shaped my identity. I have included at the end of each of the five chapters, a reflection on the key influences on my identity along with my emerging personality traits.

Chapter 4: The early years 0–12

“Stories then, like the lives they tell about, are always open-ended, inconclusive and ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations”

(Denzin, 1989, p. 81)

4.1 Introduction

The following five chapters are a recollection and reflection upon the incidents that for me, have in some way shaped my identity. I have included background information to make my story more contextualised and therefore more understandable. I had the choice of presenting these events in either chronological order or by order of themes. I have chosen to present these in chronological order from pre-school to adulthood, with an entire chapter dedicated to my working life as a teacher. I have included at the end of chapters four to eight, a reflection on the key influences on my identity along with my emerging personality traits.

4.2 Growing up at home

I am a fifth generation New Zealander, born in 1971 at what was called the Mater Hospital in Epsom Auckland. I was the youngest of three girls. My eldest sister was 20 years older than me and my other sister 15 years older. Consequently I was brought up as an only child, as my sisters married and left home when I was three-years old. My dad was a marine engineer on a ship that transported cement to ports around New Zealand. My dad also served with the Royal New Zealand Airforce in World War II in Guadalcanal. My mum was a home maker. We lived in Mount Eden, a suburb of Auckland, on a large piece of land. We also owned a beach property at Manly on the Hibiscus Coast, which we used on long weekends and summer holiday periods.

I was brought up in an era when parents and caregivers had the backing of the community; the local teachers, school principals, doctors, police officers, grandparents and extended family all agreed to the unwritten ‘rules’ and expectations, which included good manners. My parents imparted their traditional values and beliefs to me including: modelling and

instilling good behaviour and manners and believing it built self-esteem and confidence in terms of preparing me for my future. My parents felt that manners embodied numerous virtues, including compassion, respect, responsibility, friendliness and consideration. All meals were eaten at a dinner table that was set for each meal, as opposed to eating dinner meals on one's lap, perched at a breakfast bar, or in front of television which is the norm in many families these days. I learnt the finer points of etiquette, particularly at the dinner table, tipping the soup bowl and spoon away from themselves, placing the knife and fork together when finished.

4.3 Pre-school years

I remember prior to attending primary school my love of solving jigsaw puzzles. Mum and dad bought a number of them for me and I recall one puzzle that I found educational—a map of New Zealand.

Incident 1—Problem solving

I recall this puzzle which was a map of New Zealand, showing all the major towns, overlaid with Māori symbols including the tiki and Māori doll (with baby) adorned in a tassel feather cloak.

I made it a competition to complete the puzzle as quickly as I could and remember the delight in showing mum and dad. I knew that a new puzzle would be bought for me, because it was pointless redoing the same one over and over again.

In hindsight, I wonder if mum and dad bought these puzzles to keep me occupied, as I did not have any siblings to play with and possibly as an educational tool.

At the age of four I attended Lady Cobham Kindergarten in Mount Eden, a highly regarded kindergarten in the district; I recall happy times there including my first encounter with a person whose accent was different to mine.

Incident 2—Hearing a new accent

My teacher at kindergarten taught us a song “if you're happy and you know it clap your hands”. Her English accent was different to the Kiwi accent and I copied the way she pronounced it as ‘harpy’.

When I was singing along with the teacher I knew that the word ‘harpy’ was supposed to be happy, but as a four-year-old, I did not question the accent and imitated her.

Today, I still recall this delightful tune, reminiscent of happy memories at kindergarten. I also have a greater appreciation of how young children imitate adults and how quickly they pick up on slight nuances.

I remember my first interaction with a coloured person at Lady Cobham kindergarten. The teacher had distinctive afro hair and dark skin.

Incident 3—Meeting my first coloured person

My teacher role-played nurse and patient with us, as we wrapped bandages on her wrists and tended to her as our patient.

My first reaction was of one of apprehension and curiosity. I was a little unsure of her at first, but she was very kind and all the other children seemed to enjoy playing with her, so I too joined in and warmed to her quickly.

Looking back on this incident, my life as a child so far had not included the full spectrum of diversity and I think my initial reaction to meeting this person was to be expected. I had been brought up in a 'white' family having had no interaction with anyone of coloured skin.

I recall the bathroom configuration at kindergarten which was unisex with each toilet cubicle having no door and facing into a communal area.

Incident 4—Give me some privacy please!

I would try to avoid using the toilet, due to the embarrassment I felt sitting it in full view of the staff and other children. I would try and wait until I got home to use the bathroom.

I could not understand why there were no doors on each cubicle, as I was used to a door on our toilet at home. Having no door made me feel uncomfortable due to the lack of privacy.

In hindsight, cubicles with no doors was a safety measure to prevent pre-schoolers accidentally locking themselves in the toilet. I also wonder if I was embarrassed to use the toilet because I was brought up at home to close the door to the toilet each time I used it. Even at this early age I identified that I was a private person and privacy was something that was important to me.

4.4 Primary school years

My primary school years were spent at Maungawhau Primary School in Mount Eden, Auckland. Our family had strong ties with this school; my grandmother had been a founding pupil, and my mum and sisters had attended this school. The family had also donated funds to help build the school pool. I have fond recollections of primary school. I had not really considered why one went to school, one just did, and I was eager to perform well. I was motivated and encouraged by my parents to do well at school, with both mum and dad supervising homework activities. Dad often read to me from the 21 volume New World Junior Encyclopaedia one topic every night before bedtime. These books still sit on my bookshelf today. I was always keen to learn something new. I recall my first day at primary school.

Incident 5—First day at primary school

I held on to mum's hand and we were greeted by Mrs Lott, along with a sea of new-entrant faces staring at us. Mrs Lott was an elderly teacher who I took an instant liking to. She took my hand and asked me to join the others in class whilst mum exited the classroom. I remember crying and to help put me at ease, Mrs Lott paired me up with another five-year-old girl in the class, who became my long-term friend through primary, secondary and tertiary study.

At the time, a sense of abandonment and sadness overwhelmed me. I had a strong bond with mum and I could not understand why she would leave me in a place with strangers.

In hindsight, I wonder if other five-year-olds experienced the same anxieties transitioning into a new environment. I possibly found it more difficult, due to being raised more or less as an only child and having little interaction with children of my own age, apart from kindergarten.

I had a privileged upbringing in terms of the amount of dedicated attention and time spent on me and the opportunities that my parents gave me. When I was born, my parents were 42 and 47, and they were mortgage free which allowed funds to be spent on extra curricula activities (ballet and piano lessons). Mum did not have to work to supplement the household income; but instead she devoted her time to raising me and spending quality time with me. I recall at primary school, when one had to go through the usual ritual on day one of the school term, of introducing oneself to the class. I shared with the class the age difference between myself and my siblings who were 15 and 20 years older than me.

Incident 6—Older parents

The usual comment and raised eyebrows from those who questioned the age difference between my siblings and I was, "were you a mistake then?"

At the time I was embarrassed at these comments which did hurt me. I would try and justify my existence and responded with "of course not, my parents wanted me".

In hindsight, those children that made those comments did not intend to hurt my feelings and perhaps as a child I was sensitive to criticism and as a defence mechanism lashed out with a response in order to defend myself.

As a youngster, whilst I had to defend the comments made from my peers about having older parents, these myths were quickly dispelled by my parents who showered me with love and affection. My parents never made me feel like an encumbrance on their life, in fact as a child when I used to relay these comments back to them, they said "you were the best thing that has ever happened to us". As I grew older the comments from others lessened and as a teenager I was better prepared at anticipating the negative remarks, but

I did tire of having to justify the age gap to those who questioned it. I wonder why I considered responding to such comments but I do understand that a child's reaction would be one of defending one's position. I feel no hurt but think about how fortunate I was to have two loving parents who nurtured and cared for me. When I see older parents with young children I think how fortunate that child is to have parents whose age often brings with it wisdom, emotional stability, psychological strength, and financial security. I had a wonderful upbringing in a house full of love and laughter. That may sound like the stuff from an impossibly romantic movie, but it is true. My parents were the stabilising influence in my early life and still continue to be a sounding board when I seek their advice or opinions on matters. Growing up, they were older, wiser and more self-assured, and certainly had a lot more patience than many of my friend's parents.

I wonder if many people think of older parents as being out of touch with younger generations and of possibly enforcing stricter rules and regulations? This was not the case with my parents. In my view, it is not the number of years that you have been on this earth that are important, but the way you think and feel and your attitude in general. Age really is just a state of mind. In my eyes, my parents will never be old. They are still relatively active even at 87 and 92 respectively, but able to combine that with being mature and supportive, all the ingredients that matter. I never once wished that my parents were younger in years. Why should I? After all, what they gave to me could not have been surpassed by striking twenty years off of their ages. In fact, I believe that it was their age that made them such good parents. They had a wealth of experience and had already learned a lot of life's lessons by the time they had me, for which I shall be eternally grateful.

I remember attending a fifth birthday party of a school friend. I was dressed in a nautical themed dress, with crisp white socks and red shoes. Mum walked me to the party and then left.

Incident 7—An expression of independence

I entered the bedroom where the birthday person was unwrapping his presents and sat on the bed. His mother said "I would prefer it if you did not sit on the bed". I thought what a grump and left the party for home. I recall mum's shock at me arriving home so soon after dropping me off at the party.

At the time of the incident I felt uncomfortable in this person's home and the unfamiliar surroundings. I can remember the relief of getting home to a familiar environment where I felt at ease.

Reflecting years later, I wonder if I chose to leave because I was unaccustomed to interacting with other children, having been the youngest of three siblings and brought up as an only child, mostly engaging with adult company from an early age. I wonder if my reaction was an early expression of self-confidence and independence or maybe I was sensitive to criticism.

I did not consider at the time the distress this would have caused the hosts, having a child leave the party of their own volition, without the hosts of the party even knowing.

4.5 Learning from dad

I had just started school and dad introduced me to my two times table. I recall sitting in the lounge of our home and dad writing out the sequence on a piece of paper.

Incident 8—Two times table

Dad chanted the two times table to me and then I joined in and we chanted in a sing-song way.

At the time I found the pattern of numbers fascinating. I was excited at learning something that I had not yet been taught at school and I felt comfortable with my dad teaching me.

Looking back on this incident, this was an example of my dad as one of my first teachers. This was quality time spent with my dad who was preparing me for what was ahead at school and I was fortunate to have a father who took the time to teach me.

As a youngster, dad's work commitments meant that he spent two weeks of every month away at sea and I felt the time I did have with dad on his two weeks ashore was precious. I was always excited when dad was coming home and remember waiting with mum at the wharf to greet him as he disembarked off the ship. I spent time with dad in the garage where he was rebuilding his 1949 Ford Prefect; I would sit on a wooden box as he worked away on the car. I think I had an enquiring mind even at this young age, as I would frequently ask dad questions about the car as he worked on it. He drove me to and from school in it and I felt special travelling to school in a vehicle that was different to others. The indicators fascinated me as they were positioned in the pillar of the door and to operate them you would flick a button on the steering wheel and the indicator would rise out from the pillar. Whenever we drove over a bump the car would inevitably stop. The problem was that the battery sat too high in the battery bay and if the car went over a bump, the bonnet would hit the battery causing it to short and the car to stop.

Incident 9—Rote learning

I was 10 at the time and dad and I were travelling in the Ford Prefect when it stopped after travelling over a bump. Dad was unable to get the car started and so I ran down the road in my ballet leotard, stockings and ballet shoes arriving at the studio. I was questioned as to why I was late and I explained the story to the ballet master.

At the time standing in front of the ballet master and entire cast, I knew that I was not entirely sure of the workings of a car battery, but I thought that what I had rote learnt from my dad sounded impressive, especially coming from a 10 year girl.

In hindsight I may have come across as showing off about how car batteries worked and was a full explanation necessary? Perhaps a simple 'sorry I'm late' would have sufficed.

Because dad worked two weeks out of a month, we would frequently take the opportunity to go on holiday (in the summer period) during his two week's leave. We owned a caravan and would travel to a destination in the north island, staying at a holiday park.

Incident 10—I was learning and I did not know it!

On car journeys dad would frequently initiate a game that involved either converting road distance sign distances from kilometres to miles or the eye-spy game.

At the time I really enjoyed playing these games and I felt rather proud of myself at being able to convert kilometres into miles (divide by eight and multiply by five) and wondered how many other children my age would know this.

In hindsight, this was dad's way of teaching me division, multiplication, and the English vocabulary without me being aware of it. Even today, I still think about this ritual when I'm driving past road distance signs.

4.6 Learning to save

My parents introduced me into the practice of saving money at an early age with the help of plastic money boxes. The money box was in the shape of Kashin the elephant. Kashin was the Auckland Savings Banks' key advertising symbol based on their funding towards purchasing Kashin the elephant for the Auckland Zoo. Back then, money boxes did not have an opening to take the money out—only a slot to put the money in. When you filled up your money box, you would have to take it to the bank so the teller could break it open. My banking relationship with ASB had begun at an early age and continued for many years until the early 1990s.

Incident 11—Visiting the bank

I took a full money box up to the counter and waited as the teller cut the box open and counted the shrapnel. The teller would then manually enter the figure into my bank book. I then received a new money box in a colour of my choice.

At the time my goal was to fill each new money box as quickly as I could. I was unaware of why I was saving, only that it was important to save. It was never explained as to why I had to save, it was something that I just did.

In hindsight I was forming the habit of saving without even really being conscious of it. Filling the box with money as quickly as I could, was a competition for me. At the time, had someone explained the reason for saving, then I do not think I would have really understood it anyway.

Every Wednesday was school banking and I regularly banked 50c or \$1 that my mum and dad had given me. I still have my old bank books which I took to school every Wednesday along with my deposit. By Thursday afternoon the book was returned to me, with a handwritten record of the deposit made by the teller—there were no computers then to update the balances automatically. I valued money from an early age and learnt the habit of saving my pocket money.

Incident 12—Totalling up the entries

When the deposit book was returned to me at school, I would take it home and do the mathematics to check that the entry had been recorded correctly. Dad would always check to see that I had totalled it up correctly.

I was always excited to receive my bank book back on Thursday, delighted that the balance was higher than the last entry. I was not sure why I had to save, only that I had to save, because this was what my parents had told me.

Looking back on this incident, participating in school banking in the 1970's was influential in me forming the habit of saving.

Saving continues to feature strongly in my life. I take a cautious approach to spending and am a good saver, always considering whether purchases are a necessary item or a luxury 'nice to have' item.

4.7 Learning ballet

At the age of five I was encouraged by my mum in numerous after-school activities, including learning dance (ballet, tap and jazz) and playing a musical instrument, namely the piano. For me, I was not entirely sure as to why I engaged in extra-curricular activities, just that I did. I was not particularly social with peers my own age and preferred my own company and the company of adults, probably due to being raised in an environment with

older parents and older siblings. I enjoyed dance as a performance-art form with purposefully selected sequences of human movement that had aesthetic and symbolic value.

Incident 13—First ballet exam

I was six when I sat my first ballet exam in a local church hall. The final routine was free movement set to the examiner's choice of music. I listened to the music and then danced. I pretended I was a duck, crouching down waddling along flapping my elbows by my side.

At the time I thought I had failed the exam, as my interpretation did not resemble any traditional ballet movements. When I exited the exam room I told my teacher and she was disappointed with me. When the results came out a few weeks later, I gained the highest mark of honours.

Looking back, this was one of the most fun occasions at ballet. There were no restrictions and I was free to choreograph and express myself the way I wanted to, rather than being confined to the regimented syllabus. This exercise challenged the conservative style that I was accustomed to both in my family upbringing and at ballet classes.

My ballet mistress was another important teacher in my life. Ballet was disciplined with the ballet mistress commanding respect from all students from the commencement through to the conclusion of the ballet class. I was conditioned by my parents into respecting those in authority and this included my ballet teacher. As a young child I was not adverse to the regimented and repetitive practice of repeating the exercises over and over, thinking this is what one is supposed to endure at ballet lessons and being raised in a disciplined home, I navigated the ballet world with ease. My ballet teacher was strict, but I admired her greatly. She taught me the art and technique of classical ballet, and she influenced me in other ways. I admired the way she presented herself. She was always immaculately groomed and exuded femininity.

I was performing in my first ballet concert and recall the excitement of appearing for the very first time on stage. I performed as a bumble bee at my end-of-year concert. Mum made the costume, which involved a black leotard with strips of yellow crepe paper across the body. I remember sitting at the dining room table watching Dad craft the wings and antennae out of yellow pipe cleaners.

Incident 14—First stage production

I remember ending up dancing so close to the edge of the stage that I nearly fell off into the orchestra pit.

At the time I remember the gasps from the audience, but I did not realise they were directed at me. I was unaware of what all the fuss was about. I was confident about my routine and was not at all phased that I nearly fell off the stage.

In hindsight, most six-year-olds would be unaware of the potential danger and consequences of falling into the orchestra pit. I presume the ballet teacher and audience were more anxious than I was!

I was a shy child, and ballet provided me with a medium that I could use to express myself, particularly in the stage work, more so than in the ballet classes each week. The stage facilitated the development of my self-confidence. I felt untouchable on stage looking out from the stage into a sea of black with the odd flash light appearing in the darkness. Stage work gave me the freedom to express myself, totally oblivious to the audiences' opinions of me.

4.8 Learning music

Learning to play the piano was a tradition on my mum's side of the family. My grandmother, my mum and both my sisters had learnt the piano and therefore it was a fait accompli that I would learn this instrument. Music lessons were an opportunity to spend time with my lovely teacher and learn a tune or two along the way.

Incident 15—Weekly music lessons

I was seven when I started music lessons with an elderly lady who I adored. My teacher and my mum expected me to practice every morning at 6.30am before school which I reluctantly did. I performed well in my exams achieving high marks in both theory and practical examinations.

At the time I did not particularly enjoy the routine of music practice at the same time every day before school. I simply accepted that this was expected of me—perhaps to appease my mum and my teacher.

In hindsight, my mum's view was that routine was important in terms of being successful in life and this also included mastering the piano. I did not challenge her view and did as I was told.

Today, I have a better understanding of mum's perspective on learning to play the piano, in that music stimulates certain areas of the brain that controls fine motor skills, memory and speech. Music practice felt like a real chore due to the repetitive nature of practicing at the same time every morning. Routine was embedded in a number of other areas of my life, possibly having been established with routine 'music practice time'.

4.9 Religion

As a child, I was not brought up with religion; though my dad was raised a Catholic but my mum was not religious at all. My great grandmother on my mum's side never followed a religious denomination until she became a wealthy widow and was befriended by the Mormons; then when I was five, she purchased an entire set of books of bible stories for me and this was my first introduction to Christianity. All these years later, I still have these books in my home office.

Incident 16—Bible stories

As a five-year-old, my dad would read me one of the stories each night before I went to bed. Like stories in other books, many seemed make-believe, especially the miracles. My favourite was the story of Baby Moses.

At the time these stories were fantasy rather than history. I enjoyed the pictures as much as the stories themselves. I was never fully convinced that these stories were real. I remember thinking at the time that if angels were real, then why had I not seen one? If they exist then why don't they reveal themselves and if God was real, then why had I not seen him?

Looking back, I continue to ponder why these stories were read to me, when my mum was not religious and my dad had not continued to follow the Catholic religion after marrying mum.

4.10 Reflecting on the key influences on my identity: Years 0–12

The key influences that contributed to my identity formation from years 0–12 were based around *home events* (events related to living at home and family); *educational events* (events related to kindergarten and primary education); *extra curricula events* (events related to music and dance).

In relation to my home environment, one of the key influences on my identity during these early years were my parents and my relationship with them as my primary caregivers. This is supported by Bosma and Kunnen (2001) whose view is that family interactions influence the status of identity development. Families provide the basis for the beliefs and values an individual holds. They also stated that the relationships with one's family are typically the first individual experiences, therefore providing a foundation for identity formation. From an early age, the bond with my parents was strengthened through a range of interactions and experiences. There were numerous dynamics at play, including being raised virtually as an only child to older parents with traditional values and behaviours and a mum who was a home maker. This set of

dynamics makes me wonder how different these interactions and experiences would have been and their influence on my identity, had I been born the first or second child, had I been born closer in age to my siblings, had my parents been younger, had I been raised in a more liberal environment and had my mum been engaged in part or full time employment.

I remember experiencing a very secure and supportive home environment. I was relatively shielded by my parents from the world's events and social problems. Their reasons may have been because children cannot digest violent behaviour and can become terrified by exposure to the graphic images and the feelings associated with it. My parents also kept me occupied with school work and extra curricula activities, namely ballet and music. I was brought up by two hard working parents, in whom I placed my trust. This aligns with stage one of Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial framework, whereby the child looks towards their primary caregiver for stability and consistency of care, thereby learning 'trust' through having their needs met by them.

My parents placed boundaries on me in what would today be regarded as a conservative parenting style. I feel that children today seem less compliant than previous generations, growing up in much more liberal environments with blurred boundaries, compared to my upbringing. Nowadays, children have been encouraged by adults to become centre-stage, with an inbuilt sense of entitlement and strong opinions on what they will and will not do. With both parents working, or in the case of solo parenting, many young pre-schoolers are spending their early years in childcare, with less parental influence than I experienced. Conversely, this gives children the opportunity to interact with a wider circle of adults and children, compared to my experience as a young child. Researchers from diverse ideological and philosophical backgrounds (Delors, 1996; Himmelfarb, 1996; Jackson, Boostroom, & Hansen, 1998; Kenan, 2009; Wynne & Ryan, 1996), believe that the 21st century was facing a number of issues including the erosion of family, community, and personal values; globalisation and global conflict; and devastating ecological changes across the world. Gergen (1991, 2001) states that technological advances in this postmodern era have altered the very foundation of the world economy and the meaning of community and individuality. This could result in feelings of alienation, defined as a reaction to the postmodern fragmentation of identity and loss of shared meaning (Geyer, 1996) and in Erikson's (1968/1994) words "for, indeed, in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (p. 130).

I sometimes wonder how my birth order influenced my identity. As the youngest child of three girls and brought up as an only child because my siblings were much older, I did not have to compete for my parents' time and attention. The time and attention that they invested in me, almost certainly facilitated and strengthened the bond between us and I wonder how much more time and attention they spent on raising me than other parents. I was brought up to respect my parents, something that I noticed was lacking in some of my friends' homes. This respect also extended to my ballet and music teachers, my school principals and school teachers. It was also expected that I would refrain from questioning those in authority which in turn shaped my identity into one of 'compliance'. My willingness to comply rather than rebel, continued well into my 20s but gradually lessened as a result of my maturity and my confidence to challenge the status quo.

My love of learning was encouraged by my parents (*incidents 1, 8, 9, 10, 12*). They were passionate about education and constantly reinforced its importance, along with their expectations of me from an early age through to my late teens. I responded with enthusiasm and was always eager to please. My parents instilled in me some traditional values including working hard, which was a precursor to success. They instilled the work ethic that success would not find you, you had to work for it. This work ethic emerged from an early age, strengthened through ballet and music which also required a disciplined approach. Looking back, my parents were ambitious for me, something I sensed at the time and accepted, but was not really sure why—maybe I did not need to know at the time. In my adolescent years, I came to understand the reason for their drive, due to their having a child later in life. Their view was that they would not be around as long as other parents for their children and felt it was important for me to be educated in order to provide for myself. This fuelled my own ambition for success even more and the desire to do well continued into my adolescent years.

I am fairly sure that being raised as an only child developed my independence from an early age, playing alone and content with my own company, even returning home from a 5th birthday party on my own (*incident 7*). I developed analytical and problem solving skills through 'play' which included the completion of puzzles (*incident 1*). This links to Erikson's (1950/1993) stage two which explores *autonomy* versus *shame*. I was beginning to experience personal agency and independence from the maternal presence. I discovered through 'play' my skills and abilities which illustrated a growing sense of independence and autonomy. My dad was instrumental in developing my listening and comprehension

skills by reading to me at bedtime, introducing me to mathematics at an early age and taking the time to teach me (*incidents 1, 8, 9, 10, 12*).

Kindergarten was another influence in the shaping of my identity. I began to separate myself from an undifferentiated unity with my parents, and inevitably drew meaning from events and other people. As Erikson's (1950/1993) theory of psychosocial development advocates, in my pre-school years at kindergarten, I was entering stage three, the *initiative* and *guilt* crisis stage. I began to assert control over my environment by taking initiative, planning activities, accomplishing tasks and facing challenges. For me, kindergarten offered the opportunity to engage in physical and imaginative play as expressed in *incidents 2 and 3* and an opportunity to engage in play with other children my own age.

My primary school was influential in the shaping of my identity. If Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is as Schwartz (2001) and Kroger (2002) suggest open to multiple interpretations, then at five years of age, I would have been entering stage four which Erikson (1950/1993) describes as one that encompasses the crisis between *industry* and *inferiority*. This stage aligned with my early school years, when I learnt to overcome challenges and to achieve. My parents began to lose their singular hold over me, as my world began to expand to include other adults. The teacher (primary school teacher) was encountered for the first time, and I began to venture into a world where new experiences gave rise to new knowledge and new abilities. Formal schooling provided the opportunity to make, learn and do new things and a sense of industry developed as I learnt to overcome the challenges presented. Regular weekly banking at primary school along with encouragement from parents to save (*incidents 11, 12*), was significant in developing my propensity to be thrifty from an early age. This stage also included exploring the world of music and ballet (*incidents 13, 14, 15*) where I was exposed to meeting people of my own age and also interacting with adults, namely my music and ballet teachers.

