An autoethnographic study: My spiritual journey for connectedness through meaningful work and its implications for the practice of guidance counselling

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An autoethnographic study: My spiritual journey for connectedness through meaningful work and its implications for the practice of guidance counselling

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for the award of a degree at this or any other university. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation on request.

Signed:

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Aoife Shevlin
Disclosure

What if you don’t have the words to convey your inner feelings?
What if you don’t even understand what’s happening inside of you?
What if all you know is that what’s on the inside is working its way out of you?

What if outside they insist on you communicating in their way?
What if they can only hear what they want to hear expressed?
What if all they believe is that keeping it locked up inside of you is best?

I am as afraid as you for me to explore the language of my fears.
It’s a language that doesn’t know how to convey its meaning.
It’s been locked-up for so many years.

On the inside, these secrets held tight within me, I bound them with all my might.
But the ties have begun to loosen.
And I have begun to fight.

On the outside, you feed its belly with your silence while it hisses at my sides.
Occasionally I look at it sidelong and sometimes it even turns and glares.
Our eyeballs touching, its nostrils flared.

I have come to know it and the darkness that it holds.
But I am light, a sleeping giant; and my prophesy must be told.

Aoife Shevlin

(May 2015)
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Table of Contents

Declaration ................................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................... v
Table of Contents ....................................................................................................................... vi
List of Appendices ................................................................................................................... viii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................. ix
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ x
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1
  1.0 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
  1.1. Context and justification for the research study ...................................................... 1
  1.2. Researcher as subject of the study ................................................................. 2
  1.3. Aims and objectives ...................................................................................... 4
  1.4. Research methodology ................................................................................ 4
  1.5. Outline the research study ........................................................................ 5
  1.6. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 5
Chapter 2: Literature Review ...................................................................................................... 7
  2.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 7
  2.1. The traditional concept of career ................................................................. 7
  2.2. The postmodern concept of career .............................................................. 11
  2.3. Contextualising guidance policy ............................................................................ 14
  2.4. Contextualising the women’s life-work roles .................................................. 14
  2.5. Contextualising professionalism in guidance ................................................... 19
  2.6. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 19
Chapter 3: Methodology ........................................................................................................... 21
  3.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 21
  3.1. Research questions of study ........................................................................ 21
  3.2. Situating my spiritual ‘problem’ in a research paradigm: Interpretivist .......... 21
  3.3. Situating myself in my spiritual problem: autoethnographic methodology ..... 23
  3.4. Getting into my head: methods of data collection ........................................... 25
  3.5. Making sense of what is in my head: data analysis ........................................... 28
  3.6. The space for research rigour and reflexivity in autoethnographic study ......... 29
  3.7. Using my informed judgement: ethical considerations ..................................... 30
  3.8. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 30
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Primary Findings ...................................................................... 32
  4.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 32
4.1. Data analysis strategy: an analytical account of what I did and why .......... 32
4.2. Theme 1: My relational and interconnected life-work narrative .................. 33
4.3. Theme 2: Parental influence on my early career decision-making ............. 34
4.4. Theme 3: The ‘working mother’s’ dilemma ................................................. 37
4.5. Theme 4: Sensitivity ..................................................................................... 38
4.6. Theme 5: My relational resources ............................................................... 41
4.7. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 5: Discussion .......................................................................................... 44
5.0 Introduction .................................................................................................... 44
5.1. Overview of research findings ................................................................. 44
5.2. The interrelatedness between the quality of women’s relationships and career progress .......................................................................................... 46
5.3. The relational factors influencing the development of women’s career identity ........................................................................................................ 50
5.4. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 55

Chapter 6: Conclusion ......................................................................................... 57
6.0 Introduction .................................................................................................... 57
6.1. Overview of findings within the context of the study’s aims and objectives .... 57
6.2. Strengths and limitations of the study ....................................................... 60
6.3. Recommendations for future policy, practice and research ..................... 61
6.4. Researcher reflexivity in this self-study ..................................................... 62
6.5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 63

References........................................................................................................... 64
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Table - Analysis of the data collected by source ..............................................77
Appendix B: Walkthrough of coding for thematic analysis .................................................79
Appendix C: Table - Analysis of data by life chapter and relational development ..........84
Appendix D: The Life Story Interview ..................................................................................85
Appendix E: Extract of the steps of the Collage Life Story Elicitation Technique (CLET) (Van Schalkwyk, 2010) .................................................................................................93
Appendix F: Extracts from the transcripts of my Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) ....97
Appendix G: Photograph of self-authored CLET project and written reflections ......... 101
Appendix H: Table - Analysis of the correlation between the quality of my relationships, relational growth and career progress ........................................................................... 105
Appendix I: Extracts from thematic map of primary data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ........ 107
Appendix J: Photographs of self-authored artwork .............................................................. 110
Appendix K: Extracts from research diary .......................................................................... 112
List of Tables

Table 1  Development Tasks Throughout the Life Cycle (Deanow, 2011)
Abstract

The aim of my autoethnographic study is to examine my spiritual journey to find meaningful work and connectedness. A further aim of my study is to examine the implications for guidance counsellor practice by exploring the relational context in career development and provide opportunities for women marginalised by career to work through their disconnection for career renewal.

We are now living in a society that is embedded in a highly technologically driven and volatile global economy where workers’ employability depends on their adaptability (Savickas, 2011). We are also living in an increasingly fragmented world that promotes separateness and diminishes the value of caregiving, thus prioritising economic development over enhancing the human condition (Blustein, 2006; Gilligan, 1982; Hansen, 2001).

To examine these broad issues in the context of my own career journey, a social constructivist autoethnographic study has been employed using arts-based narrative inquiry techniques to collect data and analyse data on my career narrative. A thematic analysis was then conducted to report the significant socio-cultural themes and patterns in my primary findings for wider theoretical applicability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research findings arising from this study show that relatedness is central to women’s psychological development, career identity, progress and performance. Furthermore, our postmodern relational context has created a dilemma for contemporary working mothers by expecting women to balance the competing demands of individualistic career success with parenting children.

This perspective challenges guidance policymakers, academics and guidance counsellors to balance the individualistic needs of the economy with the relational needs of women’s psychological well-being (Hansen, 2001; Schultheiss, 2009; Watts, 2005).

Finally, a series of recommendations arising from the study are put forward to inform future policy, research and practice.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to this research study; contextualises it and offers a justification for it to be undertaken. My position as researcher and subject in the study is discussed. The research methodology and the aims and objectives of the research study are outlined. Finally, it presents the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Context and justification for the research study

The wider counselling profession today is detecting increasing despondency amongst clients with the fragmentation of their outer world, particularly regarding their employability (Blustein et al., 2016; Fox, 1994; Hansen, 2001). It is also witnessing their simultaneous growing curiosity with their inner world to find meaning and connectedness by discerning their life purpose (Rowan, 2005; Savickas, 2008; Sharf, 2011; Thorne, 2002). Correspondingly, a crisis has arisen about the future direction of postmodern career development theories and interventions because of a perceived lack of inner and outer stability (Blustein, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2009). However, new perspectives in career development are emerging which indicate that career development and guidance counselling are relational processes; and are heavily influenced by our relational contexts (Lent, 2016; Schultheiss, 2003). The implications of this for marginalised groups such as women, is that they may be susceptible to modifying their career interests, identity and progress to perpetuate their marginalised status (Blustein, 2006; Moltusky, 2010; Reid & West, 2011; Schultheiss, 2009).

To-date there is little research on feminine and spiritual perspectives on career development and on the interconnectedness between relationships and career (Deanow, 2011; Duffy, 2006; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003; Sharf, 2011). The rise of constructivist career theories has ignited an interest in the career experience of marginalised groups such as women and their relatedness (Blustein, 2006; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2009). The use of autoethnographic approaches to explore the cultural-relational aspects of career guidance issues is, therefore, being encouraged to unlock new
insights on postmodern dynamic phenomena (Blustein et al., 2004; Savickas et al., 2009). The purpose of this self-study is to address this gap in the research and to apply a spiritual lens to work through my disconnection with career and create an opportunity for career renewal for me and women like me. This self-study will therefore examine my relational context as a midlife mother living and working in contemporary Ireland.

1.2. Researcher as subject of the study

One of the key criteria in conducting interpretivist research and using an autoethnographic methodology is to be transparent in my researcher positionality and acknowledge and monitor the influence of my unconscious bias on the study (Butler-Kisber, 2010; O’Reilly, 2005; Thomas, 2009). The aim of this section is, therefore, to contextualise my relationship with my self-study.

Steven Hoppes (2014) describes how in autoethnography; the story, its telling and its narrator have a habit of finding one another. The connection to my autoethnographic story started in early August 2015, on a Sunday morning standing in my pyjamas in our kitchen. As is my habit I turned on the radio and found myself called by the message contained in a set of interview recordings with Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donoghue, about his philosophy on life (Bowman, 2015). The effect of O’Donoghue’s words remains the same today as it did that morning; I experience it as a reminder of the mystical experience that life is, and it leaves me asking the same question of myself, “what is it I came here to do in this life?”