Being a relatively shy child, my mum enrolled me in ballet as a way of encouraging me to socialise with other children my age, having been raised more or less as an only child. Looking back, I do not think this was successful, as I did not make much of an effort to engage with other children in my ballet class. I did though transition seamlessly into the disciplined world of ballet, most probably due to being brought up in a disciplined home environment with conservative values including respect for authority. The weekly trips to ballet and music lessons with my mum strengthened the bond that I had with her. I enjoyed classes and relished the discipline and the repetitive nature of practicing the steps

over and over, in the quest for perfection—however this did not extend to ballet practise time at home. Music lessons were similar in terms of the disciplined approach to learning, with regular music practice being the norm. The establishing of routine and a strong work ethic was embedded from an early age, with dedicated time for music practice and school homework (*incident 15*).

Looking back now, these childhood memories seem more meaningful now. Raised in a home with positive parenting provided me with a solid foundation to grow from, something I was oblivious to as a young child.

4.11 Emerging Personality Traits

When I consider my identity formation during this early period of my life, I reflect upon the development of my personality and the individual traits that emerged during this time. Whilst I felt that much of my identity in my earlier years was influenced by the home environment in which I was raised, a study by Iacono and McGue (2012) found that the genetic makeup of a child is a stronger influence on personality than child rearing. For me, the traits that emerged were *a compliance with authority, trust, conscientiousness, perseverance, ambition and independence*. Drawing on Goldberg's (1990) framework I considered how the emergence of my traits during this early period of my life, aligned with his model and found there was some correlation with his five dimensions of; openness to experiences, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. It appears that at an early age I exhibited an openness to experience with signs of a curiosity to learn and a love of learning, participating and enjoying the arts (music and dance) but did not regard myself as being overly creative or imaginative. This lack of creativity and imagination may have been suppressed due to the teaching style I experienced at school and in my extra curricula activities. A traditional teaching style of 'talk and chalk' where the teacher was the knowledge dispenser rather than the facilitator. At ballet class, we were more often than not confined to a set syllabus and very rarely had the opportunity to create routines for ourselves.

In terms of conscientiousness, much of my early years was governed by routine, based around schooling and extra-curricular commitments. This required me to be organised to accommodate all of these activities—hence the requirement of a 'routine' which was established by my mum. My attention to detail was fostered through studying ballet,

which required me to follow instructions, and remain focused. Every ballet class was challenging due to the increasingly difficult skills, exercises and combinations one was required to master and perform. Ballet was instrumental in teaching me the skills of perseverance and dedication. This art form taught me about the value of hard work and the sense of achievement that one derives from the effort one puts in. Ballet training has no finite end and perfection is never achieved—there was always improvements to work toward, and that sense of dedication and attention to detail remained with me in my later years, extending beyond the dance studio.

Goldberg (1990) suggests that extraversion has two familiar ends of the spectrum, extroversion and introversion. In terms of my own identity development at an early age, I feel that it was the ‘context’ that determined where I sat on this continuum. On the whole, I regarded myself as being low in extroversion due to my quiet, introspective, reserved, nature. I was not a particularly social person and did not deliberately seek the company of others. I preferred solitude and disliked being the centre of attention. Perhaps to some I came across as aloof or self-absorbed. An example of how context influenced this particular trait was when I was performing ballet on stage which in effect forced me to become the centre of attention. In this situation I felt comfortable with the attention I received performing on stage, but in my daily life I disliked attention and was quiet and reserved.

While extroversion concerns sources of energy and the pursuit of interactions with others, ‘agreeableness’ concerns one’s orientation to others. Agreeable individuals have a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others (Roccas et al., 2002). It is also a measure of one’s trusting and helpful nature, and whether a person is generally good tempered or not. Erikson’s (1950/1993) view is that the child who, because of his or her successful passage through earlier stages, is trusting, autonomous, and full of initiative, will quickly learn to be industrious. However, the mistrusting child will doubt the future and will feel inferior. High agreeableness can also often be seen as naive or submissive. For me, I complied with authority both at home, at school, and in my extra curricula activities which I view as correlating to Goldberg’s ‘agreeableness’. Interestingly, the findings of a study by Iacono and McGue (2012) found the trait of obedience to authority was strongly determined by hereditary.

Goldberg (1990) suggests that individuals who score on the low end of neuroticism are more likely to feel confident, sure of themselves, adventurous and tend to be more stable and emotionally resilient. They may also be brave and unencumbered by worry or self-doubt. For me, I feel that I was emotionally stable due to my upbringing, without feeling anxious, sad or depressed, but did not regard myself as being adventurous. My personality was calm and I seemed to refrain from acting on impulse.

The next chapter focuses on my teenage years 13–19 which sees some of the traits that were established in my early years either continuing or ceasing, along with the emergence of others. At the end of the chapter I have reflected on the key influences on my identity and my emerging personality traits.

Chapter 5: The teenage years 13–19

5.1 Starting secondary school (Mount Roskill Grammar School)

Secondary schools in New Zealand are ‘zoned’ which means students who live in the home zone of a particular school, have an absolute right to enrol at that school. To be deemed as ‘living in the home zone’ means that the residential address you use and your usual place of residence must be within the school’s home zone. Zoning is a means of limiting the roll to prevent overcrowding at a school. In New Zealand there is a decile rating for each school based on socio-economic factors, and schools are categorised as state, state integrated or private. The decile rating (one being the lowest and ten being the highest) is used to determine Ministry of Education funding and it is based on the socio-economic status of the community. Many parents are willing to pay a premium for properties in areas so as to have their child educated at a high decile rated school.

Zoning was in place when I attended secondary school from 1985-1988. The road I lived on was zoned for Mount Roskill Grammar (MRGS), a state co-educational secondary school, with an average decile rating. I attended Mount Roskill Grammar for a year and performed well academically, achieving an end of year prize for excellence in my 3rd form subjects.

5.2 Years 2–4 at secondary school

At the end of 3rd form my parents submitted an out-of-zone application to attend Epsom Girls’ Grammar and I was offered a place. My grandmother, mum and eldest sister had all attended Epsom Girls’ Grammar (EGGS) and it was mum’s desire for me to attend this highly respected (decile 10) Auckland secondary school. The family had also donated funds to help build the school’s diving pool. I started there in February 1986 and it was very different to Mount Roskill Grammar, both in academic and sporting expectations. The ethos of EGGS that ‘girls can do anything’ was regularly reinforced by the teachers and by the Head Mistress of the school.

Incident 17—School assemblies

The Head Mistress would enter the assembly hall, adorned in her black robe and proceed to the lectern to deliver her morning speech. She would reinforce the high expectations the school had of its students and an expectation that we would excel in academia, sporting and cultural activities. She frequently reiterated that “girls can do anything” and we were “destined for great things and great careers!”

At the time I did not particularly enjoy the assemblies, as I was somewhat intimidated by the Head Mistress, who appeared to me to be a strict and fearsome woman.

In hindsight, the repetitive positive reinforcement that ‘girls can do anything’ was a form of indoctrination, grooming me in to the person I am today.

By signing up to attend this school, I signed up to the rules and expected behaviours of the school. Ultimately, the school had a strong influence in terms of shaping my identity for the years that followed. Thirty years on as a teacher myself, I realise how passionate the Headmistress was about her school and students. EGGS was instrumental in terms of reinforcing there were other options for girls besides being a secretary or homemaker and that our realities are very often what we choose them to be.

Incident 18—The school anthem

At every assembly we would sing the school anthem, with words set to the Triumphal March from Aida by Giuseppe Verdi.

At the time I could see no reason in singing the school song and I was glad when the formalities were over and we could attend our subject classes and get on with the school work.

In hindsight, I now appreciate that the school’s motto and values were all conveyed within the school anthem and its purpose was to enthuse us with pride for being part of an institution. I did not realise this at the time and feel a greater pride in my school now, than I did when I was there as a student.

I recall my one and only detention given by the Deputy Principal. My recollections of him were his dress shorts, with roman sandals worn with knee high socks. I thought it interesting having a male as a Deputy Principal of an all-girls school.

Incident 19—Detention

I received a one hour detention from the Deputy Principal for wearing the incorrect colour hair bauble (red) rather than the regulation school colours which were navy blue and gold.

I was upset at being in trouble with the school hierarchy and disappointed with myself for wearing the wrong coloured hair tie. I felt I deserved the detention, as I had not followed the school rules.

In hindsight, the punishment was preposterous based on what I regard now as a trivial matter of the wrong coloured hair tie. However, having been brought up in a home of compliance, where one was not taught to question authority, meant that I willingly accepted the punishment.

I think how harsh this school rule was and what influence if any, did the colour of my school hair tie have on my education at secondary school? I do understand that the Deputy Principal was only doing his job enforcing senior management's policy on the school uniform and I was not attending a liberal school, but a conservative, traditional school.

5.3 The school bully

There was one particular school bully who I feared. She was distinctive with black eye liner that always appeared to be smudged, reminding me of panda eyes. I remember meeting this girl several years later working at a St Pierre's fish market counter in Auckland. She attempted to befriend me as though we were long lost friends, but I recalled the earlier bullying incident and chose not to strike up conversation with her, and instead quietly laughed inside at where this girl ended up—working in a fish mongers.

Incident 20—Dealing with bullies

I waited in the queue to use the student telephone when this bully goaded me for wearing Roman Sandals, rather than the fashionable Trek or Nomad shoes. She took the telephone cord and attempted to tie it around my neck.

My immediate reaction was fear. I remember crying and trying to free myself from her clutches.

Looking back on this incident I wonder if I was unaccustomed to this type of behaviour, having been brought up as an only child, never being challenged by siblings or having to protect myself physically from others.

5.4 Academic achievement

Mum and dad said that it was important for me to concentrate on secondary school and perform well academically in the external examinations; they both believed that education was the key to finding a good job and being able to provide for myself financially. I remember the external examinations known as School Certificate—I was required to choose five subjects. The school stipulated that Mathematics, Science and English were compulsory, leaving two electives. I chose Typewriting and Music. Music was an easy subject for me, having already studied this for many years outside of school. My second elective was Typewriting which was a practical skill that I thought I could utilise in my working career. I was strategic in choosing these two electives, due to them being less

challenging, allowing me more time to spend on the more demanding subjects of Mathematics, Science and English.

Incident 21—Time for study

In the evenings and weekends I dedicated my time to study. There was no expectation that I help with the household chores.

I enjoyed study and wanted to do well in my subjects for myself and my parents. At the time I did not appreciate how fortunate I was to be able to concentrate on study without any household responsibilities.

In hindsight, I now realise how lucky I was to dedicate my time to study without any interruptions or household responsibilities. As a teacher I am a silent observer of the pressures placed on my students in terms of having to balance work, study and family commitments, something I did not have to juggle as a student.

5.5 Relating to others

My first co-educational secondary school (Mount Roskill Grammar School) provided me with the opportunity to mix with many students of different ethnicities, compared to my all-girls secondary school with its predominantly white cohort of middle to upper class students. At the co-educational secondary school, I formed more friendships with males than with females. I sat next to the boys in class and socialised with them at lunch times, perhaps because I had no brothers.

I found it difficult to make friends at my all-girls secondary school, which may be due to the fact that I joined in the 4th form and friendships had been established in the 3rd form year, and for some girls, they knew each other from primary school. Many of the girls at my all-girls secondary school seemed to come across as being insincere and superficial and I found it difficult to form friendships with them. I am probably making a generalisation here and acknowledge that I may have also misinterpreted how these girls came across. I did however form lasting friendships with friends who were Chinese, Vietnamese and Fijian Indian. These girls did not come from privileged backgrounds, but to me seemed more sincere and grounded than many of the other girls.

Incident 22—Friendships at secondary school

One of the white girls would remind us about the celebrity status of her father. She would repeat the statement “don’t you know who my father is?” I would reply with “no” which always made her angry, even though I was aware he featured frequently on television.

This girl, like many others at the school seemed to vie for attention, and I was not sure why. For me, I felt that I did not need to boast about myself to try and gain friends or recognition from others. It was not important for me to be one of the popular girls at school—I was confident to stand alone.

Looking back now I wonder whether these girls competed for attention, because they lacked confidence or were insecure in some way. Maybe these girls did not receive the attention from their families? Perhaps my confident self-image (which I was not really aware of at the time) was gained through my ballet and music performance and positive reinforcement by my parents.

I was a quiet student and remember the uneasiness I felt in class, when teachers would focus on a particular student to answer a question in front of their peers. I remember sitting in my chair in fear as to whether I would be chosen.

Incident 23—A face with no name

Mum and dad returned home from attending a parent teacher evening at my all-girls secondary school and mum said that one subject teacher could not even remember me.

My immediate reaction was one of disbelief. How could this teacher not remember me? Maybe it was because I was a quiet, conscientious student, who never caused any disruptions in class?

In hindsight I can understand this teacher's position. Perhaps there were too many student names to remember, or maybe there was nothing about me that fixed in the teacher's mind, that made me worthy of remembering.

As a teacher, I find it is easy to remember the 'disruptive' or 'problematic' students in class more so than the quiet ones. I now make a concerted effort to get to know the names of my students and take a genuine interest in them which in turn develops their self-confidence and belief. I would never want any of my students to feel the way that my secondary teacher's comment made me feel.

5.6 Sports at secondary school

I did not participate in many school sports, as my extra-curricular activities, namely ballet prevented me from participating in case of possible injury. I remember my physical education teacher at my all-girls secondary school, whose standard uniform was a safari suit paired with a safari hat. She came across as very aloof and I found her a difficult person to warm to. The school rule stipulated we were only allowed to swim in the school pool wearing the regulation togs and blue bathing cap. I could never understand this rule, as it was not as though we were in view of the public.

Incident 24—The diving tower

I was at the top of the diving tower and changed my mind, deciding not to jump. Some girls barred the ladder preventing me from descending. Consequently, I had to jump off the diving platform. I hit the water, winded myself and exited the water with red welts across my stomach. The girls laughed, finding the incident very amusing.

At the time, I was afraid of these girls and did not know how to deal with confrontation.

In hindsight, this was an example of bullying behaviour which inevitably goes on at many schools. Whilst I should not have been forced into doing something I did not feel comfortable with, I am sure if I had been more assertive the situation may have panned out quite differently.

As an adult I am more vocal in terms of expressing my feelings and views. Perhaps this has developed through maturity, education and self-confidence. I would never consider pressuring someone into doing something they did not want to do.

5.7 Money

From an early age (incident 11 and 12) I had formed the habit of saving and this continued into my teenage years. I treated saving like a competition in terms of growing my bank balance. I was conditioned by my parents from an early age, to believe that money gave you a better quality of life and offered more opportunities. My parents continually reinforced that it was important for me to save enough money so as to provide for myself comfortably, therefore not relying on anyone to provide for me. In my teenage years, my parents also reminded me that having me late in their lives, meant that they had fewer years to raise me and wanted to ensure that I was in a position to look after myself, both emotionally and financially after they passed on. My parents encouraged me to put my savings (pocket money, birthday and Christmas money) into term deposits.

Incident 25—The importance of saving

I remember the interest rates of the mid 1980s where I was earning a healthy 15% on my term deposits at Countrywide Building Society and United Finance.

My approach to saving as a teenager was that money would give me independence and choices. I was conditioned into thinking this way by my parents.

Looking back, my parents demonstrated foresight in preparing me for my future ahead. They wanted me to be financially independent and I am thankful for this as money has provided me with opportunities and choices, that otherwise would not have presented themselves.

5.8 Religion

I was not baptised but both my sisters had been. I asked mum why this was so and she said baptism was fashionable back then. Mum and dad left it to me to decide whether I wished to follow a particular faith. As a child I was aware of different religions with the terms Catholic, Baptist, Anglican being mentioned, but I had no deep understanding of the various religions and was not overly interested in finding out more. To this day, I have not identified with a particular religion.

Incident 26—Atheist, Agnostic or Heathen?

I was 17 at the time when I had a conversation with mum and dad about religion. Dad was a non-practising Catholic and mum did not identify with any religion. Mum and dad shared with me the difficulties they experienced with dad marrying outside of his religion.

At the time I thought how controlling religion was in determining who one should marry and I did not agree with this thinking.

Looking back I am thankful that I was not brought up to follow a particular religion and that my parents gave me the freedom to explore this for myself.

I do not identify with a particular religious denomination and my family had never pressured me into choosing a faith. My views about religion have not changed—for me to believe that something exists, I would have to see it for myself. I have no desire to be baptised. I continue to wonder about the merits of religion, as I watch the atrocities being carried out by the human race around the world, fuelled by religious beliefs and differences. For me it is not important to follow a faith in order to reinforce my identity—I prefer to stand alone and have developed my own philosophy about life, rather than allowing a particular religion to determine it for me.

5.9 Ballet in my teenage years

My parents mirrored the walls and laid a dance floor in a single garage that was attached to our main garage, so that I could practice my dance routines. I very rarely practiced for exams and competitions, yet I sailed through the examinations achieving success with outstanding marks. In one particular exam, I achieved the top mark in New Zealand for a ballet exam. This lack of commitment to practice frustrated both my parents and my dance comrades. Mum and dad would often remind me of the amount of money and time they had invested in me and that other children would be grateful to have an opportunity to

learn dance. I remember attending ballet class in preparation for a forthcoming ballet exam suffering from influenza.

Incident 27—Sweat it out!

The ballet mistress instructed me to leave my knitted ballet cardigan and full leg warmers on for the entire class. I remember performing grand allegro (grande jetes, cabrioles, saut de basque, fouettes en l' air) perspiring heavily and experiencing discomfort across my chest and shortness of breath. She urged me to push on, reassuring me that it would sweat the influenza out of me.

At the time I presumed that this type of training was part of the journey ballerinas endured. I thought my teacher was horrid and I disliked her for it, but I put my trust in her, as she was in a position of authority.

In hindsight, I complied with her instructions, most probably due to me being brought up in a conservative home and attending conservative schools. Had my teacher explained and provided some context around the reason for taking this course of action, I would have perhaps been a little more understanding.

I was competing in a national competition performing a routine to the music of the 'cancan'—a high-energy, physically demanding dance which became a popular music hall dance in the 1840s and continues in popularity in French cabarets to this day. The main features of the dance are the high kicks, splits and cartwheels. I incorporated the use of a skipping rope into the routine with rope tricks that had never been seen in the skipping category before. I won the competition year after year with this routine.

Incident 28—Bullying in the dance world

I exited the stage with a grand jeté (large leap), holding the skipping rope above my head. Another competitor waiting in the wings, deliberately pushed me back onto the stage in front of the audience. The other competitors laughed as I fell back onto the stage floor, along with gasps from the audience.

At the time I was shocked at what had happened, but picked myself up and exited the stage. I walked past the perpetrator and said nothing.

When I reflect back on this incident, this was an example of bullying behaviour. I am content with the approach I took in that I kept my composure. I now have a better understanding of people and how they revert to this type of behaviour when they feel threatened.

Performing on stage or simply attending dance classes, was a form of self-expression that I felt very comfortable with and it came easily to me. I recall my early years at dance and I enjoyed performing on stage. Dance was a medium for me to express myself and helped developed my self-confidence through performing in front of an audience. It turned out that I had a natural ability for dance and went on to participate in many productions and

win a number of New Zealand competitions. I did not realise as a young child how competitive the dance world was, with many of the young dancers desperate to do well and win a prize. I was not particularly phased at winning or losing at the competitions and am not sure why I lacked this competitive nature—I was content to take life as it came. Looking back on my years of ballet, I did possess a natural talent, but lacked the desire and determination to make a career out of it.

I remember falling ill towards the latter part of the school year. I experienced stomach cramps and an inability to keep any food down. I visited my doctor who then referred me to a specialist. I remember attending the specialist's appointment and being admitted directly into the Mater Hospital that afternoon (the same hospital where I was born). I spent two weeks in hospital on an intravenous drip. I remember one evening my temperature unexpectedly rising to a very high level and the specialist being called in. I spent another week in hospital with the specialist confirming that he was unable to diagnose this mysterious disease. I was due to perform in the end of year ballet recitals but did not know if I would have the strength to dance, as it was a pointe dance which demanded a certain level of strength and fitness. I had lost 12 kilograms in the two week period and was left very weak by the illness.

Incident 29—The show must go on!

I returned home from hospital and my ballet teacher phoned mum to confirm that I would be appearing in the end-of-year concerts a couple of evenings later.

At the time I was annoyed at having to perform. I felt like no one cared that I had been hospitalised for two weeks, there was no time to convalesce just the expectation that I would perform. I felt like I was a puppet on a string, appeasing everyone except myself. However, I did perform and all went well.

In hindsight, I understand that my teacher was relying on me to perform, as I had the lead role and there was no understudy. I appreciate that my mum would not have challenged the ballet teacher. My parents held teachers in high regard due to the era in which they were raised and so did I—raised in an environment of compliance and respect for authority.

I was registered to sit my final ballet exam known as Advanced. Ballet examinations were held in the middle of winter, around August and I had been attending classes from the beginning of the year in preparation for this exam. Very few dancers reached the Advanced level, so I was aware that I would be sitting my exam alongside another dancer from the same ballet studio. This person was afflicted with influenza and had continued

to attend the ballet classes in the lead up to the exam day—unfortunately I caught influenza. This incident was one of my most memorable and not for the right reasons.

Incident 30—Ballet and influenza

I struggled through the ballet examination experiencing tightness across my chest and perspiring heavily. The examiner announced in a stern voice “would you mind getting your towel and wiping up the perspiration on the dance floor”. I did so and continued on with my performance. The examiner asked if I would like to stop. These were the words I did not want to hear.

As I wiped up the sweat from the floor I was asking myself why did I sit the exam and put myself through this dreadful ordeal. I was disappointed with myself in terms of not being able to deliver a performance that I was proud of and felt guilty that I had not only let myself down, but my ballet teacher and my parents.

Looking back, maybe I was oversensitive to the examiner’s request to mop up the floor. It was not her fault that I was inflicted with influenza. The option to postpone the examination was not exercised by my teacher. I did not question authority and thought there was no alternative but to sit the examination—the choice had already been made for me.

This was my first fail in a ballet examination as up until this point I had always achieved the top mark in New Zealand. The news spread around the ballet circles like wildfire—I do not think anyone in the ballet fraternity had ever considered that I would fail an examination, including my teachers and parents. Struggling through an examination such as this had a destructive effect on me in terms of eroding my love of dance but also my confidence in my dancing ability. I went on to resit and pass the examination the following year.

Having passed the Advanced examination I was encouraged by my teachers to sit the Solo Seal ballet examination. This was the pinnacle for any dancer. This was a different type of examination whereby you had to perform two solo acts from a ballet in front of a panel of examiners in a theatre in Wellington. The costumes were made, the examination fee was paid and the flights and accommodation booked in Wellington. I remember it being a Saturday afternoon and a practice session with my teacher.

Incident 31—Self-doubt or assertiveness?

It was a gruelling ballet session, with my teacher making a number of corrections which caused me to doubt my abilities. I decided on the way home from ballet to withdraw from the examination. I did not notify my teacher of my intentions until the following week and in the meantime I had cancelled my exam registration, the airline tickets and the accommodation. I remember the shock on my teacher’s face and her comment that I would have passed the examination comfortably.

At the time, I took the corrections personally thinking that there was something wrong with me as a person. I felt disappointed with myself and felt that I was a failure. I saw this incident as an opportunity to make a personal decision which at the time I felt comfortable with.

In hindsight, the teacher was only doing her job to help me improve my performance and bring out the very best in me. Perhaps this was one of the first examples of me expressing my independence and assertiveness?

Looking back on this event 30 years later, I do not regret withdrawing from the examination.

5.10 Learning to drive

At 16, I had driving lessons with mum in her car. I always considered mum a confident driver who could navigate rush hour with ease. I learnt to drive in a supermarket carpark on Sundays as the shops were not permitted to open on Sundays back in 1987.

Incident 32—Driving lessons

Mum bought me the road code and practice theory papers which I continually reviewed in preparation for the driving test.

At the time I remember the excitement in preparing for my driver's licence. I wanted to do well in both the practical and written components and pass the first time.

In hindsight, obtaining my licence was an important step in establishing my independence and one of the steps in transitioning into the 'adult' stage.

As the holder of a drivers licence, it does not evoke the same elation as it did when I was 16. I observe my teenage students at University so excited about obtaining their licence and think that I too was the same at their age.

5.11 My sister's marriage breakup

I was 16 when my eldest sister informed the family that her marriage had ended. I remember it being a Saturday morning and I was in mum and dad's bedroom eating tea and toast with them, when the phone rang.

Incident 33—The phone call

I answered the phone to hear my sister's voice. We exchanged pleasantries and then she asked to speak with mum. When mum got off the phone she informed dad and I that my sister's husband had ended the marriage, due to his affair with another woman.

I remember the shock and disbelief at hearing this and for a moment did not believe it. I had always observed my sister and her husband as being very happy together.

I hindsight, I was naïve to think that everyone's marriage was as solid as my parents. I did not realise at that time that marriage breakups were commonplace.

My eldest sister had been a homemaker throughout her married life and the marriage breakup left her financially disadvantaged. In order to support herself and her two children after the break up, she signed up with Work and Income New Zealand to receive welfare, which at that time was known as the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB).

Incident 34—Do not rely on others for money

I was 16 and recall the day my sister signed up for welfare assistance. She was sitting in the car expressing her embarrassment at having to receive a benefit—none of our family had ever been recipients of social welfare. Ten minutes before closing time she entered the welfare office, accompanied by dad.

At the time I was feeling for my sister but I wonder if at 16 I really understood the extent of the financial situation she was in—which was raising two young children on a social welfare benefit.

In hindsight this incident further reinforced my views about the importance of being financially independent from others, including family.