So what did O’Donoghue say to me and those tuning into Radio One that morning? He told a parable about an ant that leaves his or her colony to explore the world, and emerges out from under a rock, to first encounter a horse grazing in the open field (Bowman, 2015). The ant does not perceive, nor will the ant ever perceive, the horse before him or her because of the disproportionate size between the two (Bowman, 2015). This led O’Donoghue (Bowman, 2015) to consider what else is present in nature that we humans cannot perceive because of its vastness, and therefore instead perceive a void? In answer he proposed that humans must rely on mystics and artists to make meaning of these apparent voids to discover the treasures they hold (Bowman, 2015).
I relate this parable because it simply illustrates the mysteries of life and their conundrum, and contextualises my position in my research study and my approach to its design. Many of my childhood memories involve my curiosity about God, the meaning of life, and the nature of faith; and thus much of my developmental obstacles in adulthood have involved working through my “old issues” with god, existential meaning and faith through my life-work roles (Savickas, 1997, p.20). In this way, it is fitting that I frame my story in this self-study as a ‘spiritual journey’ because it is “the theme of [my] life story already in progress” and in that way I can “use work as a theatre for [my] self-development” (Savickas, 1997, p.9).

Hence, I find myself following my intuition that an autoethnographic study is an integral part of my spiritual journey to find meaningful work and connectedness. By using my narrative for this research, I believe it will help me to move forward in my process, and potentially provide insights that will help guidance counsellors to support the spiritual, relational and moral needs of their clients. Consequently, I have decided to be the subject of the research and use the opportunity of this self-study for transformative learning. I have performed self-reflexive work in my researcher journal to validate the appropriateness of my volunteering, using generative questions (Flick, 2006). During this study, I have used my researcher journal to disclose and examine my biases as they have arisen, and used it as a secondary source of data to report such biases where relevant in my research findings (Butler-Kisber, 2010). It is the exploration of this “tension that is exactly the point” of a self-study (O’Reilly, 2005, p.109).

In embarking on this study, I found that my old anxieties resurfaced regarding giving voice to my ‘truth’ and my fear of disconnection for being my ‘real’ self. I was reassured, nonetheless by my inner voice which spoke to me through my writing, and said to me about my truth:

“I have come to know it and the darkness that it holds.
But I am light, a sleeping giant; and my prophesy must be told.” [Poem1]

It is this sense of legacy that has given me the courage to reveal my truth in this autoethnographic study (O’Reilly, 2005).
1.3. **Aims and objectives**

The overall aim of this study is to employ a spiritual perspective to find connection and meaning in my career and to consider its implications for the practice of guidance counselling. The main research objectives are:

1. To critically review the literature on relatedness as a factor in women’s career decision-making and career development, and its relationship with finding meaningful work and connectedness.
2. To use experimental arts-based narrative inquiry methods in an autoethnographic study to access my authentic voice, my experience of work and the relational factors that have influenced me.
3. Critically analyse the overall findings and the implications for guidance counselling of exploring relational context with women marginalised by career to provide opportunities for career renewal.

1.4. **Research methodology**

This autoethnographic study is based on a social constructivist perspective. This epistemology is compatible with the acquisition of knowledge through methods that locate me in my research and allow me to explore my interaction with my context in the construction of my truth (Butler-Kisber, 2010). It explores the experiences of a midlife postmodernist Irish working mother using a “diversity of perspectives, techniques, and methods” so that it may enhance “describing and understanding the dynamic aspects and contextually-dependent nature of life design and career construction” (Savickas et al., 2009, p.248-249).

I take a breath before I dive into the depths of self-analysis sought by this study, because I am afraid:

“I am as afraid as you for me to explore the language of my fears. It’s a language that doesn’t know how to convey its meaning. It’s been locked up for so many years.” [Poem1]
1.5. Outline the research study

Chapter 1: The aim of this chapter is to introduce the topic of research, the purpose of the inquiry, aims and objectives and methodology of the study. It also includes an overview of the five remaining chapters.

Chapter 2: This chapter critically reviews the relevant literature by examining the traditional and postmodern concepts of career and their influence on contemporary career theory, policy and practice. It also contextualises the relational context that has shaped contemporary Irish women’s experience of career.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the research paradigm and methodology chosen for my self-study. It outlines the primary and secondary research questions underpinning the study. The use of autoethnography as a research method and issues related to its rigour, reflexivity, and ethicality are addressed. The methods of data collection and analysis are outlined.

Chapter 4: This chapter discusses the detailed analytical approach used and the findings from my primary and secondary data collection sources. The findings are organised under the themes that emerged from my thematic analysis.

Chapter 5: This chapter provides a critical interpretation and synthesis of the findings of my study within the context of the literature reviewed in chapter 2.

Chapter 6: This chapter draws conclusions on the overall findings and highlights the strengths and limitations of my self-study. It discusses possible implications for the practice of guidance counselling. It makes a number of recommendations and reflects on my personal learning as the researcher.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to my autoethnographic study, the justification for undertaking it and my own position within it. It has outlined the aims and objectives of
the research and provided a brief summary of each chapter. The next chapter will review the literature relevant to my self-study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to critically examine the literature relevant to the topic of study. The relevant literature was sourced by me through using key search terms, and using the references in cited materials to locate additional materials (Chenail, 2011). The material used in this review includes primary texts, policy documents, databases, radio broadcasts, academic journals and newspaper articles.