Reflecting on this incident many years later, it serves as a poignant reminder to me of the importance of being financially independent and to continue to be careful with my money. I learnt from this example, that money provides options and in my sister's case, savings would have allowed her to provide for herself and her two children without the financial worries that accompanied the emotional turmoil of a relationship breakup.

5.12 My first experience with mortality

I was 17 and in the sixth form at secondary school when my eldest sister (incident 33 and 34) was killed in a car crash. Although one is somewhat prepared for the death of one's parents, I did not ever anticipate the early death of my eldest sister. We had shared a close bond and her death affected me in a number of ways.

Incident 35—My sister's death

My mum received a phone call from my sister's estranged husband informing us she had been injured in a car accident. He stated there was no need to visit the hospital (Thames Hospital a two-hour drive from Auckland) as she only had a small laceration to her face.

We drove to the hospital and were ushered in to a side room where a doctor informed us that my sister had since passed away.

I remember being in total disbelief—how could she have died from a laceration to her face? I was angry that my sister had died alone without her family around her and an estranged husband who had left her to die alone.

In hindsight, this incident made me realise that life is fragile and should not be taken for granted. I began to view life rather differently from hereon in, appreciating that most important gift you can give someone is your time. The minor things in life that we worry about, are really not worth it in the whole scheme of things.

I remember feelings of anxiety overwhelming me as my family gathered in the carpark of the funeral directors (Morrison Funeral Home), where I contemplated viewing my sister's body. Questions ran through my mind such as would my sister want me to see her? Would viewing her help bring home the reality of loss and help in the grieving process? I could not articulate the reasons for viewing or not viewing my sister. This decision was a difficult one and one that was left up to me to decide. I was ambivalent to seeing bodies on television programmes, but how would I feel about seeing my sister? I had not seen my sister in a while and it was a chance to say good bye but conversely was it better to remember her alive? My middle sister and I had chosen the clothes for my deceased sister, a beautiful red dress (her favourite colour).

Incident 36—Viewing my sister's body

As we entered the funeral home, my middle sister's husband held my hand. I remember entering a small room. She was laid out in the coffin, the piercing spotlight in the room penetrating down on her face, highlighting the lip gloss on her pursed lips. I could make out where the funeral directors had tried to conceal with makeup a laceration on her nose, a result of the car accident.

At the time I wondered how one could die from such little outer disfigurement. Her eyes were closed and she did not look at peace. Her face reflected the pain she had experienced at the time of her death. I remember looking for her hands in the coffin but they were shielded in white lace.

Reflecting on this event, I'm not sure whether the actual viewing of my sister's body has affected me, but more so the events surrounding her marriage breakup.

5.13 Piano in my teenage years

My music teacher in my teenage years was a lovely lady and I liked her calm approach to teaching. She was a Lecturer at the University of Auckland and also ran a private studio in Epsom. I remember attending the University of Auckland campus to sit my piano theory examinations in November each year. I thought at the time it so prestigious to be

sitting an examination in a University environment. At 17, I sat my Associate of the Trinity College London (ATCL) theory component. It was Saturday 5th November 1988 and my eldest sister had been killed in a car accident the day before (4th November, on my middle sister's birthday).

Incident 37—ATCL music exam

I entered the exam room knowing that I had a three-hour written task ahead of me. I sat for the first two hours thinking about the tragedy, finding it difficult to concentrate. I answered the paper and left the room.

At the time of the examination, I did not contemplate cancelling the examination. My parents thought it important that I attend, stating that my deceased sister would want me to sit it after having worked all year towards it.

In hindsight, I wonder how many others in my position would have chosen to proceed with the exam? I wonder if this was a healthy way of dealing with loss, by simply continuing with everyday life?

In terms of my expectations of my own students, I may have in some cases been intolerant of students who I thought had lame excuses for not meeting assessment deadlines, or failing to attend exams and this probably relates back to my experience in incident 37.

Incident 38—Music lesson the following week

I attended my music lesson the following week after sitting my ATCL exam. I told my teacher that I had difficulty focusing on the exam, as my sister had been killed the day prior.

At the time I remember the look on my teacher's face. She was astounded that I sat the examination and comforted me with a hug and reassurance that I would somehow get through this traumatic time.

In hindsight, I saw my teacher in another light—rather than the authoritative role that I was used to, she offered me compassion and a listening ear.

During this traumatic time, I was not sure if I would even pass the exam. The results arrived and I passed all three sections of my ATCL with high marks.

5.14 Teaching music

At the age of 17, having acquired my ATCL I decided to teach music privately at home. I placed an advertisement in the local paper and within a few months had as many pupils as I could manage.

Incident 39—My passion for teaching music

I had built up a rather large music school with all my pupils sitting end of year examinations. I had a 100% pass rate with no students failing in the 20 years I taught music.

Teaching came naturally to me. I really enjoyed it and was very dedicated to my students. I was ambitious for them and wanted them to perform well in the examinations. I wanted them to fulfil their own potential and my role was to enable that.

In hindsight, I wonder if this passion for success with my own music students, stemmed from me being a dedicated student and in turn I expected my students to exhibit the same dedication.

5.15 Studying at University

At 17 I was accepted into University confirming for me that my past academic achievements and commitment to study was recognised and that all the hard work in secondary school had been worth it. I was the first member of my immediate family to attend University and this made my parents very proud. This was an important event in my life as it made me feel extremely special. It reinforced for me that if you do work hard and stay focussed you can succeed in whatever you do. It was important for me to obtain a degree, then a well-paid job which was the road to becoming independent in terms of earning my own money. It was an exciting chapter in my life as I looked forward to entering the world of academia.

Incident 40—University life

I remember University with no rules about uniform, no school bells to manage my time. I could make my choices about how and when I studied, even whether I chose to attend lectures and tutorials.

I found University refreshing as it was an environment that fostered independence and liberation, compared to my secondary school years. I enjoyed this environment where I was responsible for my own learning and ultimately my own academic journey.

In hindsight, the many years of being conditioned into 'routine' and 'structure' as a young child continued through to my University years and I continued to be very focussed on my studies.

Even though the environment at University was more 'liberal' than school, I continued to demonstrate the same discipline and academic rigour to my studies. I was very conscientious and wanted to do well at University for both myself and my parents.

5.16 Experiencing racism

It was my first year at University and at the conclusion of lectures for the day, I decided to take a walk down Queen Street. I needed to use the public toilets so I entered a shopping mall to use the facilities and in doing so suffered an unprovoked assault from three young Māori girls who prevented me from exiting the toilet by barricading the door.

Incident 41—A white honky!

One of girls shouted obscenities including the derogatory term ‘white honky’ and struck me on the right side of my cheek, dislodging a tooth. The girls retreated and I managed to escape and exit the building.

At the time, I was perplexed as to why this group of girls had chosen me as their victim. I was shocked at being called a ‘white honky’ as I had never suffered any racial abuse in my life up until this event. I thought about my Māori friends and whether they too viewed me as a ‘white honky’.

In hindsight, the attack appeared to be racially motivated as I had done nothing to provoke the girls, with no theft of my personal belongings—I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I have no hostility towards the attackers, but instead feel pity towards them. When I reflect upon this incident it brings back memories of being bullied at school (incident 20). I understand that there are people in society who are like this perhaps because they are born into dysfunctional homes and difficult circumstances. Maybe a household of violence, surrounded by alcohol and drug dependent adults. Perhaps a welfare-dependent mother who had lots of violent boyfriends or an abusive father? What role models did they have in their lives, perhaps only their teachers at school? This type of incident has reinforced for me how fortunate I was to have been brought up in a nurturing family, with traditional values and principles compared to others raised with a different set of values and beliefs.

5.17 Reflecting on the key influences on my identity: Years 13–19

The key influences that contributed to my identity formation from years 13–19 were based around *home events* (events related to living at home and family); *educational events* (events related to secondary and tertiary education); *extra-curricular events* (events related to music and dance); *public events* (events related to community); and *mortality events* (experiences involving bereavement).

My parents influence continued in my teenage years in terms of their high expectations of me, including my academic achievement. This was facilitated by a move from a lower decile, co-educational secondary school to a high decile, all-girls secondary school in their quest for better academic opportunities. My parents also continued to provide structure and support at home, enabling me to dedicate my time to my school work and also my extra-curricular activities such as ballet and music (*incident 21*). This aligns with a study undertaken by Sartor and Youniss (2002) that found for boys and girls, identity formation is positively influenced by parental involvement specifically in the areas of: support, social monitoring and school monitoring. I continued to comply with those in authority, including my parents, my school teachers, school principals, ballet and music teachers—the only exception being my one and only detention at secondary school (*incident 19*) and the embarrassment I experienced with not observing the school rules.

I continued to exhibit a strong sense of ambition, competitiveness, and work ethic with respect to my schooling, ballet and music. My competitive spirit featured into my late teens with me competing in a number of ballet competitions (*incident 28*). I was conditioned into persevering and dedicating myself to achieving goals, and to keep striving in life, despite the difficulties along the way. This was demonstrated by me dancing the lead role in an end-of-year ballet concert after a two week stay in hospital (*incident 29*), presenting myself for a ballet exam whilst inflicted with influenza (*incident 30*), and attending a music exam the day after my sister was killed in a car accident (*incident 35*). My response to adversity was a manifestation of the values and beliefs that had been instilled in me from an early age by my parents, where achievement was expected above all else. The choice of postponing these adverse events was not presented, but rather the expectation that ‘life goes on’. I wonder if my behaviour towards these events was typical of others had they been in the same position.

Having led what could be regarded as a relatively sheltered life in my earlier years, my first experiences of bullying at my all-girls secondary school (*incidents 20, 24*) were influential in terms of my exposure to the kinds of people that make up society. A subsequent incident of bullying within the community, was my first and only experience so far of racism directed towards me (*incident 41*). On a more positive note, my secondary school had a strong influence on my thinking and the opportunities that the school offered were vast (*incidents 17, 18*). This notion aligns with Lannegrand-Willems’ and Bosma’s (2006) view that the school is an important site for identity construction and that the school’s philosophy has the propensity to influence scholastic achievement and career

aspirations of the individual. My school's expectation was that students would go on to University and an academic qualification towards a future career (*incidents 17, 18*). This expectation was reinforced by the group of dedicated and inspiring teachers, who shared the school's vision in shaping us into being particular kinds of women. The school made me feel valued and that I was worth something and capable of pursuing an academic pathway. Erikson (1968) coined the term 'identity crisis' whereby adolescents who were feeling confused and uncertain about the future, would seek to rely upon others for direction and a sense of purpose. The word 'crisis' implied a negative connotation, but according to Atalay (2007), 'crisis', for Erikson, simply meant a turning point in an individual's life when a new problem was confronted and mastered. The danger for adolescents transitioning into adulthood, was identity diffusion and a failure to establish one's identity and place in the world. Frankl (1967, 1978, 1988, 2006) articulated the meaninglessness of life as an existential crisis. This view aligns with Yang, Staps, and Hijmans (2010), who believed that working through an existential crisis entailed finding meaning in the negative experience and transforming it into an opportunity for growth. For me, I do not think I experienced an identity crisis per se, but rather my all-girls secondary school was instrumental in developing my healthy self-esteem through the positive reinforcement of its values and aspirations for its students, supporting my future direction and sense of purpose. I wonder how different my pathway would have been had I remained at my co-educational school.

Up until my late teens I had willingly understood and accepted that the feedback from my ballet teachers, was necessary in order to improve my dance technique. However, in my late teens I began to view this feedback as something personal, which created self-doubt in my dancing abilities—this point was illustrated when I withdrew from a ballet examination of my own volition (*incident 31*). Strangely this self-doubt did not feature in any other area of my life, only ballet and I wonder if this incident was an example of self-doubt or simply a sign of assertiveness, something that had not surfaced in my earlier years as a child, with the decision making being made by my parents and others in authority. Erikson (1968) would regard this incident as an example of the adolescent searching for an opportunity to have the free will to make personal decisions. In terms of Goldberg's (1990) framework, it could be seen as moving a little higher on the *neuroticism* spectrum, whereby I was beginning to become oversensitive to criticism and self-critical.

My enjoyment of ballet appeared to wane towards the end of my late teens, due to a combination of events. Firstly, having been hospitalised due to illness along with the expectation by my teacher to perform so soon after being discharged from hospital (*incident 29*), I began to experience some resentment towards my teacher and also the art form itself. I felt that she offered me no compassion and had no consideration for my wellbeing. Secondly I was nearing the end of all the examinations available and had no interest in pursuing a career in dance. Thirdly, I was tiring of the routine and found the monotony of practice and attending classes rather tedious. I was also starting to lose the competitive spirit I once had and thought about the other activities that could occupy my time rather than dance. Finally, with the onset of puberty, my body that I had so diligently trained for years was starting to change, with growth spurts having an adverse effect on my dancing ability. My balance was affected and I found the art form rather difficult to master in my teenage years.

My sister's marriage break up and her death occurred during an impressionable time of my life, my teenage years. Her death was one of the lowest points in my life and ultimately a turning point for me (*incident 35*). This aligns with the work of Tavernier and Willoughby (2012) who found that mortality/life-threatening events were the most common theme of turning point narratives. Losing someone so close triggers the most intense emotions and had this event occurred in my early childhood, I wonder whether I would have experienced the same feelings. This event was influential in the shaping of my identity in three ways. Firstly, the events up to her death challenged a number of my long-held (traditional) views which had been shaped from an early age. My immediate and extended family had never experienced a marriage break up, this was a new experience for our family (*incident 33*) and I was trying to come to terms with the betrayal of her husband who I had thought so highly of. Secondly I had seen my mum financially provided for by my dad throughout their many years of marriage and I (perhaps rather naively) assumed this was typical of all relationships. This view was challenged when my sister was left to financially take care of herself and her two children after her husband left to pursue an affair. This incident was the catalyst for me becoming even more financially astute and independent, so if I ever found myself in a similar situation, I would be in a stronger financial position than my sister was (*incident 34*). Thirdly, her death made me realise the fragility of life—when death comes close to you, everything else in life seems so minor.

My sister's death certainly tested my resolve and whilst others who follow a religion, would have called upon their faith to guide them through this time, I drew on my inner strength (resilience and determination) to help me through this time. I had to find the strength from somewhere to pick myself up and try and make the best of life. Maybe this fortitude was inherent from birth and reinforced through earlier influences in my life including my all-girls secondary school, positive reinforcement of my abilities by my parents from an early age, and a competitive spirit and determination that had been cultivated through school, ballet and music.

5.18 Emerging Personality Traits

Reflecting on this period in my life, the personality characteristics that continued from my early years were *conscientiousness, perseverance, ambition and independence*. My willingness to comply with authority lessened towards the end of my teenage years, as I began to grow in terms of my attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. My ability to trust was eroded due to the incidents before and after the death of my sister. These teenage years of my life also saw the emergence of some additional traits of *competitiveness and confidence*. Some of these traits were reinforced at my all-girls secondary school, whilst others continued to be reinforced through my home environment and in developing a social or group identity through my membership at ballet classes. My family continued to be an important affiliation during this adolescent period, with ongoing open communication and interaction taking place between my family members and myself.

My competitive spirit to excel in a number of aspects in my life, including academic achievement and extra curricula activities, was influenced by school and by my parents. I was not aware of this competitive spirit in my earlier years and I do not think that I was born with a competitive nature. My competitive spirit surfaced in my teenage years through the influence of my secondary school and my extra curricula activities. I never really felt that I was competing against others as such, but instead competed against myself in terms of bettering myself—the areas that I fell short in, helped me determine what I needed to work on for the present and future. Perhaps I developed a tendency to become 'individualistic' in terms of me placing so much emphasis on my accomplishments.

I was not aware that I was confident as a young child but felt that this trait strengthened during my teenage years, due to the competitive environment I experienced both at school and in my extra curricula activities. I found my confidence was enhanced through working towards and accomplishing personal goals both in academia and in ballet and perhaps a solid identity in my earlier years, helped me shape my desired goals. Perhaps my cognitive development and my maturity were more advanced than others my own age, which meant that I could resolve my identity issues readily. When identity issues are solved quicker and better, there is more time and effort put into developing that identity. I feel that because I was able to think abstractly and reason logically I had an easier time exploring and contemplating possible identities. A long-term study by Soldz and Vaillant (1999) found that conscientiousness positively correlated with adjustment to life's challenges and the maturity of one's defensive responses, indicating that those high in conscientiousness are often well-prepared to tackle any obstacles that come their way. The traits of ambition and an inclination to work hard towards goals, was found to be genetically influenced, but more so determined by life experience.

The next chapter focuses on my 20s which sees some of the traits that were established in my early years either continuing or ceasing, along with the emergence of others. At the end of the chapter I have reflected on the key influences on my identity and my emerging personality traits.

Chapter 6: My 20s

6.1 Transitioning into adulthood

I was aware growing up, of the celebrations when one reached the age of 21. Traditionally, this was the time in one's life where one transitions from teenager to adult—receiving the key to the door. I had attended a number of 21st parties but had no intention of holding a party for my 21st.

Incident 42—My 21st

I remember the day of my 21st. I chose not to have a party but instead dined with my parents at Burgundy's of Parnell, a cabaret concert and show in an upmarket suburb of Auckland. I knew many of the dancers who performed there and at the end of the show I was presented with a birthday cake and a key to the door signed by members of the cast.

I really enjoyed my 21st and was made to feel really special. I was happy to spend this significant milestone in my life with those closest to me—my parents.

In hindsight, I have no regrets at not hosting a party, content that I spent this occasion with my parents.

6.2 A late bloomer

For most of my teenage years and early 20s I had the same hair style. At the age of 24 I decided to do something quite different and colour it blonde. Growing up I was conditioned into thinking that blondes were more attractive to men. This conditioning was further reinforced by the toy manufacturers who had created the Barbie doll, which was very popular with young girls including myself. My ballet teacher was also blonde and resembled a Barbie doll, so I was exposed to this image early on in my life. I deliberately bleached my hair in order to seek attention from the opposite sex.

Incident 43—Blondes have more fun!

I experienced an interesting reaction from the opposite sex. Men would glance twice at me when I was out in public, and in social situations would approach me to engage in conversation.

At the time, I found it rather fascinating how a change in hair colour could attract so much attention. However, I did not like the attention and did not pursue any of their advances. I felt uneasy and I questioned whether their interest was purely superficial, or a genuine interest in wanting to get to know me as a person.

Looking back, I was experimenting with an aspect of my identity for all the wrong reasons, namely to attract the attention of the opposite sex.

This new colour was rather short lived and I reverted back to my natural colour two months later.

6.3 Purchasing my first car

At 23 I had enough money for my first car. Up until then, I had either taken public transport or had borrowed my mum or dad's car. My parents did not offer to buy me a car and I had no expectations that they would finance it. I had to earn and save the money myself. Our family cars throughout the years were Holdens and I purchased the same make. It was a Saturday morning and I visited the local Holden dealership casually dressed in an old pair of shorts (slightly torn), t-shirt and jandals.

Incident 44—Buying a car

I browsed the forecourt and spotted a brand new red V6 Holden Commodore. I had difficulty attracting the attention of a salesman. I entered the showroom and spoke to the receptionist who asked me to wait because the salesmen were busy. I said I had cash in my backpack to purchase a car. Suddenly it was like bees to a honey pot and a salesman appeared almost immediately.

At the time I wondered why the salesmen were reluctant to serve me and presumed my appearance had something to do with it. Growing up my parents said “never judge a book by its cover” and perhaps this metaphor applied in this scenario.

In hindsight, perhaps the salesmen viewed me as an unlikely buyer for this type of car (family car), which was predominately purchased by men.

I was 23 when I joined my first sports club—a tennis club. I was excited to be taking up a sport that I had followed on the television (Wimbledon) and was very keen to play but had refrained from doing so for many years, due to my dancing career. I played tennis about three to four times a week socially and in inter-club competitions. I recall one evening returning home from a club night, leaving the car idling whilst I opened the garage door.

Incident 45—Car accident

When I returned to my car I mistook the accelerator for the brake and went hurtling through the garage, pushing the back wall out of the garage causing the beam in the ceiling to fall down on the car. The mirrored covered walls (for ballet practice) disintegrated onto the car and the roof beam came down, causing me to be trapped inside.

Dad must have heard the noise and appeared in his pyjamas and slippers. He managed to slide the beam across so that I could get the car door open and get out.

I remember dad's calm demeanour at the time. He made me feel at ease and did not blame me for the accident.

Looking back all these years late, I admire my dad's ability to remain calm in stressful situations. Something that I was not really aware of as a child.

I wonder if my dad was born with this virtue or was it something he had acquired with age and life experiences? Dad had served in World War II with the Royal New Zealand Air Force in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands and these circumstances would have most certainly tested his resilience. I feel that as the years have progressed and having spent more time with dad, I have taken on a more 'c'est la vie' approach to life. This may also be partially due to maturity and navigating my way through a variety of life experiences.

6.4 Travel

From the age of 3–15, I travelled frequently with my parents throughout the North Island of New Zealand in our caravan, on many occasions frequenting the same destinations. Mum enjoyed the caravan, treating it like a second home. As for international travel, mum had never travelled overseas until she was in her 70s and dad's only experience with overseas travel was in 1943 to the Solomon Islands, serving in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in World War II.

At primary school I had not been concerned about not having travelled abroad, but in my secondary school years, teachers and friends would reiterate the value of travel in terms of promoting personal growth. I thought what is it about overseas travel that makes it so fruitful and in turn, so phenomenal that it can have such a profound influence on people? Many of the girls at secondary school boasted about their overseas holidays and I wondered if I would ever have the opportunity to travel overseas.

I did not set out on my overseas experience (OE) in my late teens or early 20s even though many of my friends headed away on their OE. Instead, my first short overseas trip was to Sydney at the age of 24. I travelled with a friend from work staying with her pen pal in an outer suburb of Sydney.

Incident 46—First overseas holiday (Sydney)

After arriving in Sydney I was struck down with gastroenteritis. I suffered through an entire week of this debilitating illness without telling anyone. I remember attending the

production of 'Phantom of the Opera' and 'Miss Saigon', having to exit the auditorium regularly to attend the bathroom. The day before we were to depart for New Zealand I finally spoke up, requesting that my friends take me to the doctor.

At the time, I thought the illness would pass over within a couple of days and also I did not want to be a nuisance to anyone. I chose to deal with this issue alone, rather than asking others for help.

In hindsight, my negative travel experience was attributed to my reserved and independent nature, thinking that I could manage this situation without the help from others.

This incident soured my impression of international travel and ruined my entire holiday. International travel was supposed to be full of adventure and excitement but for me it was neither. Had I been more communicative with my friends, I believe my experience would have been different. Nowadays I am more forthright in asking for help from others when I need it.

Incident 47—Kings Cross

My friends visited a store that sold sex toys, and I chose to wait outside as I felt very uncomfortable entering a store like this. A prostitute was huddled up in a small alcove injecting—I noticed the blood trickling down the inside of her arm. Her elasticated dress was so short that it exposed her underwear.

At the time I was alarmed at seeing a young girl in such a vulnerable state. Whilst I had viewed scenes like this on television, it was the first time I had been exposed to this in daily life.

Looking back, I see that my conservative upbringing had shielded me from images like this.

When I was 25, I visited Hawaii with a female friend who was my tennis partner at the local tennis club. It was the heat of summer and this incident is one I will never forget.

Incident 48—The idiosyncrasies of others

I presumed we would leave the air conditioning unit on whilst we were sleeping. My friend said no, stating that the noise of the unit would keep her awake and instead we would leave the ranch slider ajar. I spent many sleepless nights, trying to acclimatise to the heat, whilst my friend wore track pants and a sweatshirt to bed.

At the time I remember thinking this bed attire was rather odd. I was not aware of my friend's quirks prior to travelling to Hawaii and because I did not like to engage in conflict, felt it was easier to simply accept her decision rather than challenge it.

Reflecting on this incident, I wonder if my non-confrontational attitude was due to being brought up as an only child and not having to challenge siblings for my opinions to be heard. Maybe I just had an easy-going nature.

Nowadays, when I travel with a companion, I always opt for separate accommodation. I also find myself learning to remain patient and ignoring their unusual habits and idiosyncrasies and focus on the positives, because the companion is likely finding my idiosyncrasies irksome too.

Incident 49—Fleeing like a fugitive

We were in the Diamond Head carpark and the driver of a taxi offered to take us back to our hotel. On the journey back a Police car approached from the opposite direction and the taxi driver swiftly pulled in to a driveway and asked both of us to duck down in the back seat. We did as he requested until the officer had driven past.

At the time we were curious as to why we had to hide in the back seat. I did not feel scared as I had my travel companion with me.

In hindsight, I was a novice traveller and perhaps too trusting and naïve. This incident has made me more vigilant when I travel and I have a greater sense of the environment around me.

The taxi driver was most probably unlicensed to take passengers and we were the unsuspecting victims. It was only when we got back to the hotel did we realise that we had put our lives at risk by not choosing a reputable taxi company.

Incident 50—Travelling solo

My first solo trip overseas was in my 30s to the United Arab Emirates. I travelled to Dubai to visit a colleague who was teaching in the Higher Colleges of Technology in the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah.

After booking this holiday to Dubai, I experienced the fight or flight syndrome. Having booked, I had an overwhelming desire to cancel—I was anxious about travelling alone to a place that was both culturally and aesthetically different to New Zealand. I took the trip which was a great success.

Looking back on this solo trip, my confidence grew even more, fuelling the desire to do more travel on my own.

Incident 51—Drug tested

On my way to Dubai, I disembarked in Melbourne for a brief stopover before the next leg of the journey to Dubai. The Customs officials pulled me aside and inquired if I was carrying any drugs. I was asked to read a laminated card outlining my rights regarding a drug search. My backpack was checked and swabbed, shoes swabbed then a pat down. I was free to go.

I remember being nervous at being singled out for a drug search. My heart was racing and a red rash formed across my neck and upper chest area—I wondered why I had been singled out. I remember this incident making me feel very uneasy and put a dampener on my first solo international excursion.

In hindsight, I appreciate that the officials were only doing their job and wonder if my appearance was the catalyst for the search?

It is still common for me to be drug searched at airports, but I do not find the experience as harrowing as it was the first time. This incident reminds me of the feelings I experienced at being singled out from others at school, receiving my first detention (incident 19). The biggest thing I have learnt from international travel, is that happiness is found in simplicity. I thought I would return home from being on the other side of the world, somewhere where no other family members have been, ready to take on new challenges in my home country, aspiring for bigger and better things. I came home humbler and smarter for it. Travel gave me a greater appreciation of New Zealand and its beauty and contentment to settle for the simplest of things, friends, family and passions.

6.5 Finding love

My sisters were married at 18 and 21, but there was never any pressure placed on me by my family to marry and have children. I never felt at any stage in my life that it was important for me to find romantic love to have a sense of fulfilment and maybe this is why I never went out of my way to look for a partner—I have always been content with my own company. I have always felt confident to attend social events on my own, attend movie theatres and holiday alone and growing old alone does not bother me either. There have been a few interesting incidents, which I look back on now with humour.

Incident 52—Two's company three's a crowd

I met a man at my tennis club who asked me out on a date. He collected me from my home and we were to join a group of his friends on a cruise around the Auckland Harbour. He drove me to an address, parked outside and told me to wait a few moments whilst he went inside. He exited the house half an hour later with another woman. He introduced me to her and she sat in the back seat. It was all very strange—I said nothing and he said nothing. We drove to the waterfront and boarded the cruise. I found out later in the evening that the woman was his ex-girlfriend. I decided not to go out on a second date and he was rather taken aback at my refusal.

At the time I was not aware of the connection between these two people probably due to my naivety, or maybe I was not all that bothered.

In hindsight, this incident was rather humorous, I had been used as a pawn in a battle between two ex-lovers and therefore I have no regrets in not pursuing this relationship.

Incident 53—Obsessive compulsive disorder?

I was set up on a blind date. We went to dinner in Newmarket and then he invited me back to his home for a coffee. We sat at the dining table drinking coffee and eating biscuits. When I got up from the table to leave he said “now when we get up from the table we

brush our crumbs off and we push our chairs under”. He went to the cupboard and took out a shovel and brush and proceeded to remove the crumbs off the table.

At the time I found his behaviour rather odd and it reminded me of someone speaking to a naughty child. I was unaccustomed to male company and I wondered whether this was typical behaviour of all men. I knew at the time it was something that I would be unable to tolerate.

In hindsight, I do not believe that this person would have been a good match for me, but the incident gave me an insight into the behavioural traits of others. As my father would say “it takes all sorts to make a world”.

Incident 54—Going Dutch

I went out on a date with a man that I had met through a friend. It was my birthday and he invited me out for dinner. At the end of the evening he said can you give me your money for your meal and I will go up to the counter and pay.

I was surprised at having to pay for my own birthday dinner, as his response challenged my traditional values, having been raised in an environment where the man paid for the woman.

In hindsight, perhaps my thinking was outdated as our society moves towards equity amongst genders, where ‘going Dutch’ is becoming the norm.

When I reflect upon my experiences of dating, I wonder if I was not particularly committed to finding someone to share my life with, as getting married did not seem to feature high in my list of priorities. Perhaps I was too fussy, too independent or egotistic in terms of my ability to make compromises for others’ idiosyncrasies, in order to accommodate someone special in my life, or maybe their values and beliefs were so dissimilar to mine, there was never going to be a match. Whilst I sometimes think about what it would be like to have been married in my earlier years, I have no regrets about having not yet married and there is still plenty of time to, should the opportunity present itself. I have enjoyed dating over the years, meeting men from different spheres of life.

6.6 Childless by choice

As a childless women I have been overlooked by some friends in my social circle as they entered motherhood and chose to socialise with other mothers. Deep down inside I did not want to have children and had no maternal instinct. I found it very hard not to feel that people saw me as deficient in some way, that not having a child was some kind of personal failing, or I was missing a part of myself that was fundamental to being a woman.

Incident 55—Your body clock is ticking!

Female friends frequently reminded me that my body clock is ticking and I should consider having a baby before it's too late.

At the time, I would always feel the need to qualify my decision, thinking that admitting to not wanting children was taboo and loaded with assumptions.

Today I feel comfortable replying to questions around family by responding with "I chose not to have a family". I also wonder if a strong self-esteem in my 40s means that I am less likely to become self-absorbed and not worry about what others think of me.

It is hard to escape the isolation that comes with being childless. I feel that as a society we proclaim that we have made progress in terms of gender equality, but childless women like myself continue to be made to feel guilty for choosing to be child-free.

6.7 The underworld

In my early 20s I frequented a night club in central Auckland called the Loaded Hog. My friends and I would visit there on Friday and Saturday nights. We were rather reserved in that we did not consume alcohol or smoke and our main aim was to go out and dance, heading home around midnight. As time went on, my friends started to pair off with partners and I found myself without anyone to socialise with in the weekends.

Incident 56—Choose your friends carefully

I befriended a female work colleague and we regularly met up at the night club with several of her friends. This particular evening she had planned for me to meet a very good male friend of hers. My brother-in-law put a stop to this liaison, as he had been involved in the incarceration of this person who had previously been charged for assault, intimidation, armed robbery and the manufacture of methamphetamine.

At the time I was feeling rather excited at the possibility of being associated with someone from the criminal underworld. I saw this an opportunity to shrug off the 'good girl' conservative image.

In hindsight, I am grateful for the advice. I was young and too naïve to understand the consequences of such a liaison—most probably ending up as a drug 'mule' for the syndicate.

I ended my friendship with this female, who later went on to become involved in a number of high profile crimes, orchestrated by the man I was supposed to meet that night.

6.8 Reflecting on the key influences on my identity in my 20s

The key influences that contributed to my identity formation in my 20s were based around *home events* (events related to living at home and family); *educational events* (events related to tertiary education); *social events* (events related to community) and *travel events* (experiences involving travel to another country).

This period of my life presented more autonomy than previously. At 20 I was continuing to navigate my way through the adolescence stage of Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial model, the *ego-identity* versus *role confusion* stage (years 12–18), possibly due to me being a late developer in the physical sense. Whilst I continued to be exposed to my parents' belief systems, I used those values as a starting place in the exploration of my values. My 20s had been a time for me to explore my identity and my individuality, with my parents influence over me diminishing as other influences began to shape my thinking. Whilst I had the ongoing support of my parents and I listened to their views, I had the freedom to either agree or disagree with their ideas. I felt that they encouraged my independence, trusting me that I would make good choices in whatever I did.

I had finished ballet and music lessons somewhat naturally, as I had completed all the necessary exams and had no real interest in pursuing dance as a career, other than perhaps teaching. I am not sure why I had no real desire to pursue ballet as a career but maybe I was just not that interested. I know that I was born with a natural gift in terms of my dancing abilities and my ballet teachers were disappointed in my decision not to continue, but I actually remember my sense of relief that these activities had come to a close, tinged with a little sadness that something I had been involved in from the age of five was ending.

Erikson's (1950/1993) view is that the major developmental task facing young adults as they transition from adolescence to adulthood, is the development and strengthening of identity. For me, my identity continued to be strengthened through a number of influences including travel opportunities abroad, where I experienced new and contrasting environments, along with developing a wider viewpoint of the world (*incidents 46–51*). Although my competitive spirit had lessened in my late teenage years, when my ballet and music activities concluded, it was revived again in my 20s through sport, namely tennis—playing interclub and business house competitions. I enjoyed sport which was new for me, having refrained from participating in my early years due to my ballet

interests. My social circle expanded to include friends from my tennis club, friends from University, friends I had made at work and friends that some would regard as unsavoury (*incident 56*). I entered the dating scene, experimenting with a change in my physical identity in terms of colouring my hair (*incident 43*). I used the information from this experiment to inform my identity, in order to determine who I was and how I wanted to be perceived by others—the outcome being that I reverted to my original hair colour soon after this experiment. I purchased my first car, a Holden family car, which some would regard as not an obvious choice for a female, but I think I was most probably influenced from my parents owning this make of car throughout my childhood and teens (*incident 44*). My savings mind-set continued in my 20s with me setting long term financial goals so as to ensure my financial independence.

My University years were influential in the shaping of my identity where I began to view the possibility of having opinions and alternate view points from what I was raised with and I began to question some of the issues I encountered in life with not just the lens of how I was raised, but with how I felt as an individual (*incident 40*). I felt I was transitioning from a modus operandi of ‘compliance’ to one of greater independence and autonomy in terms of my thinking. This aligns with Erikson’s (1950/1993) psychosocial framework which suggests that adolescents re-examine their identity and try to find out exactly who they are. The University environment influenced this process in a number of ways. Firstly, autonomy was encouraged, whereby I had the freedom to make personal decisions related to my academic studies, and the choices I made about my life and career. Secondly, the very virtue that Universities are characterised by, namely the role of critic and conscience of society (Education Amendment Act, 1989), suggests this was implicit in the teaching of papers and therefore my learning, whereby I developed my ability to think critically, and question received wisdom.

My parents did not pressure me in to choosing a career, but instead supported me in my decisions. This reflects Steinberg’s (2001) view that authoritative parents who establish stable relationships with their children, while at the same time granting them the freedom to discover their own attitudes and principles, assist these children to develop with less disquiet and with stronger senses of their own value. These results exist across multi-contextual sites and can be extended to other figures of authority, namely teachers or school principals in the adolescent’s life. This notion is of particular relevance to my study and is reinforced by Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger and Pancer (2005), who stated that

it is more likely for an adolescent to reach an achieved identity status in a family where minimal conflict is experienced. The quality of the interaction between the family and individual, influences the development identity (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002). High quality relationships (those which demonstrate love, acceptance, support, encouragement) are associated with increased levels of competence in adolescents (Kenny et al., 2002). Competent individuals are better prepared to explore options and make commitments regarding their beliefs and values. Therefore close and supportive relationships with family members act as a valuable resource for individuals in the process of identity formation.

In my 20s I should have been entering what Erikson (1950/1993) terms the post-adolescent stage of life (ages 18–40) *intimacy* versus *isolation*. It is during this time that trusting and intimate relationships are formed—young adults explore relationships leading toward longer-term commitments. I had not formed an intimate relationship and I do not think that I had reached an ‘achieved identity status’ as described by Marcia (2002a, 2002b) during my 20s. In terms of dating in my 20s (*incidents 52–54*), I was not overly concerned about finding a life-long partner, probably due to a lack of interest and effort on my part. I had not experienced falling in love, but instead seemed content with my life as it was. I had formed trusting relationships with friends and it is here that I intertwine Erikson’s theory with the possibility of the socially-constructed self. While Erikson (1950/1993) believes that one cannot successfully achieve a resolution in one stage unless the previous stage has been favourably resolved, he also writes that it is impossible to separate a human being from the society and culture in which he or she is located, because they are interrelated and mutually influential. This is supported by McLaren (2009) who stated that human identity is constructed through the actual experience of that identity and through the interaction of that person with other people.

6.9 Emerging Personality Traits

Reflecting on this period in my life, the personality characteristics that continued from previous years were *conscientiousness, perseverance, ambition, independence, competitiveness and confidence*. The trait that developed significantly during this period was my sense of independence which seemed to evolve without me being really aware of it. My exposure to the University environment along with my solo travel opportunities, broadened my world view and strengthened my independence and confidence. Whilst I

continued to have the moral support of my family I seemed to be confident at making my own decisions about my future. Compared to my earlier years, I tended not to be so compliant with authority and was beginning to form and voice my own opinions and think more deeply about the actions and behaviours of those in authority. I enjoyed my independence which perhaps deterred me from having someone special in my life. Perhaps independence came naturally to me having been raised in an environment without other siblings at home and I was leading a full life, thanks to great friends and family, my teaching career and my sporting commitments. In terms of Goldberg's (1990) framework, my 20s was a period in which I was more open to new experiences and I was willing to try new things. It was period in which I was transitioning from the University environment to the working environment. I began to seek out new experiences including international travel, broadening my network of people (to include those in the criminal world!) and exploring the dating scene. I continued to exhibit conscientiousness both at University and in my working career. This manifested itself through ambition and perseverance—traits associated with this factor.

The next chapter focuses on years 30–47 which sees some of the traits that were established in my early years continuing or ceasing, along with the emergence of others. At the end of the chapter I have reflected on the key influences on my identity and my emerging personality traits.

Chapter 7: 30–47

7.1 Graduating from University

I recall the day I graduated with my Master of Commerce from the University of Auckland. All my family attended including my sister, her husband and children who travelled up from Taihape to attend. We had a wonderful day of celebrations which started with me attending the procession from Albert Park through to Queen Street and then the ceremony held at the Auckland Town Hall. Celebrations continued throughout the day, with lunch out and dinner at the Sky City Restaurant.

Incident 57—Graduation day

I was asked to call in to my workplace and was greeted by the Head of School (incident 56) who presented me with a lovely bouquet of flowers on behalf of senior management and made the comment, “PhD next!”

I was happy to have my success acknowledged by my employer. It was important for me to feel that my academic achievements were acknowledged, because success was important to me. I was brought up in an environment where personal achievement was expected by my family and it was important that I did well for them, more so than myself.

In hindsight, my family were very proud of me and this event was important because it confirmed for me that if I work hard and stay focused, I will succeed in whatever I do.

7.2 Moving house

Having lived at the same address for 30 years, my parents decided to sell their property in Mount Eden and build on a section they owned on the Hibiscus Coast. I remember coming home from work one day and finding white survey pegs over the back lawn.

Incident 58—New home, new location

Mum and dad had informed me that a developer had purchased the property and would be building eight houses on the property. We were moving to a rental property close by, whilst our house was being built on the Hibiscus Coast.

At the time I was surprised about the move, as I had not foreseen it. I was sad at the time at leaving a place that I had grown up in and lived in for so many years.

In hindsight, even though I experienced feelings of anxiety at having to leave a home I had lived in for so long, this was not my decision to make.

I was probably experiencing feelings of insecurity and some resistance to change.

For a number of years after the move, I found it difficult to adjust to the new home on the Hibiscus Coast and the environment. I would frequently reminisce about my earlier years spent in the family home in Mount Eden. It took some time to adjust to a new suburb which offered a different lifestyle to the one I was accustomed to.

7.3 Purchasing real estate

I was 37 when I purchased my first property. I had saved for many years to purchase a property and it was important to me to purchase without a mortgage as I disliked debt.

Incident 59—Purchasing my first property

I purchased a 4000m² piece of land in April 2008 through a private sale on Trade Me. I viewed it with the owner and we wrote up a sale and purchase agreement on site.

At the time, purchasing this property gave me a sense of security, knowing that I had a place of my own.

In hindsight, I have no regrets about purchasing this block of land and felt satisfied that I could tick off another goal on my list.

Having grown up where saving was important from an early age, this incident felt like my saving efforts had finally paid off. I was used to setting goals and inevitably achieving them, and to have achieved this goal gave me immense satisfaction. I was in the fortunate position of purchasing without the need for finance.

7.4 Dealings with the Police

I had never before had any dealings with the New Zealand Police but the following incidents gave me cause to.

Incident 60—A tyre blowout

My car became difficult to steer, so I did a u-turn at a roundabout instead of going around it. I was caught by a Police officer, with flashing lights and siren. I exited the car to find an air bubble had formed in the tyre. I asked the officer if he would change the tyre. He said he did not know how and I phoned dad (who was forty minutes away) to come and change it for me.

I was embarrassed at being pulled over by the Police. I had never been in trouble with them before and was worried I would receive my first driving ticket. I was conditioned from a child into respecting those in authority, but when the officer

did not know how to change a tyre, this made me re-consider my existing views about the Police and people in positions of authority.

In hindsight, I reflect on how as a child I was conditioned into thinking that the Police are there to help. I learnt from this incident that those in authority do not know everything and I should not always assume they do.

7.5 Neighbours at war

Prior to the following incidents, I had never been involved in any conflict with neighbours. In 2011, I experienced an incident with my neighbours (husband and wife). The entrance way to my property is secured with a chain across it and padlocks at either end. A container truck delivered a container to the neighbour's property. The neighbours had authorised the contractor (without my permission) to use my driveway (as theirs was too narrow) to drive the truck down with the container aboard, swinging the container over the boundary fence into their property, causing damage to my property. The neighbours gained access to my property by removing the horizontal wooden palings on the left hand side of the entrance way, in order to lift the chain off the vertical post, enabling the truck to enter my property. The palings were then re-nailed back on to the vertical posts upon exiting the property. The truck cracked the concrete entrance to my driveway.

Incident 61—Breaking and entering

I arrived on my property to find damage to my driveway and the trees. When I made several attempts to contact the neighbour, via landline and cell phone regarding the damage to my concrete driveway, he denied knowing anything about it, slamming the phone down in my ear. When the Police became involved, the neighbour confessed to breaking and entering. The Police served a Trespass Notice on both the husband and wife.

At the time I attempted to resolve the matter with the neighbours, as seeking justice was important to me. I was confident in my ability to deal with this situation and was prepared to see the matter through to resolution.

In hindsight, I believe my actions were justified and I do not regret the action I took.

After this incident, I continued to suffer ongoing persecution from my neighbours. Their pattern of behaviour was tantamount to harassment.

Incident 62—Harassment and intimidation

When I was working on my lifestyle block, my neighbour (incident 61) erected a digital camera on the back of his car, aiming it into my shed. At the conclusion of a day's work

on the property I departed for my parent's home which meant driving past the neighbour's kitchen window. The wife would gesture me with the fingers.

At the time I was surprised at this display of behaviour from a Christian couple who were regular church goers at the local Baptist church. The wife even held a position at the church looking after the accounts.

In hindsight, this incident reinforced my beliefs about Christians, in that whilst they may outwardly express their allegiance to God and the principles that govern their faith, inwardly, they are no different to anyone else—in times of conflict, they revert to distasteful behaviour.

This incident highlighted for me that those who I assumed would have high morals and principles due to their religious beliefs, in fact did not. It challenged my long-held beliefs about religion and the purpose of religion. Ultimately I witnessed a disconnect between the supposed Christian values and the behaviours of my neighbours. Their Christian values were incongruent with their behaviour. Where was the goodness, honesty and integrity on their part?

On a subsequent occasion I arrived at my lifestyle block and my neighbour exited his house and made his way to the boundary between our properties. He stood with his arms folded watching me work. When I visited the local Police station later that afternoon to inform them of his intimidating behaviour, the officer stated that my neighbour was within his rights to do this and was not breaking any laws. This behaviour continued each time I visited my property until on one occasion I decided to take a strategic approach to resolving this matter once and for all.

Incident 63—The stalker

I called the emergency number 111 and asked for Police assistance. The Police took a description of my neighbour, his behaviour and the address of his property. Within 20 minutes a Police car arrived and the neighbour quickly retreated back towards the house leaving his property by car.

At the time I was not at all frightened but instead considered how I could use this incident to my advantage. I was aware that my phone call to 111 would activate a permanent record of the perpetrator's details and actions which would be kept on Police records for future reference.

In hindsight, I think my untiring determination and perseverance shaped by an all-girls secondary school and in the music and dance worlds, helped me through this situation. I also wonder if I drew on this inner strength being my highly developed thought processes possibly due to my higher level of education.

I was involved in another dispute with my neighbour (from incidents 61–63) where I discovered he had tar sealed over the boundary survey pegs and into my property by 13 metres in order to gain access to the back of his property.

Incident 64—Boundary dispute

After my verbal request to have the neighbour resurvey the boundary and remove the tar seal were ignored, I was involved in nine months of legal representation—with me winning the case.

At the time I was astounded at the behaviour of the neighbour and how obstinate he was in terms of refusing to comply with my request.

In hindsight, I was pleased with myself for following through to the resolution stage. Whilst it might have been less stressful on me had I let the matter lie, I felt the issue was an important one that required remedying.

This was the first time in my life I had experienced obstinacy from someone. I wondered why someone would behave like this when it was blatantly obvious that they were in the wrong. It was not easy for me to challenge the person and I found the nine month litigation period very stressful however it was important for me to persevere with the process. There were times where I questioned my resolve in terms of whether I could see it through to the end but I saw it through to resolution and felt very satisfied with the outcome. This incident reinforced for me that it is important to retain your values and sense of right and wrong.

Incident 65—Indecent exposure

I was mowing my lifestyle block when the neighbour (from incidents 61–64) and two of his friends proceeded down to the fence line and began to attract my attention by leaning over the fence and waving. I completely ignored them. They then exposed themselves along the fence line and began to urinate against the fence, laughing as I drove past on the ride-on mower.

At the time I did not feel intimidated by their actions—in fact I was amused by these middle aged men and their primordial behaviour.

In hindsight, I found it an interesting example of how some people respond or in this case revert to distasteful behaviour in order to intimidate another person in order to gain power over them.

7.6 Dealing with illness

My dad had been fit and healthy throughout his life. Once a year he would visit the doctor for a health check-up and a standard blood test.

Incident 66—Dad's cancer diagnosis

It was August 2011 and I had returned home from work when mum told me that dad had been requested to visit the doctor's surgery that day, as a result of a recent blood test. Mum informed me that dad had been diagnosed with a blood cancer.

My immediate reaction was one of shock. I remember running to the toilet and vomiting.

Looking back on this incident, it reinforced for me how fragile life is and how it should be valued more—rather than sweating about the small stuff, look at life and its challenges and put them into perspective.

My dad had been healthy up until this stage and nothing in his character suggested he was suffering from a blood cancer. I actually did not believe the diagnosis at first and it took me some time to accept it. I questioned why my dad had been inflicted with this horrible disease, when other human beings who cause hurt and harm to others during their lives, seem to sail blissfully through life unscathed.

My mum suffered a debilitating stroke in 2014 and this brought about changes in my parents' lifestyle as well as my own. I was shocked when mum had her stroke in terms of witnessing the incapacitation of someone I loved so dearly. The thought that I could have lost her was horrifying.

Incident 67—Mum's stroke

I entered mum's room in the hospital. Mum displayed the signs of a severe stroke—her mouth drooped, unable to speak, the right side of her body paralysed and her right arm in a sling. Mum was fed through a feeding tube.

At the time I was in shock at seeing mum like this and questioned whether I could have done something to prevent this from happening. I wondered whether mum would recover from this.

I hindsight, this incident reinforced for me what is important in life. It raised the same feelings I experienced in incident 35, when my sister passed away.

This event, like incident 35, highlighted to me the fragility of life. Situations can change quickly and I frequently remind myself to take nothing for granted. I learnt a lot about responsibility and priorities and how an incident such as this can evoke a heightened sense of emotion towards a loved one.

7.7 Unjust practices

I have been both victim and observer in a number of incidents that seemed unjust. These incidents challenged my core values and principles and whilst I brought these incidents to the attention of those involved, some of my efforts were in vain.

Incident 68—Too trusting?

I took my car in to have a rubber grommet replaced and was informed by the owner of the shop that the front shock absorbers required replacing. I found this a little odd but accepted his advice. I requested the old shock absorbers be returned to me. Four other automotive shops tested them and found them to be fit for purpose. I returned to the shop and informed the owner of my findings. I requested the wheel alignment printout of my car that was conducted prior to the new shock absorbers being fitted and was informed that the car was never placed on the wheel alignment machine prior to fitting the new shocks, only afterwards. The owner admitted that new shock absorbers were not required and offered to put the original ones back.

At the time of finding out that I had been duped into buying \$800 front shocks, I was angry. Although I was a little apprehensive about confronting the owner, I felt it was something that I had to do, not just for myself to make my feelings known, but for other customers in the future.

In hindsight I am comforted by the fact that I had the confidence to speak up and confront someone who had deceived me.

A three-year old rental property next door to my home had been rented out to gang members who were subsequently arrested by the Police on drug related charges. I was working in the garden one day when a cleaning crew arrived. They cordoned off the drive with 'hazardous area' signs and kitted themselves up in overalls, respirators and backpacks containing a liquid spray. As I observed this activity I came to the conclusion that the property had been used as a clandestine drug laboratory. A few weeks later the interior was painted (applied over the existing wall linings) new carpet was laid and new ducting fitted in the bathroom, which I suspect was where the clandestine drug laboratory had been originally vented.

Incident 69—Mind your own business

I phoned the Auckland City Council whilst the clean-up crew were there, to find out if the property had been registered with them as a clandestine laboratory. They confirmed that it had not and I informed them that I had reason to believe it had been used for the manufacture of methamphetamine—I asked if they could visit the property that day. They stated that the matter had nothing to do with them and it was up to the landlord to report the matter to the Council.

At the time I was astounded at the Council's response and their reluctance to investigate the matter. I assumed that those in authority would have acted on this

information, having a duty of care to the subsequent tenants that rented the property.

In hindsight, I was probably meddling in a matter that did not really concern me and it was not my business to get involved. However, I do know that my respect for those in authority has been eroded through incidents like this and that I learned that those in authority cannot always be relied on to help.

Some months later I checked again with the Auckland Council and the property had still not been registered with them as a clandestine laboratory. This did not surprise me but I took comfort in the fact that I was proactive in bringing this matter to the attention of the Council, even though they chose not to act on this information. I feel that my conscience was clear as I had raised the issue with those in authority, assuming they were in the best position to help, even though they did not.