According to Thomas (2009) undertaking a review is a process that involves analysing the interrelatedness between the themes of the study, in order to achieve an integrated understanding of the topic. In many ways, my study began with a fragmented understanding of and relationship with my topic of interest, and a limited vocabulary to articulate my research aim and questions. According to the literature, our interpretation of career and career success is subject to the prevailing socio-cultural discourse that dominates our worldview, and that of those with whom we interact (Blustein, 2006; Fox, 1994; Kidd, 2006; Lent, 2016; Reid & West, 2011; Savickas, 2011). Therefore to develop an understanding and work through my disconnection with my career I have contextualised my relationship with career by dividing this literature review into five sections. The first two sections seek to understand career in its pre-postmodern and postmodern contexts respectively. The third section examines the policy context of guidance practice. The fourth section analyses the career and parenting context of contemporary Irish working mothers. Finally, the fifth section examines the implications of these relational factors on the professionalism of guidance counsellors.

2.1. The traditional concept of career

This section will define career in terms of its 20th century context. It will then describe how this traditional concept of career has influenced pre-postmodern theories of career development and decision-making.
2.1.1 The traditional organisation of work and the influencing socio-economic context

The economic and industrial expansion that occurred in the industrial age created the conditions for long-term management positions with progression that gave rise to the traditional concept of career (Blustein, 2006; O’Neil et al., 2008). In the 20th century our concept of career was organised around the full-time worker (Savickas, 2010). Full-time paid work was dominated by men at that time (Blustein, 2006; O’Neil et al. 2008). It was not until World War II due to significant labour shortages, that it became socially necessary and acceptable for women to participate in the workforce, by which time the traditional concept of career was already embedded within society (Blustein, 2006; O’Neil et al., 2008). According to some career was an elitist concept based exclusively on the market-based career experiences of a minority of privileged white middle-class men working in Western capitalist economies (Blustein, 2006; Deanow, 2011; Hansen, 2001; Watts, 2005). In contrast, women were socialised to be caregivers and work in the home without pay, and thus positioned outside of the labour force (Blustein, 2006; Schultheiss, 2009).

At the same time scientific inquiries for knowledge into human development and career development were being conducted based on the principles of objective truth (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Miller-Tiedeman, 1999; Schultheiss, 2003). One of the main limitations of this epistemological approach in the study of human behaviour was that it neglected context and researcher bias (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). In her criticism of the conditions for objectivity in 20th century psychology the feminist theorist Gilligan (2005, p.731) remarks how culture was mistaken for nature, and consequently man became “the measure of all things human”. According to the feminist perspective the traditional career theories evolved with an implicit bias against women and feminine themes such as relatedness, which mirrored the theories of psychology and human development (Deanow, 2011; Schultheiss, 2003; 2009). They concentrated instead on the career experience of white Western middle-class men (Blustein et al., 2004; Deanow, 2011; Scuhultheiss, 2003; 2009).
Furthermore, the dismissal of women’s experience because of their presumed inferiority resulted in: the omission of women’s “sensitivity to others” from traditional theories of moral development (Muuss, 1988, p.230); the predominance of men’s individualistic moral reasoning in our theoretical and social discourse (Gilligan, 1982); and the suppression of women’s based on connectedness (Gilligan, 1982). The feminist literature asserts that this overall failure to recognise bias and to study difference resulted in women’s experiences being misinterpreted, their intelligence being undervalued, and limitations being placed on our understanding of the human condition (Gilligan, 1982; 2004; 2005). This led Gilligan and others to conclude that only through letting go of what we thought we knew under the “culture of patriarchy” can we find new ways of knowing and being; and transition to a new paradigm of connectedness which embraces difference and change (Bager-Charleston & Kasap, 2017; Deanow, 2011; Gilligan, 2004, p.141). Despite this, empirical studies of Gilligan’s moral framework have proved inconclusive (Muuss, 1988). Nonetheless, her theories are lauded for highlighting the need to “integrate the concept of abstract justice and the concern for particular other” across all disciplines (Muuss, 1988, p.242).

2.1.2 The pre-postmodern theories of career development and decision-making

This section will briefly examine the key traditional and modern approaches to career development and decision-making.