7.8 Reflecting on the key influences on my identity: Years 30–47

The key influences that contributed to my identity formation from 30–47 were based around *home events* (events related to living at home and family); *educational events* (events related to tertiary education); *public events* (events related to community).

I purchased my first piece of real estate which gave me a real sense of achievement and also a greater sense of independence (*incident 59*). Academic achievement featured again with the completion of my Master's degree (*incident 57*). The constant striving for achievement and success, inherent from an early age, was not as strong as it once was, perhaps due to my age and a shift in my thinking as a result of negative work experiences (see chapter 8). Routine still featured in aspects of my life, but not to the same extent, as I took on a more relaxed approach and outlook on life.

Until my 30s, I had not experienced much conflict in my life and I either avoided such situations or simply complied with the requests of the opposing party. However in my 30s–40s my approach was different (*incidents 61–65*). I was assertive and confident and challenged the opposing party because it was important to me that justice prevailed. Perhaps this approach was a result of my past experiences, maturity, a heightened confidence and my values and beliefs. I knew that my maturity and healthy self-esteem would hold me in good stead to see these adverse events play out, even though the constant intimidation and harassment I experienced could have been soul destroying. I wonder how incidents 61–65 would have played out, or even occurred in the first place,

had a male companion been present looking out for my emotional and physical well-being.

Navigating adversity alone has been influential in strengthening my confidence. I have continued to develop a positive view of myself which in turn developed my confidence in my ability to solve problems and to trust my instincts. This helped build resilience which was already developed to some extent through positive reinforcement by family, secondary school and as a result of the death of my sister when I was 17. I believe that resilience carried me through a number of 'low points' during this period in my life but I developed a wariness and sense of mistrust of others. Perhaps this was a result of the emotions I experienced during these situations and now I carry this sense of mistrust into situations involving others. Perhaps mistrust is too harsh a word and maybe being cautious of others and their motives is more fitting. Having learnt the concept of trust at an early age from my parents which is expressed in stage one of Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial framework, I feel that this characteristic was eroded by the negative experiences (conflict) during this period of my life. As Erikson's (1950/1993) theory claims, successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality and the acquisition of basic virtues and whilst I acquired this basic virtue of trust from an early age, incidents 61–65, were the catalyst for a shift in these basic virtues and ultimately my topography of personality.

Whilst these experiences influenced the formation of my identity, the emotions within and in response to these incidents have affected me more so. Chang (2009) states that "emotions are a response to interpretations of events, rather than to the events themselves" (p. 204). The vast amount of feelings and emotions that one encounters when experiencing certain incidents throughout one's life, have the potential to affect personality in either a helpful or harmful way. Woodward (2004) states it is essential to differentiate identity from personality and suggests that identity is something an individual actively claims in relation to their social position, while personality refers to a feature, such as a trait someone 'has' or what they are 'like' as a person—I challenge this view. For me personality is inextricably linked to identity, because the outcome of an experience can ultimately influence an individual's personality.

When I was 40 I experienced a change in my role within the family as a result of my parents' illness (*incidents 66 and 67*). There was a shift in the traditional roles within our

household, as a result of my dad's cancer diagnosis and my mum suffering a debilitating stroke. I moved into a caregiving role and was solely responsible for the running of the home. This aligns with Woodward's (2004) and Collinson's (2003) view of identity which suggests that identity is multi-dimensional, with many different role identities which vary depending on the environmental demands and associated requirements upon the individual to express them. I found that my capability for compassion and empathy grew through caring for my parents and I had a sense of moving towards a higher level of self-understanding, maybe on a spiritual level, similar to what Peck (2008) alluded to in his book *The Road Less Travelled*. Helping others emerged as a strong self-esteem factor for me which aligns with a study by Melkman, Mor-Salwo, Mangold, Zeller and Benbenishty (2015) who state that the benefits to helping others included self-efficacy, social connectedness and a sense of purpose. Prior to this experience, I was unaware that I was caring and compassionate but believe it must have been present earlier in my life in terms of my role as a teacher.

Two incidents in my personal life (there are incidents in my working career, chapter 8) have caused me to reflect on my own moral compass (*incidents 68, 69*) and I have come to understand that not everyone's moral compass is the same as mine. I would expect that most people have been victims of unjust practices in their lives and for me I experienced this in incident 68, where I was duped into buying \$800 worth of shock absorbers for my car, which turned out to be unnecessary. I learnt a valuable lesson about honesty, integrity and trust, or the abuse of it in my case—I was the unsuspecting victim. This incident has shaped me into being more wary of others and their motives, particularly in business where profit is the predominant driver. Incident 69, where I notified the authorities of a possible clandestine drug laboratory, caused me to think about the ethical framework of others in society. Whilst this incident did not personally concern me, I felt I was doing my moral duty by looking out for my fellow human beings, namely the next unsuspecting tenants. This incident had an impact on my social conscience and I began to develop a self-centredness whereby I began to consider myself and my own needs first, as opposed to having a sense of responsibility or concern for the problems and injustices of others. This incident has caused me to reconsider my future involvement in matters that do not concern me directly. This has challenged my caring nature, but with time I am sure it will become easier and I will be able to distance myself from issues that do not concern me.

7.9 Emerging Personality Traits

Reflecting on this period in my life, the personality characteristics that continued from my previous years were *conscientiousness, perseverance, independence, and confidence*. I felt that my *competitive spirit* and *ambition* had lessened during this period, probably due to me having achieved a number of my personal goals and I was satisfied with where I was at in my life. I also did not have the external influences such as school or extra-curricular activities offering encouragement and fuelling my ambition.

I experienced a number of incidents during this chapter of my life that involved conflict in both my personal life and in my career. The traits that developed significantly as a result of this was *perseverance, confidence, resilience* and *integrity*. Perseverance had been present from an early age, most probably shaped through ballet and music where one is conditioned into thinking that repetition and attention to detail brings about achievement and success. Some may view perseverance as a sense of stubbornness, never willing to give up in spite of all that life throws at you. Maybe others see me as stubborn and in this light, perseverance could be viewed as ‘stubbornness with a purpose’.

These incidents of conflict caused me to reflect on my own moral compass in comparison to others—something that I had never given much thought to in my personal life, but more so in my working career where I had experienced conflict. I thought about what makes people behave the way they do and this relates back to Locke’s argument of whether or not humans are born with innate traits like morality and empathy. Where conflict arose in my personal life, I was aware that I could not control what other people did, but I could control my response. I learnt that in these situations, those with less of a moral compass have no compassion for other people and lack a conscience, which in turn results in a lack of humanity and humanity is what differentiates us from the animal kingdom. I learnt to have a clear boundary for protecting my integrity by being consistent with my actions, principles, expectations and outcomes, which in turn activated my moral compass. This takes confidence in standing your ground and staying true to yourself (your ethical values and morals) because in the end, no one can take your integrity away from you. In a study by Strohminger and Nichols (2014) moral traits, such as empathy or politeness, seemed to be the most important component of identity. Subsequent to this study, Strohminger and Nichols (2015) found that kindness, loyalty, and other traits of morality are what really constitute a person’s identity.

The ensuing chapter focuses on my working career in education. I share with the reader the incidents in my work environment that shaped my identity. At the end of the chapter I have reflected on the key influences on my identity and my emerging personality traits.

Chapter 8: My working career

At the age of 23 I was employed in the Human Resources division of a tertiary institution, but soon after moved into a teaching role at the same institution. I had a passion for teaching and was always keen to eventually move into a teaching career. None of my immediate family were teachers, so I am not sure where this passion stemmed from. I was excited about teaching and felt that I had the qualities, including patience to be a teacher. I had taught music privately for a number of years and the possibility of engaging in part time teaching at University opened up another opportunity for me to explore. This chapter explores incidents in my teaching career which began at the age of 23 and continued until the present time.

8.1 Teaching business at University

Incident 70—The fortuitous phone call

I received a phone call from a staff member in an academic department asking if I was interested in undertaking some part-time teaching. I attended an interview with the Head of School and was offered a one year contract. At the end of the year, I was offered a permanent role.

I remember the feeling of elation at being offered a contract role and it just felt right to accept the position.

In hindsight, this phone call was significant in terms of it being the catalyst which launched a career that has spanned 24 years.

I remember my parents not being overly happy at me relinquishing a permanent position for a one year contract. For them, security of employment was important perhaps due to the era in which they were raised. This teaching opportunity was something that I really wanted to do, and I was confident that I would be good at it. I wonder whether my confidence was personal confidence not shared by all of my teaching peers. What was the source of my certainty that I knew how to teach music and deliver lectures in the tertiary environment with no fear or lack of confidence? What I had learnt was by observation and personal experience. I was confident to teach, and I believe I was successful at it.

8.2 A toxic workplace

I remember my first teaching job. For the first 10 years I enjoyed a collegial relationship with my teaching peers and senior management, however I began to experience a noticeable change in the workplace culture as a result of the appointment of some existing teaching staff to management positions. I started to see another side to these colleagues that I was unaccustomed to. I witnessed a change in their personality, behaviour and leadership style towards some of the staff including myself, some of it tantamount to bullying and victimisation. I wonder whether these staff had always possessed these traits or whether these positions of power brought these traits to the surface. I was certainly unaware of these traits prior to them being appointed to these positions of authority, but wonder if the power they derived from their new positions had caused them to behave in this way. I witnessed a fall in staff morale which I put down to management and their authoritative leadership style. This style of leadership was having a detrimental effect on staff (including myself), their health and well-being. The opportunity for staff to think critically and independently was gradually eroded. Our staff Christmas party was at Hotel du Vin (a luxury hotel retreat), combined with team-building exercises in an attempt to build up the low morale of our teaching department.

Incident 71—The staff Christmas party

We were provided with a list of songs to sing on the way in the mini bus. When we arrived we were instructed to engage in team-building exercises, including moving tyres from one side of a paddock to another. The day concluded with Christmas dinner.

I felt the day was fairly regimented due to the leadership style of those we reported to. From the singing of the songs on the bus to the list of activities we had to engage in, the day did not feel at all like a celebration of a year's work.

Looking back, I recognise that management were doing what they thought at the time was helpful in trying to build the team, but as so frequently occurs in many organisations, I observed a growing disconnect between management and staff.

I recall an incident whilst teaching where the pass rates on a paper I taught with a team, were low. I attended a meeting with senior management and the programme leader who both requested me as Paper Leader to change the assessments for the following semester, in order to meet the required completion rates. To me this felt like an act of 'dumbing down' assessment, in order to achieve higher pass rates.

Incident 72—An ethical dilemma

I questioned management's motives, believing it was unethical practice, stating it would have a detrimental impact on educational standards. However, I succumbed to their request and agreed to change the assessments.

At the time the request to change the assessments to what I considered 'low quality' went against my own personal values and standards. Agreeing to this change, meant that I too would be equally culpable.

In hindsight it was difficult for me to challenge management who could use the power derived from their positions to their advantage. It was easier to go along with their wishes and turn a blind eye to the unethical practice in question. I still feel responsible in some way as I was intimately connected with the changes in the assessment.

Management have legitimate power in terms of their formal right to make demands, and to expect others to be compliant. Secondly they can wield coercive power to punish others for noncompliance. Management framed their proposition to me in a way that legitimised this type of practice. For me, this practice challenged the robust educational values that I had been accustomed to throughout my schooling and tertiary education. This incident influenced my identity as a teacher, in that teaching no longer felt as meaningful and of value—it was all about manipulating assessment in order to achieve higher pass rates.

Workplace bullying was endemic in my first teaching job. I found this surprising in a humanitarian field (teaching) which supposedly nurtures and supports people. Much of the bullying manifested itself in either intimidation or exclusion of individual staff members. The bullying began after the Head of School who appointed me to my position (incident 70), resigned to take up a leadership position overseas and a Senior Lecturer in the Management Department was appointed as the new Head of School. I had initially worked with this person when they were a Senior Lecturer and found them to be very personable, however all this changed when they were appointed to their new role. I experienced a very different leadership style to that of the outgoing leader.

Soon after the appointment of the new Head of School, a new Academic Group Leader was appointed from outside the organisation, whose moral compass was somewhat different to mine and many others in our department. Our first introduction to the new incumbent was an interesting one. An all attend two-day team development workshop was held, where he delivered a PowerPoint presentation sharing his vision for the group moving forward—he spoke with evangelical zeal. We played a number of games during the morning session (including lining up in birth dates from oldest to youngest).

Incident 73—Girls on film

The Academic Group Leader requested we have our photograph taken by him on his own personal digital camera, so that he could learn our names. I found this request to be particularly disturbing and declined to be photographed, along with a number of other female staff members.

When I declined, I found his behaviour rather intimidating and threatening, so much so that I was pressured into being photographed. I felt that being photographed by someone I had just met, was an invasion of my privacy and privacy for me was something that had always been important, even as a young child (incident 3).

In hindsight, I can understand that this manager may have wanted to learn the names of his staff, but I feel there were better ways of going about it that were not so intrusive.

I remember a very kind male teacher in our department, in his mid-30s, who was diagnosed with cancer. The diagnosis came as a great shock to me. He was a very nice person who was passionate about teaching and was well liked by his students and teaching colleagues. I recall one day when he came into my office, extremely upset. He had emailed the Academic Group Leader asking to be excused from attending a staff meeting, because he had undergone radiation treatment, which had caused a number of side effects including a severe skin reaction on his neck. He received a reply from the Academic Group Leader stating that he was expected to attend the meeting.

Incident 74—Bullying of staff members

My colleague shared with me the email from the Academic Group Leader which stated that he was well aware this staff member was undergoing radiation treatment, but there was an expectation that he attend the staff meeting.

At the time I empathised with the feelings that this staff member was experiencing. All I could do was comfort him, but inwardly I was surprised at the lack of empathy from the Academic Group Leader.

Looking back this Academic Group Leader appeared to lack 'emotional intelligence' and was narcissistic in his approach towards staff. To me, he appeared to be insincere, lacking any depth or soul and this was exemplified in the way he communicated with staff, often in a condescending and patronising manner. My values and belief system were at odds with this person, who placed a low priority on the well-being of staff.

Incident 75—Death of a colleague

My colleague (incident 74) passed away some months later after losing his battle with cancer. Our department held a ceremony in honour of him, which was attended by the Academic Group Leader featured in incident 73 and 74.

At the time, I was astounded that this person attended the ceremony. I felt his presence was hypocritical and I had difficulty fathoming why he would choose to attend, having shown no compassion to this staff member when he was alive.

In hindsight, this Academic Group Leader may have had his own reasons for attending this ceremony, maybe out of guilt or maybe genuine grief for the loss of a staff member, but his presence made me resentful towards him and I questioned whether I could see myself continuing to work with someone whose values were so different to mine.

I recall another incident concerning this Academic Group Leader and a staff member in my department. This staff member was a very quiet person who was well liked by her students.

Incident 76—Assault of a staff member

My colleague was in a meeting with the Academic Group Leader when he began to shout at her. I heard something hit the wall and raced out of my office to be met by the staff member exiting the office crying. I asked what had happened and she informed me that he had become violent and had thrown a telephone book at her head, just missing her.

I was angry and wanted to confront him, but my colleague requested me not to. Her reason being, she needed the job and wanted the matter left. All I could do was comfort her.

In hindsight, I can understand her reasons for tolerating his behaviour—I was not in the same position as her in terms of having to meet financial commitments like a mortgage and children to provide for. I also see that my boundaries were different to that of my colleague in that I would not tolerate this behaviour and would take a stand against it. I was not brought up amongst violence and therefore find any form of it unacceptable.

I remember an incident where I requested leave from a Friday staff meeting to attend a family memorial service. Other staff members also put in apologies and were not questioned about the circumstances surrounding their absence. Unfortunately I was questioned via email from the Academic Group Leader that featured in incidents 73–76.

Incident 77—My turn to be bullied!

The Academic Group Leader's response to my apologies was "I am not intending to pry into your personal life but where a meeting is known to be an all attend, I would appreciate something more than a please accept my apologies note". I found myself on disciplinary charges resulting in frequent meetings with Human Resources, senior management, mediators, and lawyers.

At the time, I felt that the email was interrogative, in terms of undermining my integrity and credibility as a professional. I was not prepared to accept his behaviour like others in my department.

In hindsight, with maturity and experience on my side now, I would now deal with the matter differently and approach the perpetrator directly, rather than seeking the help of others to assist me.

Incident 78—The departure of the bully

A few weeks after my final disciplinary hearing related to incident 77, our department were called to a meeting where the Head of School announced that the Academic Group Leader who featured in incidents 73–77 had resigned to take up a position at another tertiary provider.

This came as a surprise to me and I recall the relief on hearing this announcement—this person and their treatment of myself and other staff members would be over.

Looking back I am disappointed in the inactions of senior management and I continue to hold resentment towards the Head of School in evading the behavioural issues of this Academic Group Leader.

8.3 Conflict with management

Our teaching timetables were prepared by our Academic Group Leader in consultation with senior management. As lecturers we were not consulted on what papers we wished to teach, or the timetabled hours for the papers. I recall one of my teaching timetables where I was scheduled to teach on a Monday and Wednesday 10–12 noon, 12–2 pm and 2pm–4pm. With no scheduled breaks between these classes, these were referred to as back-to-back classes. The back-to-back classes did not allow for a lunch break or even a toilet break and the classes were also scheduled around the University campus, which meant that there was little time to catch a bite to eat, due to the commute from one site to another with my trolley bag on wheels. The current timetable of six consecutive hours of teaching also contravened the Tertiary Education Union collective agreement, which stipulated that staff were entitled to a break after five hours of consecutive teaching. I requested a meeting to negotiate my timetable with the Academic Group Leader (newly appointed after the departure of the previous incumbent left, incident 78).

Incident 79—Questionable leadership practices

I entered his office and was greeted by two female colleagues that I worked with. One of the females stated that they were unable to change the timetable and suggested I approach the organisation's counselling service to support me in managing my workload.

At the time I felt intimidated by being confronted by three people in his office, believing I was only meeting with him. I was perplexed at their response to my request. I did not challenge them, having been brought up to respect those in positions of authority.

In hindsight, I wonder if my quiet nature caused me to be exploited in this case. Maybe I was naïve to think that senior management would accommodate my request. I realise now that not all managers have their staff interests at heart.

I informed my dad of the situation and he contacted the Academic Group Leader by phone. My timetable was duly amended soon after their telephone conversation. After this incident, I held feelings of resentment towards those I reported to. I was also annoyed at myself for not recognising the patronising, manipulating and coercive behaviours of these people and my reluctance to challenge their response.

Incident 80—Injustices

I recall an incident where I made an application for reimbursement of prescription glasses (as per the Collective Employment Agreement). The application was made to the Academic Group Leader in conjunction with the Head of School. I received an email from the Academic Group Leader (copying in the Head of School) stating that “given that you are academic staff and spend 4-6 hours a day in front of a class, it is not unreasonable for you to be able to take breaks/pauses from the screen. I will arrange for the Health and Safety Office to visit you to give advice on how to manage breaks”.

At the time I could not fathom why my application was not approved, as I felt I met the criteria for the application. I also felt that the email was patronising and condescending.

In hindsight, this was an example of favouritism amongst staff and the colluding management style exhibited by the Academic Group Leaders and Head of School. Interestingly, when I was made redundant later on in the year, the Dean of the Faculty included the reimbursement for prescription glasses in my redundancy package.

I returned to my office after teaching and found that my desk drawer had been broken into and my wallet had been stolen from my handbag. I went to see the Academic Group Leader (from incident 79) to inform him that my wallet had been stolen.

Incident 81—Lack of leadership

I entered his office and informed him that my desk drawer had been broken into and my wallet had been stolen from my handbag. His response was that I probably left it on the bus and I reiterated that my desk had been broken into. He showed no interest in the matter and I exited his office.

At the time I was disappointed that he did not believe me that my desk had been broken into and he showed no interest in helping me.

In hindsight, this was another example of the lack of ‘inaction’ and lack of leadership by senior management. Maybe this issue fell into the ‘too hard’ basket for him or this was his natural approach to dealing with issues of this nature.

A week later I received a call from a staff member in another department on the campus, to say that my wallet had been found in a meeting room cupboard. All the cash flow cards and money had been stolen, but she had managed to identify me from my staff identification card inside.

In 2012 I was awarded a Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. The function was held at the Auckland Art Gallery and my dad accompanied me to the event. As I alluded to earlier I am not a religious person, but believe in the principle of Karma.

Incident 82—Is this Karma?

The Academic Group Leader who featured in incidents 79 and 81, approached me to offer his congratulations. Thoughts about incident 79 and 81 flooded back and when he went to shake my hand, I just stared at him and said nothing. He hung his head and walked away.

I remember feeling really empowered by my actions. I exuded poise and confidence, something I did not possess in my earlier years at work, most probably due to my inexperience and naivety.

Looking back on this incident, I feel that my conduct on this evening was justified. I was outwardly expressing my intolerance of this person's actions, something I should have voiced at the time of incident 79 and 81.

8.4 Teaching timetables

Senior management did not consult with staff regarding teaching timetables, so we never quite knew what papers we were teaching until the timetable appeared in our pigeon hole a few days prior to the first day of teaching. Some staff encountered new papers and others had the same. I recall one staff member who was concerned at having to teach a paper he knew absolutely nothing about.

Incident 83—Quantity not quality

A staff member approached me distraught about teaching an accounting package MYOB. He knew nothing about the package and was reluctant to approach management after hearing of my experience (incident 79 and 81).

I empathised with this staff member as I would have felt uncomfortable being placed in this position. I wondered why management were allocating staff to papers they knew nothing about—was this ethical? After all, students were paying substantial student fees for their study and were entitled to be taught by someone with content knowledge in that subject area.

In hindsight, this signalled to me that management's priority was being able to tick the box at having 'a teacher in place for the start of classes on Monday'. They did not have the students or lecturers best interests at heart.

8.5 Career development

I was keen to engage in PhD study having graduated in 2002 with my MCom. I met with the newly appointed Head of School who did not appear to be as supportive as the former Head of School who had appointed me to my position some years back. Unfortunately my request was denied.

Incident 84—Quashing my career development

I entered her office and was advised that the Faculty were not in a position to support me embarking on PhD study. This was then confirmed in an email that read: “while we are encouraging some degree staff to complete PhDs, the faculty is not in a position to approve and fund all staff who wish to engage in PhD studies”.

At the time I was very disappointed at the decision and wondered why senior management did not have a culture of fast tracking young talent.

In hindsight, there was favouritism amongst staff, with those who colluded with management and were therefore encouraged and supported into higher education.

The Head of School who declined my application, was undertaking PhD study and I wonder if this was a deliberate attempt to prevent me from undertaking higher study.

8.6 Redundancy

I had been employed in the tertiary sector for a period of 15 years when I was made redundant. With the decline in student numbers and phasing out of the Certificate and Diploma programmes, redundancies were inevitable. I remember the process in terms of determining the criteria and the final disestablishment of teaching positions in the Faculty. At the time, I thought I was advantaged in terms of being the only staff member in my department to hold a Master’s degree from the University of Auckland (all my fees had been paid for by the Faculty), 15 years’ length of service, and the recipient of a \$3000 Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Senior management were strategic in setting the redundancy criteria, with Programme Leaders and Academic Group Leaders’ positions excluded from the criteria. Senior management appointed selected staff as ‘joint’ Academic Group Leaders just prior to the redundancy announcement to ensure they were not in the ‘scope’ for redundancy. The criteria stipulated that redundancies were based on length of service and not qualifications. Unfortunately having 15 years’ service was not sufficient compared to other staff who had accumulated

many more years of service. My Master's qualification was of no advantage either, with the final determination not taking into account qualifications but rather length of service.

Incident 85—The redundancy letter

The letter appeared in my work pigeon hole. I opened it up to find that I was being made redundant.

At the time I was upset that I had lost my job and felt the criteria used to determine the redundancies was unfair. I felt I was losing my dignity, sense of purpose in life and a part of my identity, as my career formed such a significant part of who I was.

In hindsight, this was a blessing in disguise. It was financially advantageous in terms of exiting with a very healthy redundancy package based on 15 years' service and taking up another teaching position very soon after with a different tertiary provider, on a higher salary.

I had always envisaged a long career with the tertiary provider I was made redundant from. For me it was the loss of the work relationships with colleagues that had been forged over many years, along with feelings of being rejected by an organisation that I had a long association with. Maybe I was too complacent in thinking that my job was safe. This experience has proven to me that these situations can be among the most valuable. Redundancy allowed me to be removed from a department that was dysfunctional with a toxic culture that was having a negative effect on my identity. Reflecting on this incident many years later, my identity is not some fixed quality that is only expressed via a particular job. My identity comes from my values and I have to trust that these values can be expressed in some even greater, more authentic way. I now understand that no one is indispensable and that whilst you may be loyal and commit to an organisation, you are still susceptible to the decisions made by those in positions of power. As I have aged, I have not been so committed to my employers as I was in the past and I regard a job as something 'temporary' that can be taken away as quickly as it came.

Incident 86—The exit meeting

I sat at a boardroom table with the Dean at one end of the table accompanied by the General Manager and myself at the other end accompanied by a union representative. The Dean confirmed that my position was disestablished and did I have any comments. I asked him to reconsider this decision based upon the investment the Faculty had made in terms of my career and teaching awards. The Dean was adamant that none of this counted. He declined my request and with no emotion bid me farewell.

At the time I felt rejected—this organisation did not require my services anymore and that made me feel that all my years of loyalty to this organisation counted for nothing.

In hindsight, this lesson in rejection made me reassess any future loyalty and commitment to future employers.

Redundancy influenced the way that I view my loyalty and commitment as an employee to any current or future employer. These events serve as a reminder that employment is ‘ephemeral’, rather than a career per se—I am merely a staff identification number to any organisation.

8.7 Teaching at Polytechnic

Having been made redundant, I was fortunate to walk away with a healthy redundancy package and obtained a contract lecturing position at a polytechnic a few weeks later. I had assigned some readings to my Pasifika group of students for homework—however I failed to understand the implications of setting homework.

Incident 87—Understanding other cultures

I noticed that one of my students had bruising on her face. I asked her what had caused this. She said her father had scolded her for doing homework rather than helping with the chores and caring for her eight siblings.

At the time I felt partly responsible for this child’s beating. My expectation based on my own academic journey was that when homework was set by the teacher, it was to be done.

In hindsight, I now have a better understanding of Pasifika culture and the demands placed on students by family.

I think back to when I was studying (incident 21) and had no household responsibilities and could focus my time on study. The home environment in which I was raised is not the same for others and this incident caused me to modify my expectations of students.

8.8 Teaching at University

After spending a couple of years on contract at the polytechnic, I was offered a permanent role. At the same time, a position came up in a different faculty at the University where I was made redundant. This position was attractive because of the reduced commute time. I accepted the role with my previous employer and commenced my new position hopeful that the organisational culture in this faculty would be better than my previous experience. It was not noticeable at first, but after a few months I began to see pockets of cliques in the school. These pockets did not occur within senior management, but instead amongst

the teaching team I worked with. The teaching staff were an extremely close knit, in terms of having working and personal relationships dating back a number of years. As an outsider entering this teaching team, I was made to feel welcome, but always knew it would be difficult to fit in with an established culture. I guess one of the reasons we build relationships with each other is because it develops a sense of predictable familiarity around us and being a new comer to the group, meant of course unfamiliarity with each other.

Incident 88—Feeling exploited

The Programme Leader requested that I relinquish one stream of a paper to another staff member (a close friend of the Programme Leader) who was already teaching two streams and did not want to pick up an alternative paper to fill her timetable. I declined and the discussion became heated. After some pressure, I conceded.

I remember wondering why I conceded to this person's request. Was it something about my nature which gave rise to people taking advantage of it? It brought to the surface previous work incidents where conflict had arisen.

In hindsight, I am glad I did concede, otherwise I would have to endure the repercussions, including my ability to work with this group of people in the future.

I think about the times I have accommodated both my peers' and management's requests, always to the advantage of someone else, with little or no reciprocity on their part. I wonder if they were exploiting my good nature, knowing that I would comply with their requests. Perhaps if I had socialised outside of work with work colleagues, I would have been accepted into the groups and enjoyed the benefits of belonging to a close-knit group.

8.9 Supportive career development

In my new teaching job I experienced a different management culture compared to that of the faculty where I had been made redundant. This new faculty had a different approach towards its staff, one that was supportive and encouraging in a number of ways including career development.

Incident 89—PhD study

I remember asking senior management if I could enrol in PhD study. They encouraged and financially supported me throughout the process by timetabling in a non-teaching day for me to study and funding my PhD fees.

At the time I felt re-invigorated and energised in terms of my teaching and passion for my career, something that had been eroded in the teaching job I was made redundant from.

In hindsight, I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to take up this new teaching role, which I believed help restore my trust in those who hold leadership positions.

I went on to be awarded an Academic Staff Doctoral Study Award which assisted me greatly in working on my PhD.

8.10 Applying for a teaching award

In 2012 I was nominated for a Vice Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award and a colleague provided me with a reference in support of this nomination. This reference gave me an insight into how another person perceived me.

Incident 90—Is this altruism?

She wrote “Sheree has the rare ability of at a moment’s notice, being able to focus intently and 100% on the question that you are asking. Her ability to put aside any personal agenda and to focus on the communication at hand, is the mark of a true professional—to help a colleague with no real expectation of anything in return, is a real gift and a rarity.”

When I was first presented with this reference I was humbled. I had no idea this was how my colleague saw me. I had not recognised this quality in myself, whereas someone else had. I wondered how many others viewed me this way?

In hindsight this colleague had highlighted something that I had not seen in myself, altruism—that is kindness and unselfishness.

I wonder where I developed this trait from, perhaps my parents—certainly not religion, as I have not identified with any particular religious denomination. For me, I want to be good to people because it is the right thing to do, as opposed to doing it to manipulate them into feeling obliged to give me what I want. I have been both the victim and the observer of manipulative behaviour, always for the benefit of someone else.

8.11 My teaching experiences with students

My teaching experiences with students have, on the whole, been positive, but there were incidents that challenged my thinking.

Incident 91—The aggressive student

I returned some assessment marks to a tutorial class. A male Māori student who was disappointed with his mark approached me and said “you can’t teach me nothing, I do not even want to be here”. I replied “well the choice is yours as to whether you wish to

be educated—education gives you opportunities in life or you can choose to do nothing with your life”. He stormed out of the room. He returned to class the following week and sat up the front. This student achieved the top mark in the final exam and went on to complete his degree.

At the time, I wondered what had evoked such a heated response from this student. Was this an expression of hostility at being taught by a white female and would a Māori teacher (perhaps male) have engendered the same outburst?

In hindsight, I can understand how the student felt at receiving a poor mark. There may have been other issues which culminated in this outburst, but I do not have any regrets about what I said to this student.

I recall an incident in my first teaching job. I was conducting a tutorial and received a knock on the door from a colleague who presented me with an email she had received from a student of mine who was absent from my tutorial that day.

Incident 92—A death threat

The email stated that I was going to be killed that day—the ‘Angel of God’ had instructed the student to do it. Our school receptionist arrived with a dozen red roses and attached was a card from the student. I immediately dismissed my class and proceeded to inform management of the threat. Management declined to do anything.

At the time of this threat, I was not perturbed by the death threat per se, but disappointed that management were not willing to confront the student. For some reason, they discarded my complaint.

In hindsight, I can see that it was easier for management to turn a blind eye to this threat, but felt disappointed at not receiving the support of those in positions of authority—those who could actually do something about resolving this situation.

The matter was resolved through the help of a senior manager in another Faculty. The student was invited to attend a meeting with senior staff and this is where his schizophrenia was exposed—I was informed by this senior manager, that during this meeting the student began to hear voices and pictured the panel members naked. Management dealt with the issue accordingly and I was safe to return to class the following week.

The following incident takes me back to my own experience as a school pupil (incident 23) when the teacher at parent-teacher interviews had difficulty recalling who I was. I wonder if the experience back then has been the catalyst for me making a concerted effort to remember the names of each and every one of my students.

Incident 93—More than just a name

At the end of the semester a group of students presented me with a bouquet of flowers along with a card that read “you make me feel more than just a name on an enrolment form”.

At the time I was appreciative of the gift. I knew that I cared about my students and their educational journey but was unaware of the impact that I had made on this group.

Reflecting on this incident, I do see that teaching comes naturally for me. I was not really aware of my teaching qualities, but now see that students are intuitive and can sense if you have a genuine interest in their learning.

Perhaps this caring, nurturing trait developed from my own upbringing, with both my parents taking a very close interest in my academic and extra curricula activities and the expectation that I would succeed. Because I value the importance of education in terms of it being an investment in one’s career, I try to impart this on to my students. From my own experience as a student exposed to an authoritative teaching style throughout my primary, secondary and extra-curricular activities, I refrain from delivering my classes in the same manner. Instead I give my students some context around the topics they learn, in an attempt to make the learning environment as convivial as possible.

Sharing the story about the death of my eldest sister has enabled me to make an emotional connection with other students who have been bereft. I remember one Pasifika student who was bereaved by the loss of her grandmother. She would wear a sweatshirt with a picture of her grandmother on the front and the dates of her birth and death.

Incident 94—Feeling another’s sorrow

I took this student aside one day and shared my story of losing my eldest sister in my final year at secondary school. After our talk I saw a significant change in this girl’s attitude and commitment to study with her successfully graduating.

At the time, I was reliving the grief that this student was feeling, the same pain that I felt when I lost my sister.

In hindsight, I’m not sure if the sharing of my story was the catalyst for the change in this student. It was cathartic for me in sharing my experience as well as offering the student a listening ear to her story.

8.12 Teamwork

I have been involved with three other colleagues in a research project and subsequent writing up of a journal article. We had spent several months preparing, meeting and collecting data, with me travelling outside Auckland to gather data. It was agreed that all

four names were to be included in the submission of the journal article. I was surprised to find out that two of the four colleagues were attending the CAUTHE conference in Sydney in 2016, presenting what was at that stage of the process our working paper.

Incident 95—Love many, trust few and always paddle your own canoe

I received an email from two of the colleagues stating that our working paper submitted to CAUTHE 2016 had been accepted with no amendments required. Because I and another colleague were not going to be presenting in Sydney, we were informed that our names would be removed from the working paper.

I remember the feeling of total disbelief. I questioned the motives of these two people that I had worked with for many years and thought I knew well. I would not do this to someone and I had difficulty understanding their reasons. I was disappointed in their behaviour and felt a sense of betrayal from two people that I had always thought highly of.

Reflecting on this incident it has made me more cautious of my work colleagues, something that I had never really given much consideration to. It has influenced me in terms of being more careful in whom I trust and more guarded in my actions.

8.13 Equity in the workplace

I experienced a management style that was passive in terms of their approach to dealing with issues involving teaching staff. Management would skirt around the issue and inevitably do nothing, burying their heads in the sand like ostriches, hoping that the issue would go away. To me, this management style was one of an ‘avoidance culture’. I recall one incident in which I was the paper leader for a paper delivered on an undergraduate degree programme. I taught the one hour lecture and the three, two hour tutorials (six hours) were delivered by another colleague, a Senior Lecturer.

Incident 96—Equitable workload

I allocated the marking according to the timetabled teaching hours (which was standard practice). The lecturer questioned her allocation, stating that marking was always divided in half between two staff. She took the matter to the Programme Leader who escalated the matter to the Head of Department (HOD). The HOD was unable to make a decision and it was escalated to the Associate Head of School who passed it onto the Head of School who employed marking assistance.

I felt unsupported by the Programme Leader and HOD who were rather passive in their approach. I felt the matter should have been dealt with by them—informing the staff member of her marking obligations. I was confident in standing by my decision and following through on it.

In hindsight, I believe this was a case of favouritism, the lecturer in question was a very close friend of the Programme Leader and I can understand where her loyalties lay.

This incident has shaped my thinking in that not everyone is amicable to work with and there will always be challenges with some people. My heightened confidence in this incident was probably a result of past workplace issues with senior management whereby on the most part, I simply conceded for fear of reprisal. Equity in the workplace is important to me and I continue to get frustrated when I observe favouritism amongst staff and the lack of accountability. Having been raised in a disciplined home and school environment, I found the non-accountability in the work environment difficult at times.

8.14 Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching

In 2002 in my first teaching position I won a Distinguished Teaching Award. In 2012 I was again nominated for a Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. A requirement of the application included student feedback via the Student Paper Evaluation Questionnaires (SPEQs) that are administered at the end of each semester, along with a reference from a work colleague in support of my application. To my dismay my colleague declined to provide me with a reference. Her response was:

Incident 97—You think you know someone

"I do not feel comfortable giving a recommendation for just one person in the team over others. I feel that it is unfair to provide references for only you when the whole team deserve to be recognised for teaching excellence. I do acknowledge that you get good Student Teaching Evaluation feedback, however the other points you have made are all really part of course development that stems from the team discussions both before and after each semester. I admit that individually we all action the development initiatives but these decisions are more often than not made collectively. All of us have redeveloped papers over the years and for some many, many times. For me to recommend your work and not the work of the others just doesn't seem fair and equitable".

At the time I was taken aback by my colleague's response as I was sure she would support me. We had a positive working relationship and no untoward dealings with each other.

In hindsight I should not have assumed she would support me. I appreciate that an individual has the right to accept or decline requests of this nature and perhaps there was another agenda at play here—maybe a case of jealousy or was it something about me as a person that she took a disliking to? Interestingly, this was the same colleague who featured in incident 95.

I managed to obtain a reference from another colleague (incident 90) and won a Vice-Chancellor's award attending the ceremony held at the Auckland Art Gallery accompanied by my dad.

8.15 Experiencing deceit

I was teaching one of three streams of a paper and another colleague was teaching two. A couple of days later I re-checked my timetable and found that a second stream had been added to my timetable. I assumed that my colleague had relinquished one of her two streams.

Incident 98—Colluding with management?

I asked my colleague whether she was aware that she had lost a stream—she said no. At the end of the conversation she gave me a printed copy of an email (dated the day before) concerning an entirely different matter. At the bottom of the email, I read that she had notified the recipient that she was only timetabled to teach one stream of this particular paper.

I was surprised to read this, but never disclosed to her that I had seen it. At the time I wondered why she did not choose to disclose that she was already aware of this change. Up until this incident, I never doubted her integrity and honesty, but this changed after this event. Having been lied to by this person I found it difficult to trust her again.

In hindsight, I imagine there have been many instances in my life where I have been lied to for various reasons.

This colleague was involved in timetabling with senior management and this may have been a case of colluding with management—although she may have had her reasons for not choosing to disclose the change to me, I still viewed this incident as one of deceit.

8.16 Teaching overseas

In September 2005, I travelled alone to the United Arab Emirates, my first visit to the Middle East. Friends and family commented that it would be unsafe in terms of the political unrest in this part of the world, but I felt this was something I had to decide for myself.

Incident 99—Experiencing a new culture

I visited a Higher College of Technology and met a number of staff and students from the college, observing and delivering guest lectures.

At the time I felt both excited but slightly apprehensive (somewhat fuelled by the comments made by family and friends) about visiting the Middle East. Personally, I had no preconceptions about the country and I wonder if this made my experience richer for it.

In hindsight, this experience developed my confidence in terms of being exposed to a different environment and experiencing a different culture.

In January 2010, I visited Bahrain where I had the opportunity to network with a number of academics both ex-pat New Zealand and Bahraini working at the Bahrain Polytechnic.

Incident 100—An introduction to Islam

I visited the local mosque where attendants provided me with an abaya and hijab. I participated in the prayer session, along with approximately 1,500 Bahraini men and women. The men were situated downstairs and the women upstairs.

At the time I felt fortunate to have participated in this culturally enriching experience.

In hindsight, I visited Bahrain with an open mind about the Islamic culture. The trip provided an opportunity to be exposed to and learn about the Islamic culture, thus widening my perspective on a different culture and religion.

When I was employed in my first teaching job, there was an opportunity to deliver a one week workshop to the Government officials in Niue.

Incident 101—My first Sunday church service

I was invited to a Sunday church service, where I heard the choir sing and observed the congregation receiving Holy Communion. I went on to attend a traditional Sunday lunch with a local family.

At the time I remember this being such an enriching experiencing as I had never previously attended church (as a worshipper) and was interested to see what went on during a service.

In hindsight, this service confirmed for me that I have no real desire to follow Christianity—perhaps I am too set in my ways or am happy with my own philosophy towards life.

My minimal experience with religion over the years has not given me the motivation to subscribe to a particular religion, I am however respecting of others' religious beliefs and would not deter anyone from following a religious denomination should they choose to.

8.17 Reflecting on the key influences on my professional identity

As I reflect on my working career all of it spent as an educator, I think about the key influences that have shaped the formation of my identity which include redundancy (*incidents 85, 86*), incidents of conflict with senior management (*incidents 77, 79, 84*),

incidents of bullying directed towards myself and others (*incidents 74, 76, 77, 79*) and my interactions with students (*incidents 91–94*).

Academic development featured again with my enrolment in PhD study (*incident 89*). Whilst my initial attempts at doctoral study went unsupported in my first teaching job, my subsequent teaching job provided me with a more positive working environment, and with the support of senior management enabled me to pursue this program of study. Whilst my own ambition and determination in the latter years had somewhat diminished compared to my former years perhaps due to my age and a shift in my thinking as a result of negative experiences in my first teaching job—I was however, ambitious for my own students, focussing much of my energy into my teaching role.

My teaching career has been rewarding in two ways, firstly the job fulfilment of working in a humanitarian field that aligned with my caring nature. I seemed to transition seamlessly into the teaching role, after my experience in operating my own music school for many years. Teaching was something that came naturally to me—an obvious fit with my nature to care for people. Perhaps this caring, nurturing trait emanated from my own upbringing, with both my parents taking a very close interest in my academic and extra curricula activities. Secondly, my nomination for teaching awards from my students was confirmation that I was doing my job well which was important to me.

My progression into teaching was fortuitous (*incident 70*). I moved into my first teaching role through a range of unplanned and unforeseen events. My sense of professional self and to a large extent my personal self, had been based for many years within what I felt was a productive and content teaching department, where colleagues were committed to meaningful teaching and learning encounters with students and colleagues. Cannatella (2007) wrote of the value of a nurturing context and in the context of a teacher, a context that was benevolent. My identity was also shaped by the feedback from the students as highlighted in *incident 93 and 94* which confirmed my belief in the kinds of relationships that I built with them. Palmer (2007) writes “the connections made by teachers are not held in their methods but in their hearts – meaning ‘heart’ in its true sense as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self” (p. 11).

With the appointment of the new Head of School and Academic Group leader the stability of my workplace which I had enjoyed for so many years was being tested. I began to

observe imperfections in a system that I naively thought was flawless. My work environment and those I reported to, had an influence on the shaping of my identity. It was difficult for me to make sense of the perceived changes within our department and school, along with the leadership style of the new appointees. Their leadership style led staff to becoming fearful, anxious and threatened, resulting in staff going into protective mode. As a result of a number of incidents, I too became despondent with some of the senior management team and felt somewhat let down by their actions and in some cases inaction. My identity as a conscientious, dedicated member of staff began to shift, along with many others who found it difficult to find their place within the department. We were required to make sense of the new leadership style in order to understand and construct our identities within that definition. I became disillusioned with management and disconnected from my job.

My professional identity as a teacher and the conflict that I and others experienced with senior management, aligned with Parkison's (2008) view that power structures frame the identity of the teacher, and the power structures that were reframing mine were difficult to anticipate and even more difficult to comprehend. I was a confident, enthusiastic, passionate teacher until senior management imposed alternative norms and standards on the way we behaved and the way that we did our work. I think about how management used their positions to control and manipulate their direct reports, wielding the power derived from their position to use at their discretion and in some cases abusing it by disempowering staff. This to me was a form of bullying, and this type of behaviour influenced my thinking on styles of leadership and the type of person who aspires to leadership positions. Do they seek these positions as a way to gain power over others? Are they naturally insecure people and these types of roles allow them to wield power over others under the guise of the title 'leader' or 'manager'? Hodgen and Askew (2007) state that a professional identity crisis can result when external structures and regulations conflict with the internal values or personal performance of a teacher, and that was certainly what I was experiencing. I felt as though I was engaging in a practice of what Naring, Briet and Brouwers (2006) term 'surface acting', requiring me to act an emotion that I was not feeling and in some cases completely suppressing my emotions.

I observed a workplace culture that led some employees, including myself to disengage from their job, as though they were not really 'present' at work, just going through the motions. For me, engagement is highly influenced by one's personal conscientiousness

along with the leadership style and organisational culture and the engagement of the people around you. If you have people who are highly engaged but they are working for those who are not, or whose management style is one of disempowerment, then those levels are hard to sustain. High levels of engagement are an outcome of working in an environment where you are able to fully utilise your skills and experience, where you can bring your whole self to work and your organisation values the diversity of that. I had always strived to be a conscientious, committed staff member, but there seemed to be no place for that leading up to the redundancy round, as colleagues who were my close friends were competing for the same jobs. In each of these situations my professional identity was being challenged. This feeling of loss is recognised in the work of van Vuuren, Beelen and de Jong (2010) whose view is that for a person's work life to have meaning, they need to make sense of what is happening in their work environment.

At this time, so much of my professional life was shifting and changing that I could neither make sense of it, nor know how to work within this type of environment. The negative events that took place at work, were also taking a toll on my personal wellbeing, with me experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and stress. I began to question the actions and behaviours of the senior management and gave careful consideration as to whether I could remain in the profession and be subjected to this style of leadership. I had always been accepting of change and willing to adapt, but found it difficult in these sets of circumstances. The meaning of my work was put under threat and having to work against power structures, meant that I had to strive to make my own work meaningful.

As a teacher, work happens between and among human beings; teaching is essentially a profession that encompasses significant relational considerations. If one allows oneself to feel negated and disempowered by the context, then one will not be able to practice meaningfully. This in turn will negatively impact on the construction of one's identity because you have a sense of frustration in your work. However, an active knowledge of self, offers the opportunity to make choices about the way that one acts or reacts within that context that will empower one to construct meaning. I think that my resilience along with a solid values system established from an early age as a result of my upbringing, helped me through these events. I knew myself well enough to maintain stability without having to seek the acknowledgement and reassurance of senior management or other power structures. With the ground of my context shifting under my feet, and the challenges I was experiencing, the process took some time to stabilise and with it the

emotional content of my professional life which also impacted my personal life—I now see a closer link between my personal identity and my work environment. Fortunately I was able to share with my parents the negative incidents in my work environment that were happening at the time and with their support, I navigated my way through the legal process, including the countless mediation hearings. The outcome being that I retained my teaching job and the Academic Group Leader who was responsible for the toxic environment at work, moving on to another position with a tertiary provider in a different New Zealand city. As a consequence of these events, my resilience was strengthened and I now seem to be more strategic in my thinking and approach towards people in positions of authority—I take a more cautious view of management and their motives.

As I alluded to in the literature review (page 28), people derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organisations or teams to which they belong. As Hogg and Terry (2000) state, one adopts certain patterns of behaviour and demonstrates such expressions of identity and for some, the professional and/or organisational identity may be more pervasive and important than ascribed identities based on gender, age, ethnicity, race or nationality. In effect, one's sense of identity is created through taking a part of everyone with who one bonds, and adding it to one's own sense of self. In this way, our self becomes a complex, multiple, social being. In order to be allowed to join a group (and therefore satisfying belonging and esteem needs), we have to give up prioritising everything for ourselves and be ready to put the group ahead of our own interests. In doing this, we have to change our sense of identity from always 'me' to thinking about 'us'. Turner et al., (1987) state that when individuals define themselves in terms of shared group membership, they redefine themselves moving away from unique and individual attributes, towards more shared and collective stereotypes. This relates back to Stryker's (1968, 1980, 1987) view that people emphasise certain social group memberships, or role identities, in order to be socially accepted—this may mean taking on group values and beliefs, even if we do not particularly agree with them. For me as a newcomer in one of my teaching jobs, I found it difficult to take on the collective identity due to a disconnect between the group values and beliefs and my own and therefore I was never fully accepted into the team. On the surface we looked like we were a team, we shared an office, we taught on the same papers, but in reality it was superficial. This is evidenced in *incidents 88, 95, 96 and 97*.

Throughout my childhood and teenage years, my parents stressed the importance of a good education in terms of securing a well-paid job and career progression. In my case, being educated has in some ways hindered my career advancement. I reflect upon the sacrifices I made, particularly the time expended on becoming educated, believing that it would hold me in good stead for the future. From a personal development perspective, I am glad that I engaged in postgraduate study, but from a professional perspective, I would say that ‘networking’ or in layman’s terms “schmoozing” is more beneficial for career advancement. I had learned the practice of separating one’s working life from one’s personal life from my parents who did not socialise with my dad’s work colleagues. Perhaps if I had invested in developing my social networks at work, rather than focusing on the attainment of qualifications, then I would have maybe enjoyed a more fruitful pathway in terms of my career development and advancement. I guess these situations can be best summarised in the old clichés “jobs for the boys” and “it is not what you know, it is who you know.” However, for me to engage in this manner to gain an advantage or in the quest of self-promotion, would not fit with my ethical values.

Whilst these incidents caused me to question ‘the system’ I had been a part of for so many years, it has prompted me to question whether people’s identities are ‘real’ or whether they simply act in accordance with what is expected of them in different social situations. Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987) claims, that people emphasise certain social group memberships, or role identities, in order to be socially accepted. For me, would I go back and act differently in order to be accepted into the realm?—probably not.

8.18 Emerging Personality Traits

Reflecting on my working career, the personality characteristics that emerged were *caring, empathy, ambition, distrust, altruism*. The trait that lessened significantly during my working career was *my respect for those in authority*. Whilst I seemed to be tolerant of students, I seemed less tolerant of those I reported to due to an accumulation of incidents involving conflict between myself and management. As both an observer and victim of the actions and inactions of management, my thinking changed about those in authority and their motives and I began to compare their moral compass with mine. Morality is central to identity because our moral selves are central to what it means to be human. Another perhaps more substantial factor is that moral traits are a reliable predictor for how individuals will fare as potential partners for cooperation and affiliation. One of

the chief reasons we make distinctions among persons in the first place is to monitor suitable social partners (Baumeister, 1998), and indeed a person's moral character as compared with say their personality or shared interests, is the ultimate dimension by which we judge friends, and work colleagues (Buss, 1989; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014; Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000).

My observation of the moral traits of those in senior management significantly challenged my long held views on people who occupy positions of authority. I had been conditioned into thinking that those in positions of power and authority were trustworthy and decent people. They were to be respected and their directives adhered to by their subordinates. Unfortunately, I experienced a disconnect between my values and beliefs and those of the managers I reported to. I felt that those in positions of power abused their power in a way that to me seemed intimidating and bullying which led to me having little respect and commitment towards my employer. Up until this stage I had always respected people in positions of power, probably due to me being raised to respect those in authority, but these events gave me reason to question my long held beliefs. I became disillusioned by those I reported to and I developed a sense of *distrust* towards them, a trait that had not previously or had reason to surface in my earlier years. Having never previously been subjected to this type of behaviour, it ultimately led to my distrust of those I reported to and me withdrawing significantly from my commitment to my work, namely to my employer. Whilst I continued to be conscientious in my role as a teacher and was there for my students in terms of my engagement with them in the classroom, I felt a lesser degree of commitment and loyalty towards those I reported to.