The predominant career development theories of the 20th century were the trait and factor career decision-making theories. The earliest of these was Parson’s (1909) vocational matching approach; and later Holland (1985) devised the person-environment fit classification (Savickas et al., 2009). The differential perspective focused on measurement (Schultheiss, 2003). Whilst relevant they had limited regard for the relational context in which the career was occurring (Schultheiss, 2003). The general criticism made of the trait and factor and life-span theories in the 21st century is that they are predicated on obsolete assumptions of predictable career and life-stages (Savickas et al. 2009; Savickas, 2011). However, others argue that even before the turn of the century they were not representative of the experiences of the majority of the world’s population (Blustein, 2006; Watts, 2005).
Conversely, in the latter part of the 20th century the emergence of the developmental perspective of career development focused on the growth and implementation of an individual’s self-concept throughout their life (Kidd, 2006; Hansen, 1997). Super (1951) broadened the scope of career by putting the person at the centre of their paid and unpaid roles; and later included the development stages which accompanied these (Hansen, 1997). Critically, Blustein (2006) argues that by embedding career in an aspirational lifestyle, Super’s contribution to career theory was ultimately to shift the research focus of the field to the organisational career success of a small but fortunate group who can exercise choice (Blustein, 2006). This narrow concentration on career success, led the field to neglect the study of different work experiences including meaningful work, issues of deprivation or the negative feelings work can engender (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2008; Bimrose & Hearne, 2012). Additionally, by overlooking difference others argue that the guidance profession has invalidated the experience of those who feel marginalised because of their difference (Schultheiss, 2003; Schultheiss et al., 2011). This disconnection with career appears however to have extended beyond the marginalised in the 21st century with relevant literature asserting that the traditional concept of career is dead (Blustein, 2006; Savickas, 2011; 2010). Accordingly, it is a concept that needs redefining for people to reconnect with it meaningfully (Blustein, 2006; Hansen, 2001; Savickas, 2011; 2010).

Alternatively, modern career approaches like social learning theory, expanded a particular psychological theory into a career development theory (Sharf, 2011). One such career development theory is Krumblotz’s Social Learning Theory (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). It asserts that individuals develop beliefs about themselves and their career though their direct and indirect experiences of positive and negative affirmation (Kidd, 2006). These observations inform the individual’s worldview and career development (Kidd, 2006). The task of the guidance counsellor is to challenge the accuracy of this worldview by ensuring the beliefs are logical and the behaviours that follow are rationale (Kidd, 2006). Social Cognitive Career Theory ([SCCT], Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; 2000) is a career decision-making theory which focuses on how social factors and self-agency influence career outcomes (Lent, 2016). Self-agency is dependent on a client’s self-efficacy and their expectations of a positive outcome (Kidd, 2006). Self-efficacy describes the individual’s belief in what they can achieve in terms of career success (Lent, 2016). The later expansion of SCCT emphasises how relational self-efficacy (Lent & Lopez, 2002) is developed and modified by its relational context for personal growth (Lent, 2016; Kidd, 2006). Arguably,
the social learning theories reveal a patriarchal bias in respect of their emphasis on logic, achievement and individualism; which does not empower clients marginalised by such narrow worldviews (Hansen, 1997).

2.2. The postmodern concept of career

This section will define the postmodern career in terms of its 21st century context. It will then describe how the postmodern concept of career has influenced current theories of career development and decision-making.

2.2.1 The postmodern organisation of work and the influencing socio-economic context

There is general agreement that rapid technological advances together with the advent of the globalised economy in the 21st century have reshaped how we work, what we do for work and why we do it (Hansen, 2001; Savickas, 2011). Significant socio-environmental changes have also occurred including: increased female representation and diversity in the workforce; growing problems of disparity, displacement and violence; a decline in life satisfaction and a direct rise in physiological and addictive disorders; and, the irrecoverable depletion of the earth’s natural resources (Fox, 1994; Hansen, 2001; Helliwell et al. 2012). Consequently, diverging views have emerged amongst policymakers and academics on how work and the economy are and should be organised in the 21st century.

On the one hand, constructivists such as Savickas (2010; 2011) argue that to be relevant, career development theory must help clients relate to the economic circumstances of the time. In the 21st century this means embedding client’s career identity in an individualist global economy based on production (Bassot et al., 2013; Savickas, 2010; 2011). In this context work is organised around employability and its end-product (Bassot et al., 2013; Langelle & Ashby, 2017; Savickas, 2010; 2011). On the other hand, instead of measuring economic progress in terms of production using Gross National Product (GDP) per capita, there are policymakers actively undertaking studies to find a broader measurement of wealth to reflect our entire economic and social performance (Hansen, 2001; Helliwell et al. 2012). Their emphasis on people’s well-being rather than their productivity is consistent with the spiritual and holistic career decision-making frameworks which began to emerge.
in the 1990s from the work of Bloch and Richmond (1998), Hansen (1997), Miller-Tiedeman (1999) and others (Sharf, 2011). Despite the pioneering work of these radical academics, their ideas have failed to shift the focus of career guidance (Peake & McDowall, 2012). According to Hansen (2001) they did not succeed in changing the emphasis from “finding a job for self-satisfaction” to “using our talents for the common good” because of the inherently individualistic nature of our information society (Hansen, 2001, p. 261).