My sense of *care* and *empathy* towards other colleagues emerged during my working career as a result of what I regarded was the mistreatment of staff by senior management. Goldberg's (1990) model suggests that people high in agreeableness tend to be well-liked, respected and sensitive to the needs of others. They are sympathetic, and affectionate to their friends and loved ones, as well as sympathetic to the plights of others. In a study by Tait (2009), people who were high on extraversion and agreeableness were high on altruism. Therefore, agreeableness and extraversion may be essential traits that make up the altruistic personality. Tait's (2009) research found that people high on these traits are generally more empathic and more likely to help. I would challenge Tait's (2009) finding in that I regard myself as low in extroversion (quiet, introspective and reserved) but high in agreeableness.

As a 23 year old entering the teaching profession, I was ambitious and had visions of progressing up the chain of command. Perhaps I was rather naive in terms of career advancement, presuming that hard work was the key to success. In my 30s I experienced a work place culture that did not seem to foster ambition or support career development, and I began to feel a sense of hopelessness. I had become ‘desensitised’ towards the actions of management. I saw others being promoted to positions of authority, not on merit but on allegiances with senior management. I therefore redirected my energies from myself to my students, feeling that I could help my students in making their ambitions a reality. I felt a sense of pride when I attended my students’ graduation ceremonies and a sense of job satisfaction in that I had made a small contribution in their lives.

This ensuing chapter is a reflection of my research from chapters four to eight, along with 10 key personality traits that I felt had emerged along the way. As Costa and McCrae (1994) state, personality traits are important contributors to identity formation and may serve as expressions of identity as well as determinants of other factors that contribute to identity formation.

Chapter 9: So Who Am I?

“Be yourself, everyone else is already taken”

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is a reflection of my research from chapters four to eight, in search of answering the research question *how have my lived experiences influenced who I am today?* Some of the traits that have emerged from my research, are associated with Goldberg’s (1990) five-factor model of personality of *openness to experiences*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness* and *neuroticism*. Whilst these five factors are not necessarily traits in and of themselves, they are factors in which a number of related traits and characteristics fit. In this chapter I share with the reader my 10 personality traits which I feel have emerged during my life time.

9.2 Reflecting on my research

When I set out on this doctoral study a number of years ago, it was not as a result of me experiencing an ‘identity crisis’ per se. Instead, it provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my life experiences and their influence on who I am today. During this exploration of the ‘self’, I gained a better understanding and greater awareness of my own identity development which included my values, principles and personality traits. I feel that having a strong sense of my own identity will help me to better understand others, whether they be family, friends, students and colleagues. A strong sense of ‘self’ is helpful when experiencing crises in one’s life, helping one to cope in times of difficulty.

Through this study, I have come to understand that one’s identity continues to evolve throughout life, although much depends on inborn traits and early experiences. As Meeus et al. (2002) state, families play an important role in providing the foundation for the beliefs and values an individual holds. In my case, my beliefs and values were learned from an early age from my parents. Erikson (1968) suggests that identity is largely fixed by the end of adolescence, but he did propose that identity continues to evolve throughout

adulthood but gave little detail on what this process looks like. From my study it can be seen that my identity continued to be shaped after adolescence through a number of incidents in both my personal and professional life. Some of these incidents impacted me greatly, in terms of my identity being shaped by the emotional consequences of these events.

McAdams (1988, 1993, 2001) and Pillemer (1998, 2001), suggest that the events that comprise the life story are the most personally relevant experiences of an individual's life. Narrative identity is conceptualised as multifaceted in the sense that individuals do not simply have one life story. The life story may comprise any number of experiences an individual has had over their lifetime and is continually updated as individuals gain new experiences. The life story that is shared with others may depend on the social context in which it is told (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1988, 2001; Pasupathi, 2001). Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) state that identities can be focused on the past—what used to be true of one, the present—what is true of one now, or the future—the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. The set of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural patterns learned from experience determines how one thinks, feels, and behaves.

I have identified in my research that some of the traits that shaped my identity were present at birth (heritable) which aligns with the ideas of philosopher Descartes (1596-1650), who believed that traits were innate. Alternatively some of my traits were developed through experience, which is supported by Locke (1632-1704) who states that the mind is a blank slate on which experience writes. Virtually all major theories since Freud, have given far more importance to environment, or nurture, than to genes, or nature. A thematic approach has led me to identify a number of emerging traits that either strengthened or lessened through the various chapters of my life. Some of these personality traits were contextual in that my personality was influenced by environment and time, along with the biological bases of personality and behaviour. The personality traits that emerged during my life time so far are:

9.2.1 Compliant

From an early age until my late teens, I demonstrated compliance, a willingness to obey and respect those in authority. Whether this was influenced by my conservative

upbringing, or perhaps a natural tendency to comply with authority due to my gentle nature, I am unsure. Boundaries were placed upon me by my parents who also modelled respect and compliance. The schools I attended and the extra-curricular activities I participated in, expected its students to obey and show respect to those in positions of power—the alternative was punishment in the form of detention or denigration in front of others. When I think about my experiences as a student at school, it was an authoritative environment, where the teacher disseminated information and the student obeyed. I remember writing screeds of notes from the blackboard, with little or no context to support it—thus no opportunity for debate, argument, or discussion. I always thought that if I were to become a teacher I would teach differently, providing students with context around the subject matter, encouraging students to ask questions, and stimulating debate.

My compliance with authority and in some instances my respect for those in positions of power, diminished in my teenage years, as I developed my own set of values and beliefs and I began to question the views and actions of others. In relation to my working career and my willingness to comply with authority, I would say that after a period of ten years at work, I experienced a change. I would not suggest that I became rebellious in any way, but instead questioned the motives of senior management, whose values and beliefs were dissimilar to mine. I was somewhat resistant to their decisions, finding it difficult to comply with directives that to me seemed unreasonable. This reflects the literature which states that other influences on a person's identity may include aging, experiences and a changing environment in the workplace (Knights & Willmott, 1999; Kroger, 2002; Lopes, 2002).

9.2.2 Trusting

My ability to trust was formed from an early age, influenced by my parents who provided me with a stable upbringing. I never had any reason to doubt my parents' trustworthiness and I rather naively assumed that everyone I interacted with was trustworthy like them. My capacity to trust was tested in later years, particularly around the events surrounding my sister's death. The trust I had for my brother-in-law was violated, when I learned of his adultery. In addition, a number of experiences in my working career, caused me to doubt the trustworthiness of the individuals I had entrusted (by virtue of their seniority). Their actions led me to doubt their motives and I became distrustful towards those in positions of authority. I often wonder whether these people took advantage of me due to

my naivety (due to my age and lack of worldly experience), which included my inability to anticipate their motives. Perhaps they took advantage because they felt justified, due to their positions, while lacking conscience, character, and being void of morals. I learnt a bitter lesson from these events, which have since led me to the view that trust cannot be restored, and I have become more cautious towards others, both in my work environment and people outside my immediate family. These incidents have reinforced for me that one's immediate family has your best interests at heart, as opposed to those people outside of family. Sometimes I feel saddened that the negative incidents in my life have influenced me to be more guarded in my approach towards others and my distrust towards them. I suspect that having a low propensity to trust, can hold me back from experiencing true joy and fulfilment in relationships.

The negative experiences I have shared in my narrative, where my ability to trust others was challenged, have been the catalyst for me in developing a greater 'awareness' of others and their intentions. My experiences have led me to understand that there are some people who will take advantage of a gentle nature and betray your trust. Their negative behaviour towards me has not in any way influenced me to become like them and I have no fears that I will become like them. These experiences have instead taught me to be more wary of others, but never to feel obligated to become like them in order to be accepted. For me, the situations where my trust was betrayed, felt in some ways liberating. My notions of trust moved from subjective and attached, to being objective and detached. I have learned to compute trust more accurately and am now more cautious in how I manage my relationships with others, whether they be personal or work oriented.

9.2.3 Conscientious

I view conscientiousness as a set of behaviours that are 'principled'—an inner sense of what is right. These behaviours are built upon expectations I have of myself in a variety of situations. They are in some respects performance standards and I am aware that in the past I tended to have demanding standards of behaviour in comparison to others. In the past, this may have led me to being critical and intolerant of others, who did not adhere to the same principles and standards. These past experiences have confirmed for me that whilst I may be conscientious, I should not expect the same from others—thus developing a tolerance towards others and their standard of behaviour.

Conscientiousness tends to be associated with social conservatism, being conventionally religious and to a lesser extent with authoritarian attitudes (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010; Saroglou, 2010; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). For me, religion has not influenced this trait because I am not religious, but possibly through the influence of authoritarian environments both at home, school and in my extra-curricular activities. Even through difficult times in my working career I have continued to be conscientious in my work, trying to deliver the best possible outcomes for my students in challenging working environments. According to Kandola and Egan (2014); Swami et al. (2012); Vecchione, Alessandri, Barbaranelli and Caprara (2011), people high in conscientiousness tend to place great value on security, conformity, following tradition, and obedience to authority. I would argue this view in that whilst I still consider myself conscientious, I would not regard myself as placing a great deal of emphasis on conforming to social norms, following tradition or always complying with authority, particularly in my 30s and 40s.

9.2.4 Perseverance

It is difficult to determine the origins of this trait, but feel that it has featured predominantly throughout my life. I was encouraged at an early age by my parents, through play, to complete and accomplish tasks and activities. This was strengthened in my extra-curricular activities (ballet and music), where perseverance was expected and encouraged by my parents and my teachers. Perhaps this regular physical activity (learning dance) influenced the habit of perseverance. I wonder why some people have higher internal drives than others and perhaps there is a scientific answer for this, in that it may be due to higher levels of ‘dopamine’ which is a prime motivating force to help keep pushing one to achieve goals, which equates to higher levels of perseverance (Lin & Kuo, 2013).

My perseverance was tested and further reinforced during my working career. I navigated my way through a turbulent work environment, not wishing to succumb to the unfair demands of senior management. Some may view my perseverance as stubbornness, however I view perseverance as something positive, namely strength. Stubbornness to me is a ‘dark’ or negative trait and is essentially an entrenched resistance to change—I would not regard myself as one who is resistant to change.

9.2.5 Ambitious

In terms of my personal motivation, I was driven by ambition rather than competition, from an early age. Ambition to me is an internal personal motivator in the pursuit of personal growth, whereas competitiveness is an external personal motivator, where other people affect the ultimate outcome. Reflecting back now, I would not consider myself a competitive child and I never really thought about outperforming others. Instead, I was ambitious, which was demonstrated through goal setting and seeking qualifications and awards along the way. In my teenage years competitiveness was encouraged, influenced by the all-girls' secondary school I attended and the constant reinforcement from my teachers that I was expected to perform well academically. Competitiveness was also reinforced through ballet and music competitions and examinations each year. To me, I viewed these occasions as competing against myself more so than my peers—the real journey was only against myself and my unrealised potential. I wanted to do well for myself, rather than measuring myself against others.

My ambition was fostered both by the schools I attended and by my parents who wanted me to perform well both academically and in the arts. My parents sacrificed their time and money in order to provide me with the best possible opportunities in order to facilitate this. When I reached my 30s I felt that my ambition both in my personal and working life somewhat diminished. A study by Aumann, Bond and Galinsky (2011) found that workers lose their ambition at the age of 35 and one of the likeliest causes of this is bringing up children. For me who does not have children, the reason for my loss of ambition may have been partly due to my career ambitions being quashed as a result of a number of negative incidents at work. In addition, I had already achieved a number of goals in my life and I was feeling content with where I was at in my life, both academically and financially, and instead found meaning in a wider set of experiences. When I became a teacher I became ambitious for others. I invested in my career in terms of dedicating my time and attention to my students, in order to facilitate the attainment of their goals.

9.2.6 Independent

Independence can be defined in a number of ways, but for me it is to completely support myself, both financially and emotionally without anyone's help, being free to make my

own decisions, not being influenced or controlled by others in matters of opinion or conduct. I do recognise that to some extent, we are governed by others' authority or jurisdiction, particularly in the context of a work environment. I appreciate that some people may regard independence as introversion and in my case this could be true, but I would not regard myself as being extremely introverted, which sits at the polar end of Goldberg's (1990) continuum. My sense of independence was established from an early age and still continues today. Having been raised virtually as an only child, I seemed to be content with my own company, seldom seeking out the company of others. I grew in independence influenced by the University environment which fostered one's individuality and self-expression. In my work environment, I refrained from taking on a collective identity and was confident to stand alone. My independence was also strengthened through a growing distrust of others outside my family, as a result of a number of negative events in both my personal and working career. Goldberg (1990) states that introverts generally feel a certain mistrust or caution with other people and often work better alone.

In terms of my financial independence, my approach towards money (from an early age) is motivated by my needs. Money gives me security—an 'enabler' which provides me with choices. If I chose to retire now (at 47) from full time employment, I would have enough income from multiple streams to not have to engage in full-time or part time employment. Whilst setting myself up for the future has meant that I have spent most of my life in the 'saver mode' rather than the 'spender mode', I was willing to make these sacrifices early on in my life to make sure I had a stable, worry free future. Some may view my inclination to save and prepare for my future as inhibiting me from enjoying other experiences, however I have no regrets and continue to enjoy my financial independence and the choices it brings with it.

9.2.7 Confident

As a young child I was not really aware of the notion of confidence and I do not think I ever felt as though I lacked confidence. I do recall being a shy child and I did refrain from mixing with other children my own age, but does shyness equate to a lack of confidence or indicate a sign of weakness? I do not believe so. I believe there is a misconception that confidence means being an extrovert, being loud, openly expressive and outgoing. These are all from the way things look, rather than what they are. Based on my study of my own

identity formation, I believe that confidence is something that is created within yourself, it is not something you are born with. Confidence is very much an internal feeling of self-assurance, an attitude of being comfortable in who you are as a person and believing in your abilities as an individual. My study shared a number of incidents in both personal and professional contexts where my values were challenged and in some cases undermined and in order to navigate this I needed to stay strong to my values. Confidence can be expressed in a number of ways and for me I would describe myself as being ‘quietly confident’, not being afraid to speak up for what I believed in. It means being able to differentiate constructive criticism and judgment, and which ones to take on and which to let go. It means not being afraid to make mistakes and learning from them and being true to myself.

I always recall my Mum saying that I was enrolled in ballet classes as a way for me to interact with others my own age and also to develop my confidence. As an introvert, I had grown up being told that I needed to be more confident and push myself forward more and herein lies the misconception—quiet people are often regarded as less confident. Quiet people are often underestimated and overlooked, with little or no acknowledgement of their achievements and may appear as unsocial and distant at times. Many quiet people are highly observant and analytical and tend to think before they speak. They know how to determine a situation, and are able to read what others may be feeling.

For me my confidence was strengthened through a number of events throughout my life. It began in my earlier years with the constant reassurance from my parents that I was capable of achieving great things. Reflecting back on my all-girls secondary school I remember the constant reinforcement “that girls can do anything”. Ballet performance also built my confidence, particularly on stage where I exhibited confidence in front of large audiences. My confidence was reinforced through the teenage years through the University environment and travelling overseas alone. Perhaps my ‘quiet confidence’ stemmed from my belief that my behaviour was not governed on what other people thought of me. Today, I continue to exhibit a quiet confidence and feel relaxed in presenting myself to and interacting with others—I do not need to validate myself to others and am impervious to negative opinions and fearless in my endeavours, erasing the fear of failure. The idiomatic expression ‘I feel comfortable in my own skin’ is relevant here, as opposed to me conveying an impression of confidence.

9.2.8 Resilient

Resilience to me is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy and personal conflict whilst remaining true to my values. I could have labelled this personality trait with other nouns including courage, fortitude and determination, but the important point for me is that I use resilience as a coping mechanism or tool to deal with life's setbacks and losses. I feel that it is important to have established a strong foundation so that when you experience times of crisis in your life, you are better prepared. My first traumatic experience was in my teenage years, with the death of my sister. I experienced emotional pain and sadness during this time and for some time after. From my experience the road to resilience involves considerable emotional distress and people do not all react the same to traumatic and stressful life events. My resilience was further reinforced in my 30s during my working career where I experienced emotional distress as a result of the toxic work environment and the personal conflict between myself and senior management.

I believe that my thought processes along with the caring and supportive relationships within my family, helped me navigate my way through these events. Relationships that created love and trust, provided me with role models and offered me encouragement and reassurance which helped bolster my resilience. As I alluded to in the literature review, close and supportive relationships with family members act as a valuable resource for individuals in the process of identity formation. The quality of the interaction between the family and individual, influences the development identity (Meeus et al., 2002). In addition to this I believe that having a positive view of myself and confidence in my strengths and abilities along with the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses, assisted me through these difficult times. I continue to possess a strong resolve—whether acquired due to the trauma of losing my sister at the age of 17 or something that was innate from an early age, I am unsure of.

9.2.9 Caring

In terms of finding out who I am, I have come to understand that I was born with a gentle nature and do not believe it was something that has developed throughout my life. I am aware that my gentle nature, has in some instances been abused or taken advantage of by others, who may view this as a weakness. I was aware that my work as a teacher required a caring and helpful nature towards students, and always felt that the notion of caring was

something that came naturally, rather than a trait that one had to learn. I naively assumed that the ability to care and empathise with others was a universal value. Having been raised in a caring home environment, I thought that this was the norm, only to find out in both my personal life and my working career that it was not. It was not until my 30s, that I became aware of my caring nature. My ability to empathise with others, surfaced in my working career as a result of a number of work incidents involving conflict. I felt a sense of care towards my fellow colleagues, offering them my time and a listening ear. In relation to Goldberg's (1990) framework this concern for or devotion to the welfare of others, could be termed as altruistic, and appears within the *agreeableness* dimension.

I was aware that I was working in an environment where senior management showed little care and consideration towards staff, including myself and I observed the impact of their behaviour unfold before me. Even today, I wonder why those in leadership positions lacked emotional intelligence and why they neglected to see the world through others' eyes and understand their unique perspectives. Perhaps they saw this caring quality as a weakness, rather than being fundamental to good management. To me, management demonstrated tunnel vision along with a self-centred approach. Preoccupied with their own importance, the managers I reported to seemed narcissistic, grandiose and arrogant. They devalued their staff, showing little empathy for others and had little, if any, conscience. I felt that they exploited people without any remorse. Perhaps narcissistic managers struggle with fragile self-esteem, having a sense of emptiness arising from their lack of true self-love and inability to care about other people, or about abstract values such as honesty and integrity.

9.2.10 Social conscience

For me, my expectations of society are tied to my moral values which relates to Mead's (1934) view that instead of having an internalised expectation of what society expects of you, the individual possesses certain expectations of society. A number of incidents expressed in chapters four to eight, influenced me in terms of challenging my views on what I would consider to be right and wrong and I developed a social conscience towards some of these issues. In some instances I acted on that urge to put right what to me seemed like an injustice. This aligns with Freeman's (2014) view that "to form an identity, then, is not only about articulating who and what one is, but what one stands for, what one considers right and good (p. 18).

My approach now (at 47) to these incidents would be somewhat different based on experience and hindsight. I now take a more pragmatic approach by distancing myself from getting involved in others' issues whether they be in a personal or professional context. This means having less of an emotional connection with the plights of others, being less likely to extend myself for other people and becoming more 'self-centred' as a way of self-protection or self-preservation. In my 24 years in the tertiary sector I reflect on the changes I have observed on the educational landscape, whereby Universities are run as corporate entities in the pursuit of profits, pitting staff against each other. This shapes one into becoming more self-centred in order to survive in an environment such as this. Whilst this approach naturally challenges my caring nature, this view has been shaped by my past experiences and I have learnt to consider my own needs first rather than others. Over the years, my ability to empathise with others has lessened. I had always thought that if you overcame one of life's many challenges you were naturally well-placed to empathise with others facing similar struggles. However, having endured difficult experiences myself and my view that life events can be readily conquered if one has the resilience and confidence, has led me to having a decreased compassion for others in similar situations.

The ensuing chapter is titled looking backwards and looking forwards. This chapter is an opportunity for me to reflect on my past experiences and their influence on my identity along with the view of looking forward to the future and what it holds for me in terms of the shaping of my identity.

Chapter 10: Looking backwards and forwards

“An unexamined life is not worth living”

(Socrates c.469–399 BC)

10.1 Introduction

I refrained from labelling this section ‘conclusion’, due to the autobiographical nature of this study and the ongoing emergence and shaping of my identity which lies ahead. Instead, I have expressed this chapter as ‘looking backwards and forwards’, which does not draw the study to a conclusion, but rather opens the study up to emerging possibilities based on my past experiences. I see my autobiography as having a nomadic nature, an emergent rather than a planned mission hopefully leading to others using autobiography as a way to interpret identity. I regard the capturing of my story as a site for exploring the process of identity construction, it is an unfolding story of my journey of identity, and while I may have laid down some of this path while walking, the path continues to be laid down and walked upon by myself, along with the influence of others. As McAdams (1988, 1993, 2001) suggests, identity takes the form of a personal life story in which life phases may be considered ‘chapters’ in the individual’s evolving autobiography. This chapter also includes the required academic elements of theoretical and methodological contributions, challenges and limitations and opportunities for further academic research.

10.2 Looking Backwards—Hindsight

My main aim with this study was to share my experiences and thoughts on my own identity construction, in order to legitimise my view that there are many ways of envisaging identity construction. My purpose was not to say there is a finite way in which one’s own identity is constructed, but rather to stimulate debate on it, to encourage reflection on views held, to consider other possibilities and to appreciate the many ways in which identity construction can be conceptualised. I hope that my study has in some way, helped demystify the complexities around identity construction. For me looking backwards and looking forwards is a form of dialogic interplay. My past, present and future are not separate from each other and this fits with the notion of reflecting on one’s prior experiences and thinking of myself as a complex emerging living system. My past,

the experiences I have had and the opportunities taken or missed, have shaped me into becoming who I am today.

The process of looking back over past incidents has provided me with a profound source of insight, understanding, and self-knowledge which aligns with Freeman's (2014) view that:

The process of identity formation is frequently one of taking-stock, of looking inward, and trying to discern who and what one is, in the eyes of others as well as in one's own inner depths. Following on the hindsight idea, this looking inward frequently assumes the form of looking backward. (p. 16)

Relating this to my own study, the examination of my early life set the context for my study, by reflecting on experiences that have led me to the place I exist in now, giving me a better understanding of the influences that have contributed to my identity formation. As emerged in chapter four, my personal identity developed from an early age, something I was naturally oblivious to as a young child. Having undertaken this study I now see that my identity was shaped through exposure to a diversity of internal and external stimuli and contexts. Emerging from my narrative were the key influences on the formation of my identity which were situated around; *home events* (events related to living at home and family); *work events* (interpersonal experiences, changes or conflicts with work colleagues and students); *educational events* (events related to kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary education); *extra curricula events* (events related to music and dance); *social events* (events related to community); *travel events* (experiences involving travel to another country and experiencing a new culture); *mortality events* (experiences involving bereavement and major illness).

As I look back on the incidents throughout my life, I have come to understand that they are located within particular contexts and these contexts have emerged as an important influence in my own identity formation. Jones and McEwen (2000) refer to the incidents in one's life as 'contextual influences' which include childhood experiences, sociocultural conditions and relationships. Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995) speak of these life events as 'transitions' that result in "changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). I came upon the following definition of context offered by Elbaz-Luwisch (2007, p. 388) who regards context "as a place that holds meaning, to the persons who inhabit it". This definition suggests to me that context influences people

differently depending on their own values and the personal response and meaning they assign to it—context alone cannot influence anything.

It is the way in which we respond to our contexts, our interpretation of them, and the meaning that we give to this interpretation, that grants context its singular influence over us. Therefore although context influences identity, it is the interplay between the personal human response and the context that actively constructs it. Our biographies intervene in the objective response and make it subjective, our personal histories influence our interpretations and our value systems play a role in our judgements and choices. All of these bring a certain power to the ways in which we view and respond to our contexts. Perhaps this is what Greek Philosopher Epictetus' was inferring when he said "it is not what happens to you in life, but how you react to it that matters". Interestingly Erikson's (1968) psychosocial model which although provides a useful framework to interpreting personal identity construction, does not consider 'context' and I believe the inclusion of 'context' would add an interesting dimension.

In terms of my own exploration into my own identity formation, the contexts that I experienced either refined, or in some way challenged my identity—but ultimately they have defined it. Each context brought with it its own set of relationships and the responses from those relationships have been a powerful influence on the construction of my identity. My personal response to the many contexts I experienced, have been defining influences on my identity formation—the type of person that I am with my own values, beliefs and idiosyncrasies, responds in particular ways and with particular emotions to particular contextual influences. Take for example the following contexts; if I had not been situated in a stable family context, with supportive and loving parents as role models and my first teachers, maybe I would not have had the opportunities presented to me. If I had not attended that particular kindergarten, primary or secondary school, each of them holding a specific ethos, I might not have been influenced to pursue a career. If I had not been exposed to a toxic culture in my work environment, I may have not come to learn its bitter lessons and also its blessings. If I had not taken up the opportunity to teach in Niue and the Middle East, I would have missed the opportunity of travelling to new destinations and learning about other cultures. If I had not purchased property, I would not have come to experience the joy of home ownership and also the bitter lessons associated with it. If I had not been encouraged to pursue postgraduate study, I would not have been open to new thinking that this level of study provided.