2.2.2 The postmodern theories of career development and decision-making

This section will examine how the postmodern career approaches focus on “local truths and knowledge systems” through individual’s stories and life themes (Kidd, 2006, p.65).

Although spiritual career processes had a limited impact on the career discourse in the postmodern era (Peake & McDowall, 2012); the literature does reflect a growing interest in the theme of spiritualism in the context of personal meaning-making (Duffy, 2006; Rowan 2005; Sharf, 2011). It also appears to reflect a shift in people’s perspective on their career aspirations in the Western World (Duffy, 2006; Iles, 1999; Rowan, 2005). Although not categorised as a spiritual approach, the constructivist approach to career development does facilitate the exploration of spirituality as a theme (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Sharf, 2011). This is because constructivism is interested in subjective truth rather than objective truth (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Corey, 2013).

The rise of constructivism in postmodern psychology has arguably facilitated the wider use of subjective and narrative methods of inquiry using storied lives and meaning-making (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Corey, 2013). The dominant constructivist career approach is arguably Constructivist Career Theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2011). CCT encourages individuals to reclaim their career identity back from organisations and to renegotiate work to fit around their life, using a narrative career counselling process to construct its meaning (Kidd, 2006; Reid, 2016; Savickas, 2011; Sharf, 2011). The focus of life-design interventions is to enhance the client’s “career adaptabilities” to enable them to relate and adapt to the obstacles that might arise when implementing their story (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p.336). This is accomplished by having the client frame their story as a
redemptive plot where they “become the hero in their own life story” overcoming adversity (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p.337). This redemptive sequence is prevalent in the midlife narrative of highly generative adults who seek to transform bad occurrences into meaningful events with positive implications (McAdams, 2001).

Critically, CCT deliberately places the individual, not their relationships, at the centre of their story and their construction of meaning, so that they become self-reliant (Blustein et al, 2004; Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). The benefits to the client of this are: firstly, that it fosters inner stability where there is outer volatility; secondly, it encourages their use of introspection to create personal meaning and to express their “existential needs”; thirdly, it engenders reflection on the consequences of their behaviour, and finally, reflexivity to bring about the necessary personal development to implement the desired change (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p.338). Its proponents assert that in this way CCT offers a structure for private moral development in a secularised postmodern society that is void of supportive guidance (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). It is also sensitive to the exploration of relationships and cultural context and fosters greater inclusivity and diversity in career guidance practice and research (McMahon & Watson, 2013; Savickas, 1993; 2001). In another way, CCT’s use of career adaptability to frame and promote separateness in client career narratives perpetuates social injustices by implying that clients must privately cope and adapt to the biases that dominate our career discourse (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2004; Reid & West, 2011). In the same vein, CCT ignores the public interest that is served by confronting these prejudices for social change (Blustein et al., 2004; Reid & West, 2011; Watts, 2005).

Contrastingly, relational theory which originated from feminist theory emphasises the “self-in-relation” where traditional theories of human development “emphasise the importance of disconnection” (Surrey, 1983, p.1). In a career counselling context, Blustein (2006) argues that the focus of social constructive career theory must shift its emphasis from creating “a self-contained” and disconnected individual, towards relationships and connectedness (Blustein et al., 2004, p. 428). In this setting, clients’ career identity and intrinsic values remain undistorted by career-adaptability’s susceptibility to the dominant discourse, especially in the case of those clients already discriminated (Blustein et al., 2004; Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010; Reid & West, 2011; Schultheiss et al., 2011).
2.3. **Contextualising guidance policy**

This section will consider how “developments in career guidance need to be examined in their policy context” (Reid & West, 2011, p.397).

Arguably guidance practice is experiencing a relational dilemma with regards to its future direction. From a policy perspective, the debate is whether we value connectedness and believe we have a moral responsibility to provide effective guidance to all human beings; or whether we believe in market principles where effective guidance is available to those who can pay (Hansen, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Muuss, 1988; Watts, 2005). The discussion is further complicated by how we evaluate our policy decisions when implemented in practice. On the one hand, CCT supports the postmodernist concepts of unpredictable career but in practice it is complex, time-consuming, and costly (Hansen, 2001; Reid & West, 2011). On the other, the traditional approaches rely on outdated presumptions about career and the human condition; but their simplicity, accessibility and low costs satisfy postmodern economic logic (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Hansen, 2001; Sampson et al., 2011).

The lack of investment in research to evaluate the costs and benefits of guidance interventions generally is another inhibitor of policy direction (Sampson et al., 2011, Watts, 2005). There is an apparent lack of political and academic will to experiment because of the separateness of a “hard economic environment, dominated by outcomes and targets” (Reid & West, 2011, p.397). Contrastingly, in collaborative domains like sport relational context is being widely investigated to maximise self-efficacy and improve performance (Lent, 2016).

2.4. **Contextualising the women’s life-work roles**

In recognition of the “power of context” (Jordon, 2008, p.1), this section will examine my career context using theories of women’s development to understand the relational context of women’s experiences of career and parenting.
2.4.1 A gendered model of women’s psychological development

The first new models of women’s development which emerged in the 1970s show the normative development from a feminine relational perspective (Deanow, 2011; Jordon, 2008; Schultheiss, 2009). According to these theories, it is connection and not individualism that is at the core of women’s psychological process (Deanow, 2011; Schultheiss, 2009). This feminist perspective postulates that women are psychologically wired for collaborative work and not the individualism of career (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010). Consequently, women can experience a disconnection with career (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010). Deanow (2011) expanding on Miller’s original Relational-Cultural model (1976), depicts the movement through connection and disconnection as a series of non-linear developmental tasks as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Developmental Tasks Throughout the Life Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Cluster</th>
<th>Normative Connection</th>
<th>Disconnection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (0-18 months)</td>
<td>Primary empathy</td>
<td>Nonresponsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddlerhood (18 to 2-3 years)</td>
<td>Relational differentiation</td>
<td>Unworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool (3-6 years)</td>
<td>Caretaking</td>
<td>Diminishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School (7-12 years)</td>
<td>Chumship</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (12-25 years)</td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Voicelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>Subordination or domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Dexterity</td>
<td>Imbalance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>Sustainment</td>
<td>Withdrawal or abandonment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: Deanow, 2011)

This model asserts that a woman’s primary aim is to develop mutually beneficial relationships; and that these relationships invigorate and empower us, and help us define our self-concept (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011; Jordon, 2008). A positive connection is a relationship characterised by authenticity, empathy and mutuality (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011; Motulsky, 2010). “Relational mutuality” is where each partner is “fully and authentically present” while in-relationship and able to act empathetically (Deanow, 2011, p.132). Key relational skills include the ability to recognise and tolerate disconnection, having the skills to reconnect and building relational resilience (Deanow, 2011; Comstock et al., 2008). These skills develop over the age clusters so that in adulthood we can be “relationally present and engaged” in the multiple relationships we
have formed, and therefore experience overall “dexterity” rather than imbalance in adulthood (Deanow, 2011, p.133).

According to the feminist literature, disconnection is a natural occurrence that provides opportunities for renewal of self and the relationship; and the development of new strategies for reconnection and growth (Deanow, 2011; Jordon, 2008). Contrastingly, strategies of disconnection involve disengaging from the emotional aspect of a relationship which Deanow (2011, p.131) describes as functioning in a “nonrelational mode”. Feminist studies highlight the psychological problems that arise for women from chronic disconnection to stay in-relationship (Corey, 2013; Deanow, 2011; Jordon, 2008; Moltusky, 2010).

2.4.2 A relational approach to career development and decision-making

In the context of this autoethnographic study, feminist theorists argue that career decision-making is a highly relational process which requires the study of how we connect to ourselves, other and society to inform our career counselling approach (Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003; 2009). Recent studies show that women’s connections socialise them to prioritise their relationships over excellence in career (Moltusky, 2010). This contributes to feelings of poor self-esteem and a sense of diminished career possibilities amongst women; and ultimately discourages women from bringing their whole selves into their career and relationships (Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2009). It is this lack of authenticity that creates a disconnection between women, their career and their relationships; and makes the process of career decision and transition psychologically distressing for women according to Motulsky (2010). These findings correlate with the developmental obstacles of subordination or role imbalance which the relational model predicts adult women will encounter in their development (Deanow, 2011). Feminist studies also show the interconnection and positive correlation which exists between the quality of women’s relationships; their experiences of career progress and career transitions; and overall well-being (Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). Hence, the task of the guidance counsellor in the integration of relational theory with career theory is to recognise the importance of relational connection in client’s lives and exploit it (Schultheiss, 2003). A relational approach supports the female client in developing and understanding her “relational competencies” as a worker, including the development of her “self-reflection, active
listening, empathy, self-disclosure and collaboration” (Hansen, 2001, p. 263). It also helps the client to manage her relational and career obstacles by positively using relationships with others as a career development resource, including the presence of the guidance counsel or (Schultheiss, 2003). In the context of this study it is necessary to examine the career obstacles that have shaped the careers of contemporary working mothers in Ireland.

### 2.4.3 The relational context of an Irish working mother

Women in Ireland have traditionally been socialised to be “carers and stay-at-home-mothers” (Byrne-Doran, 2012, p.108). Prior to the 1970s, Irish women upon marriage or the birth of their first child left their employment because of institutional policy or societal expectation (Oaks, 2003). Ireland joined the then European Economic Community in 1973 which created the conditions for an economic boom, and the formulation of equality legislation that facilitated mothers returning to the workforce (Oaks, 2003). Despite a Constitution that infers that the woman’s place is in the home, the expansion of the Western workforce particularly during the “Celtic Tiger” in 1990s Ireland created new opportunities and prosperity for women (Byrne-Doran, 2012; Oaks, 2003, p.1975; O’Shea & Kirrane, 2008). However it appears as though policymakers overlooked its implications for childcare, and women’s private reproductive and career choices (Byrne-Doran, 2012; Oaks, 2003). Consequently, the sourcing and financing of childcare and its career interruption became largely the private responsibility of mothers; and a key determinant for women on whether and when to have children (Oaks, 2003).