When I reflect on how the incidents in my life have shaped my identity thus far, I would say it was the emotion that was evoked due to those experiences that have influenced my identity. The emotional response that I experienced at the time was as a result of a challenge to my principles and values. This aligns with the findings of Singer and Moffitt (1992) who suggest that life story events are those which are ‘self-defining’, events which cause strong emotions, have been thought about many times, feel important and help individuals understand who they are. In a similar vein, Taylor (1992) states that quite often we understand as personal identity, those aspects of ourselves that form the basis for our self-esteem. This formulation helps explain how we understand identity to be such a powerful motivator of action and how matters of identity can engage such deep and powerful emotions. It is possible that developmental tasks and crises mentioned by scholars such as Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980) are contextual influences manifested through various events, experiences and relationships. The emotional reactions that result from experiencing such contextual influences may provide the impetus for movement from one stage of identity to another.

For me most notably the events surrounding mortality (the death of my eldest sister), job redundancy and situations where I experienced conflict with another person/s have impacted me emotionally. In some instances they challenged and/or undermined my values, integrity and moral principles, which in turn felt as though my identity was being violated in some way. When I was navigating my way through the low points in my life (the death of my sister, a toxic work environment, job redundancy and conflict with others), my identity was being challenged. I was in a time of identity diffusion and I was being shaped by the emotional impact of these events. This aligns with the work of Kroger (2000) whereby my personal and professional identities were consciously impacting on each other, with my values and principles being tested in my working environment, bringing about a plethora of mixed emotions and ultimately a challenge to my identity. It could be said that the reaction to these contextual influences evoked an emotion that either nourished particular dimensions of my identity or else thwarted it. This aligns with Taylor’s (1992) definition of personal identity as “defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose” (p. 27). In terms of Taylor’s interpretation I see personal identity as a personal moral code or compass, a set of moral principles, ends, or goals that a person uses as a normative framework and a guide to action. In my study I see my personal identity as

being shaped by the emotional impact of my lived experiences which in some way extends Taylor's definition of personal identity from 'who I am', to 'who I am really'. However, one must be mindful that personal identity is not fundamentally about moral orientation as this view would be too narrow.

In relation to my working career I think about how different my life would have been had I not pursued a career in teaching. Would I have experienced the same or similar conflicts in another job and would these conflicts have engendered the same emotional response to the context that was at play? Sutton and Wheatley, (2003) state that our day-to-day experiences of our work are entangled with our emotional response and very often are controlled by them. If an incident has a significant impact on you, it has the ability to fully transform your personality based on what you experience and take from the specific incident. One inevitably modifies one's personality based on certain experiences that one faces throughout life, due to the certain feelings that one has to overcome based on the incident. Woodward's (2004) view differs in that it is essential to differentiate identity from personality and suggests that identity is something an individual actively claims in relation to their social position, while personality refers to a feature, such as a trait someone 'has' or what they are 'like' as a person. Based on my study, I would challenge Woodward's (2004) view, in that personality and identity are inextricably linked and I would even go so far as to assert that identity is a direct outcome of one's personality.

It is important to highlight that how a person deals with a life changing incident/s can determine the resulting identity, suggesting that identity comes from choice, and choice comes from identity. Because each person is a unique individual who has a set of beliefs and values that are intrinsically personal, each person by their very nature, will have a different response to personal and professional encounters that will ultimately define the construction of their identity. Therefore the findings from my study may not be applied to the same extent to others, as each individual would use a different set of methods to cope with the impact of those contextual influences and also people react differently to those contextual influences based on their individual level of emotional development. A future avenue of research could involve exploring the interplay between the emotional and cognitive reactions to contextual influences as they facilitate identity development and the methods an individual uses, to cope with the impact of those contextual influences.

For me, my identity has been influenced by both high and low points in my life and this is supported by Kolbenschlag (1998) who states that autobiographical writing interrogates and examines both the joy and pain of our lives and forces us to look at the myths, reality frames, worldviews, biases that motivate us consciously and unconsciously. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) state that autobiographical writing is a way to write about the context of a life. It is always a retelling because the life to which it supposedly refers is already a kind of narrative construct. The incidents I have shared in my study have been the catalyst for the development of ten personal characteristics that I alluded to in chapter nine. The high points have engendered reinforcement of existing traits and a strengthening resolve and the low points have engendered a reaction and in some instances a growth in personal development, a change or turning point in my life. Maybe this is what Kegan (1982) meant when he said that these life transitions provide opportunities for growth and development in that they often create disequilibrium that demands reorganisation of meaning and of self in relation to others. My view is that I am not *defined* by these incidents in my life, but rather *shaped* by them. If someone were to ask me exactly how these incidents have been instrumental, my response would be “*it is what you do with your interpretation of these incidents that shapes your identity*”. If you choose to grow, gain insight, and adapt, put the experience to use by educating others, or implementing changes in your life or the lives of others, then it becomes a healthy, functional part of your identity. This aligns with Freeman’s (2010) view that “hindsight plays an integral role in shaping and deepening moral life” (p. 5).

As I alluded to in the introduction, my study was an exploration on the construction of my personal identity rather than a study about ‘teacher identity’. Having undertaken this study on my own personal identity formation I see a connection between my personal identity and my role as teacher. I see the authenticity of teachers rooted in their ability to be able to express their personal thoughts, feelings and knowledge in the classroom and if a teacher is self-aware, he or she is better able to empower students, and therefore enhance learning. I would challenge the view of Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) that ‘teacher identity’ stands at the core of the teaching profession and thereby provides the framework for teachers in the construction of their own ideas of ‘how to be’ and ‘how to act’ as a teacher. My view is that ‘personal identity’ stands at the core of the teaching profession in that having a self-awareness of one’s being, being able to express one’s uniqueness in the way one teaches. All teachers should be asking themselves “what is it

that I am giving to my students that is only mine to give? What is it that I do differently and that only I do it this way? What do I give that others don't?"

10.3 Looking Forwards—Emerging Possibilities

This process of reflecting back on past experiences and their influence on my personal identity has been somewhat of a cathartic journey. Whilst I did this exercise unaided (without the help of a facilitator, i.e. counsellor or psychologist), others may choose to engage in this exercise with the help of a facilitator to help guide them through the process. For me, the act of looking inward has led me to becoming more self-aware and self-accepting, hence having a more meaningful view of my life. As I look forwards to the future having looked back on the incidents that have shaped my identity so far, I know that my understanding is incomplete and there is more to learn and experience about identity construction. As Freeman (2010) purports "it is only by coming to terms with one's past in the present, that one can move toward the future armed with a better, more adequate vision of who and what one ought to be" (p. 19). This study in which I reflected on past incidents, has given me perspective on those incidents, providing me with insight and contributing to my moral growth—a notion first coined by Freeman (2010).

For me, context has proven to be significant in the construction of my identity and looking ahead, I am aware that I will come across similar contexts in addition to new ones. I recognise that my identity is in a state of constant development and is influenced by the society and culture in which I reside. I concur with Gergen (1991), that the socially constructed self does not have an external, fixed reality, knowledge is created when human beings filter their identities through the lens of their subjectively lived experiences. I will take with me into the future an open-mindedness and willingness to consider others' perspectives—this notion is useful in preventing me from jumping to assumptions about others and their response to situations and reminds me of the importance of reasoned judgement in my interpretation of behaviour. This reflective practice opens up my capacity to interpret myself and others in a variety of ways.

The incidents I have experienced have carried with them life lessons that have remained with me, long past the initial experience. I agree with Pillemer's (1998, 2001) thinking that these lessons have either reinforced my values and belief system or provided the impetus to shape my identity in some way. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998)

write of human beings who are shaped and changed by the discourses of power that they encounter. This is a world that is lodged in a particular historical and social or cultural context and a world which changes as it changes us. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) state that “this self-practice occupies the interface between intimate discourses, inner speaking, and bodily practices formed in the past and the discourses and practices to which people are exposed, willingly or not, in the present” (p. 32). As a result of my past experiences, I do feel a heightened sense of resilience and confidence and my approach to incidents like those I have shared in this study, would be somewhat different now based on maturity and the benefit of hindsight.

Some of the incidents I have shared in my story have been the catalyst for cultivating my moral resilience (Rushton, 2017) which will in the future, assist me in situations and enable me to remain grounded in my values and be clear and open to other points of view. I have a better understanding that integrity for one person may be different from another, but being able to ride the waves of adversity and come back to a place where I feel whole is the core of building moral resilience. Looking forward I feel that moral resilience is a pathway for me to being able to re-orient my attention to the important grounding of integrity, that sense of wholeness of harmony between who I am, what I do and how I choose to engage with the people I interact with.

Rushton’s (2017) work on moral resilience is relevant to my own resilience development in terms of engaging oneself from distress, from situations where we feel victimised and/or powerless and where our integrity is being undermined, to a point where we can get back on course. Rushton’s (2017) view is that individuals have the ability to cultivate their own moral resilience through their moral adversity. There is the opportunity to learn, to grow, potentially even to change in positive ways, to make meaning out of the situations that we find ourselves in. So as we learn from experiences, then we are building on our knowledge about how to deal with these situations and that even in the midst of these really challenging difficult situations, we can find the evidence of possibility for what we might learn about ourselves and what we might learn about others. Rushton’s (2017) ideas around moral resilience are very similar to Freeman (2010), who suggests that hindsight plays an integral role in the process of moral growth. Through hindsight, there emerges the opportunity not only to see the possible errors of our ways but to transcend them and thereby to move on to better ways of being in the world (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

As I look ahead I wonder if our identities are a continuum of awareness of ourselves at any instant in time? Whilst it may be untenable to guess at what my future self will be like, some elements that I take forward into the future suggest that my identity has been shaped through a number of adverse incidents, which in turn has shaped my identity into one that is resilient and confident. Other characteristics include a strong sense of self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-image, perhaps as a result of my upbringing whereby a strong foundation was laid along with positive reinforcement by my parents, indoctrination by my secondary school and participation in activities such as music and dance (both performance and teaching). I feel that the development of these ‘self-like’ traits has helped build a layer of protection, enabling me to be less dependent on what others think of me. Whilst I appreciate diversity of opinion from others, I am confident of my own, placing little emphasis on others’ opinions, which makes me less vulnerable to their rejection and criticism. A strong sense of emotional and mental stability also contributes to a healthy self-acceptance, whereby I am not relying on measuring up to peoples’ expectations and not seeking validation from others. Whilst past incidents suggest the development of particular qualities that I take forward with me, there are some which I am probably currently unaware of that have yet to emerge.

Looking forward, Erikson’s (1950/1993) theory of psychosocial development suggests that at this point in my life (late 40s), I should be entering stage seven *generativity* versus *stagnation*—generativity meaning an adult’s ability to care for another person. In my case this is true, as I am primary care giver to my elderly parents, which I am very much enjoying and am happy to continue with (*incident 66, 67*). I envisage that these responsibilities will be the catalyst for me either taking early retirement from full-time employment or perhaps engaging in part-time work. Looking back on the frustrations I experienced during my teaching career (chapter eight), makes me think about whether I should consider a change of career. I do enjoy the autonomy and job satisfaction that comes with being in the classroom, and perhaps the option of becoming self-employed in the teaching field (ballet and/or piano) may offer a similar, if not more fulfilling experience—one which offers me even more flexibility in terms of when and how I work. I am fortunate that my financial position means that I do not have to work if I choose not to. I am comforted in the fact that my future will be one that is financially secure, based on sound investments from my earlier years.

I think ahead and wonder what life after work will look like, which aligns with Erikson's (1950/1993) stage eight—*ego integrity* versus *despair*. I refrain from referring to these as 'retirement years'—whilst it may be retirement from work per se, one can find stimulation and fulfilment in other activities that are not associated with paid employment. Interestingly Erikson's (1950/1993) model suggests that individuals enter this stage at the age of 65, which I contest is perhaps a little premature based on the increasing life expectancy of New Zealanders who are living longer and healthier lives (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). Having focussed a lot of my energy on a teaching career with no parental responsibilities, I think about how I will transition into this period of my life and hope that I continue to maintain good health during this time.

10.4 Research Objectives

As I revisit my research objectives set out in the introduction, I feel that they have been addressed through this autobiographical narrative. These included:

- Establishing autobiography as an approach to researching identity construction.
- Employing an autobiographical approach to interpreting my own identity construction.
- Employing an incident based approach to interpreting my own identity construction.
- Tracking the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, "meaning" and "significance"—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present moment.
- Sharing my experiences and thoughts on how my identity has emerged and continues to emerge over time. The research has helped me by means of self-reflection to understand myself regarding finding the answers to the question: Who am I?
- Stimulating debate on identity development and encouraging others to reflect upon their own life experiences in the shaping of their identity. I hope my writing stimulates and benefits readers to think critically and participate in self-reflection.

10.5 Theoretical Contributions

In order to provide a theoretical underpinning for this study, I explored the work of a number of key contributors in field of identity studies, ranging from Freud's (1923) studies which was further built upon by Erikson (1968) in his psychosocial framework of identity construction, along with Goldberg's (1990) five-factor model of personality. The work of other writers in this field was reviewed including Marcia (1966, 1967, 1976, 1980, 1993a, 1993b, 2002a, 2002b) who examined the identity status paradigm and McAdams' (2001) notion of the life story model as a tool for interpreting identity formation.

My interpretation of self and identity is one that represents both change and stability, sameness and differentness, the static and the dynamic. I see identity as durable, while also acknowledging that, in day-to-day living, one's experience of 'who am I?' is continually being configured. I have experienced a number of events in my life that have influenced my identity in some way, shape or form. The actions I took, the people I spent time with and the principles I chose to defend have shaped my identity. Through following the principles behind my identity I have constructed an identity that encompasses my core values and unique choices. This aligns with the view of Weiss and Bass (2002), who assert that a core self does exist "even though the situations of our lives change, our personalities, although they may be modified as we adapt to new situations, have at their core a continuous self" (p.65). Freeman's (2014) notion of 'double triad' is also particularly relevant here where he states that:

The first triad, which I call 'spheres of temporality', suggests that narrative identity emerges in and through the interplay of past, present, and future in the form of remembering, acting, and imagining. As for the second triad, which I call 'spheres of otherness', I suggest that this temporal interplay is itself interwoven with our relation to other people, to the non-human world (e.g., nature, art), and to those moral and ethical goods that serve to orient and direct the course of human lives. (p. 15)

By employing the technique of narrative inquiry and reflecting on my experiences, I can see over time the development of new perspectives and behaviour changes. I have been able to extract meaning through the process of examining critical experiences throughout my life and concur with Clandinin and Connelly (2004) that any piece of autobiographical

writing, is a particular reconstruction of an individual narrative and there could be other reconstructions. Writing an autobiography has enabled me to bring what some may see as unrelated incidents to the surface, where my thoughts are emerging at a conscious level at a later stage in life. Writing stories is a way of learning, in a very public way. My research and writing on these events have led me to better understand the influences in my life that have shaped my identity. These events as highlighted in chapters four to eight, related to seven themes; *home, work, education, extra curricula, social, travel, and mortality*. The highs and lows I have experienced throughout my life so far, have had an influence in shaping who I am, with some of these incidents being turning points in my life. These turning points, particularly those where I experienced adversity, have resulted in a shift in my views and behaviour, which in turn has built resilience and confidence.

There will be aspects of my personal story that have hopefully resonated with the reader, confirming the status quo, creating a heightened awareness, insight and feeling of association with their own lived experiences. I am aware that the contents of this research may have evoked an emotional response and some level of discomfort for those who read it, but may also offer the reader opportunities for the future. My story may open new possibilities for the reader, and encourage them to consider similar and different connections, whether they be small or large, that might be relevant in the exploration of their own identity. In terms of assessing whether I have achieved the criteria for the quality and effectiveness of this project, lies with the reader rather than with me as the creator of this work, and this fits with the postmodern idea as posed by Rosenau (2001), that we are all interpreters of life texts, and our own 'reading' is of value.

As I continue to navigate my way through life, I can continue to expect that future experiences, whether they be positive or negative, will continue to shape my identity. There are two aspects that have come to light during this study which some readers may or may not consider profound but for me they are. Firstly, that change in one's life is inevitable and that it brings with it joy but also challenges. In my case these challenges have been instrumental in shaping my identity into one of resilience and self-confidence. Secondly, everyone has the ability to fully transform themselves through life's experiences. If one is surrounded by a specific group of supportive people, then that group can significantly influence one's personal identity. For me this unconditional support came from my parents who provided me with a stable foundation in terms of my upbringing and also as my first teachers.

10.6 Methodological Contributions

This thesis offers a methodological contribution in two areas, firstly through the use of an “incident” based perspective and secondly by tracking the emergence of my identity through exploring the relationship between then and now, “meaning” and “significance”—what such an incident meant at the time it happened and what its significance came to be looking backward from the present moment. As I previously alluded to in chapter one, one aim of this study was to employ an autobiographical approach to interpret my identity construction. Whilst the writing of an autobiography has faced criticism in the past as an indulgent self-examination of oneself, I argue that it depends on the purpose for which it is used. In my case the partnering of self (me) and the topic under investigation (identity construction), represents a methodological contribution in the use of autobiography as an approach to researching identity construction and the value of narrative inquiry in helping me and the readers of this thesis understand the impact key experiences had on my identity development.

The articulation of the philosophical issues of introspection and narrative construction through autobiography are central to theory building. The narrative serves as a lens which recognises the meaningfulness of experiences by noting how they function as parts of a whole. Narrative renders individual lives intelligible, both by linking together disparate elements and by connecting individual lives to broader aspects of humanity. Freeman (2014) regards the work of hindsight, as being very much about our relationship to others and to the larger world. Narrative has both an epistemological dimension as the means by which we understand and know the world, and an ontological dimension as it structures our being in the world, through our telling of stories to ourselves and others about ourselves (Lawler, 2000). To understand my own sense of self, I used my autobiographical narrative as a means by which to examine my own ontological and epistemological being. Whilst narrative is often thought of mainly in terms of its orientation to the past, this thesis has demonstrated the use of narrative in terms of its bearing upon the future and the process of articulating the self-to-be, or the self that ought to be—a notion originally proposed by Freeman (2010).

Another aim of this study was to stimulate debate on identity construction, encouraging others to reflect upon their own life experiences in the shaping of their identity. I feel that this thesis has illustrated how reflecting on identity through autobiography and in

particular autobiographical development of complex expressions of self-identity, contribute to knowledge (expressed as stimulating resonance and debate). Autobiographical writing is a way to write about a whole life or particular events and in this study creating, imagining and re-interpreting historical data by recalling details through an autobiographical narrative of significant events in my life so far. The process of autobiographical narration, with its delving into the past and into memory, forms an important part of identity construction and a means of interpreting past experiences that shape and allow greater understanding of the present self. As McNay (2000) states, it incorporates aspects of identity which transcend the traditional oppositional humanist and post-structuralist views on identity construction.

[As] the idea of narrative shares the poststructural emphasis on the constructed nature of identity; there is nothing inevitable or fixed about the narrative coherence that may emerge from the flux of events. Yet, at the same time, the centrality of narrative to a sense of the self suggests that there are powerful constraints or limits to the ways in which identity may be changed. (p. 80)

Identity in the humanities and social sciences has in many instances been approached in both reified and impersonal ways. The complexity and ubiquitous nature of identity research has been noted by Kerpelman (2001) as requiring different research approaches. In a similar vein, Schwartz (2001) calls for different methodological approaches to identity research, with Whitty (2002) specifically calling for narrative investigations. This study has hopefully addressed this void, with an example of narrative identity analysis, using an autobiographical narrative technique for exploring identity which does not appear to have been employed in studies. The significance of this thesis lies in it being written in an effort to fulfil the need for experiential accounts. Experiential themes extracted from these events have contributed to the development of my personal identity. This is an extension of Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) idea that narrative inquiry as a methodology, necessitates a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.

In this research I have made extensive use of a disciplined approach to introspection. As the researcher, the researched and the writer of this work, I have reflected on the way that introspection has been deeply embedded in entire research projects, making a novel and powerful methodological contribution. The role of the researcher as the key informant of the study, whether through the formalised collection of introspection by me as the

researcher in narrative mode, or in more unconscious informal ways, has been highlighted in this study. Using different types of introspections and being reflexive, methodically thinking about thinking, has added richness to the findings. Methodologically, this approach of narrative inquiry in understanding lived experience in the formation of identity, is believed to be somewhat unique, having the advantage of truly allowing the personal experiences to emerge. The significance of my study is the intimacy of the material collected, which offers advantages in the extent and depth of detail in the data collected that would not normally be available if conventional interviews with strangers were relied on. My study makes a contribution to academic autobiographical methodology, arguing for its ability to honestly locate the researcher in the field of inquiry and enhance the richness of the study.

The use of autobiography as a method for exploring identity, generated 'rich data' highlighting moments of epiphany and 'life changing' instances that have influenced me throughout my later life. My story was a way of knowing, it was an individually and contextually situated story, as such it is life history or narrative (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) and it links experience and story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). It was personal and subjective, yet also practical in terms of stimulating resonance and debate. The use of autobiography in writing and reflecting on events, was both cathartic and confessing, offering tangential benefits which involved levels of self-actualisation and personal growth. This journey has been one of self-enlightenment and knowledge acquisition. The study enabled me to fully appreciate what it meant to construct a sense of self and a life narrative in relation to the larger social world of family, friends, education and work. This journey of writing enabled me to explore what it meant to see myself as embodying particular ethical and moral values, viewing my identity as connected to and expressed by both personal and professional experiences.

10.7 Challenges and Limitations

This study has been challenging and there have been limitations in the development of this work. One of the challenges was my underestimating the emotional cost of the research which challenged both my intellectual and emotional tenacity. I had done some reading around this and was reminded that although it has been argued that vulnerability gives authority to autobiographic inquiries (Behar, 1997; Ryang, 2000), the same vulnerability requires careful and attentive supervision. Because autobiographic theses

contain personal elements, one must be prepared and able to separate critique of the manner and quality of discourse, from criticism of the self. I was aware that heightened levels of self-revelation positioned in the academic arena would be open to scrutiny, but I was able to navigate this journey because of the trusting relationship with my supervisors where my self-interrogation, fear and declaration were supported. This support included the insightful and rigorous questioning imposed by my supervisors.

This study has challenged me in terms of it being the first qualitative study I have undertaken in my career. In terms of research design I began this project in a naïve way, having little experience with narrative or autobiography as research. This required me to make a paradigmatic shift in terms of moving from traditionalism to constructivism and ultimately a metamorphosis from a novice educator and researcher to a constructivist/postmodernist educator and researcher. The methodology had specific limitations that brought their own challenges, because there were no precedents on which to draw from. I was navigating a research process in which there were few other studies similar to mine, that had used the same methodology in a study of identity construction.

A further limitation was the nebulous nature of the topic of identity and the challenges of managing the literature on identity theory and refining the literature directly applicable to this self-study. This study by its nature, concerns itself with the identity construction of one person and in a study of self-identity, each person brings their own values, own biography and own knowledge and interpretations. Interpreted through this lens, each person is a unique individual, with a unique process of personal identity construction. There are common factors for example, contexts that influence identity, but it is the unique response or interpretation of these contexts that influence the construction of meaning. It is difficult to offer principles that might be of value to others and the best I can do is to increase the awareness of the value of a conscious sense of personal identity, and an awareness of the way in which the personal response to context influences its construction. Identity construction is a holistic process that is influenced by personal and professional biography (written or unwritten), one that is fluid and unique and not defined by an end result.

Another challenge was the time constraint due to this study occurring while I was employed full time. When I look back on my study as a full time undergraduate student, I did not fully appreciate the luxury of being able to dedicate my time solely to study. A

further limitation that I must acknowledge were the demands and expectations of writing articulately for research at doctoral level. This meant that while I was learning about the content of my study, I was also entering a journey of learning about the process of research and writing, navigating my way through the research process and a methodology that was unfamiliar to me. There were many times that I wanted to abandon the study for more traditional research but am glad that I persevered, as I felt some comfort in sharing my story, that would not have been possible had I undertaken a more conventional project.

10.8 Opportunities for Further Academic Research

This self-study has been deeply enriching for me personally, even though I have opened up myself to the scrutiny of others. This work presents incidents up to the age of 47 and therefore offers an unfolding story of my exploration of self-identity. There is still so much more to discover about the ongoing development of my identity and I expect my views on identity will evolve further as the years go on. A future avenue of research could involve exploring the interplay between the emotional and cognitive reactions to contextual influences as they facilitate identity development and the methods an individual uses, to cope with the impact of those contextual influences.

To those critics who may ask how this study can be of value to others—sharing my story does not imply that readers should learn from what I have written, but I hope that my work has increased the awareness of the value of reflective practice, advocating autobiography as one of the deepest ways of reflection. An understanding of others’ ‘identity’ can help us comprehend divergent views and this understanding can foster more respectful listening, deeper dialogue, and better informed judgment—vital skills for citizens in today’s diverse society. One’s identity is one’s vector, it is the path defined by what one does and why one does it.

From my study I have come to understand that one’s identity is not finite, but continues to emerge throughout one’s lifetime, hence my thesis title ‘*Emerging Identity*’. The phrase “*laying down a path in walking*” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 2016, p. 237) describes what we do as we journey through life and I think about all the people who have walked with me, or intersected my path and their influence on my identity. I would encourage others, including colleagues and students to embark upon and experience this journey, so that their identity construction may become an ‘awareness process’ that influences and

contributes to their personal and professional life, making the value of one's commitment to knowledge generation deeper, wider and infinitely more meaningful. By understanding oneself, one has a lesser chance of experiencing role confusion. For me, I look forward to the future and the ongoing emergence of my identity. The question I wish to leave for readers to ponder is *how have you been shaped into the person you are today?*—everyone has a different story to be told.

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