In her analysis of women’s career and reproductive plans in postmodern Ireland, Oaks (2003) sees new trends emerging in the social discourse. In one way, it has become a cultural taboo for a young woman to express an ambition to be a mother; and in another way, pregnancy planned or otherwise is viewed “as an expensive nuisance in the workplace” (Oaks, 2003, p.1981). Recent national and international studies of young women compared to those conducted thirty years ago show that contemporary women are under no pressure to suppress career ambition or temporarily put their career on hold in order to raise their children (O’Shea & Kirrane, 2008). However, falling fertility rates in countries with low levels of parental supports suggests that women are adopting a more rational decision-making process in their private career and reproductive decision-making processes (Oaks, 2003; Kassam et al., 2015). They are adopting consumerist behaviour in their private decision-making according to some, where the attainment of job achievement...
and a comfortable lifestyle must be accomplished before parenting “is perceived a viable option” (Oaks, 2003, p.1997). Others argue that consumerist behaviour is not rationale (Helliwell et al, 2012). They posit that as consumerists that we fall into an inescapable employment trap; a spiral of working to spend, and spending to alleviate the lack of meaning in our lives (Fox, 1994). In her findings into the lived experience of Irish working mothers, Byrne-Doran (2012, p.102) observes a relational dilemma in how home and work compete in the lives of these women and leads the majority to choose “adaptive” work; where they “attempt to combine work and home commitments in their relationship with the labour market”. Like the relational theorists, Byrne-Doran’s (2012, p.101) highlights how critical the relational support of partners is to a woman’s “experience of balance” in working through such dilemmas.

In terms of valuing women’s “reproductive labour” (p.36), Schultheiss (2009) is critical of how career development theories continue not “to define motherhood as a career” (p.25). Nonetheless, the literature does recognise that parental role-play and employment status influences children’s attitudes to the work-family dynamic (O’Shea & Kirrane, 2008). However, there appears to be a dearth in research on the dominance of the “dual earner context” (O’Shea & Kirrane, 2008, p.524). In their study of the socio-economic factors that influence Irish young people’s attitudes to work and family life, O’Shea and Kirrane (2008, p.545) found that the “employment status and job type of the mother was of particular importance” in shaping children’s organisational “fit”; as well as their expectations of and commitment to a future employer. It appears that working mothers are aware of their “generational influence” and it is embedded in how they use their life-work roles to “model a view and reality of life for their own children to aspire to”; it is this sense of legacy which gives meaning to their work (Byrne-Doran, 2012, p.109-110). Arguably, legacies can have both positive and negative effects.

On the negative effects of parents’ legacies, Morrisey (2017) asserts that contemporary parents have over-protected their children from adversity and thus inhibited the development of their children’s resilience. This view appears to have found traction generally. Hence these young people have been derogatively dubbed the ‘Snowflake’ generation for being “overly sensitive”; a colloquial term attributed to the ‘Millennial’ generation born between 1980 and 2000 (Assimakopoulou et al., 2017; Morrisey, 2017). Contrastingly, an examination of the literature on the socio-cultural environment inhabited
by contemporary Irish young people suggests that the scale of fragmentation in their lives is considerable (Department of Education and Science [DES], 2009; Pope, 2017; Riegel, 2018; Smith, 2018). The DES (2009) has linked family break-up and dysfunction strongly to the increased demand for personal counselling that is currently overwhelming the school guidance services in Ireland, which are traditionally concentrated on supporting entry to third level. It would appear that contemporary parents and society are leaving a dubious life-work legacy to our young people; the future direction of guidance policy and in particular its guidance counselling element is arguably critical to restoring that legacy.

2.5. Contextualising professionalism in guidance

This section will examine some of the relational factors affecting the delivery of guidance counselling.

According to Reid & West (2011, p.400) “the capacity to work empathetically, reflexively and creatively” is a prerequisite for a guidance counsellor. The transformative powers of these elements of the therapeutic relationship are well-documented as being critical to effective guidance counselling; they are also time-consuming to support and provide (Lent, 2016; Schultheiss, 2003; Thorne, 2002). Consequently, the policy context and career approaches of the contemporary guidance practice pose some ethical challenges for this way of working with clients. Guidance counsellors need to therefore consider how they will support “mutual empathy” in a policy context based on economic logic and focused on the outcome of the guidance intervention; and not on the interaction which is necessary between the guidance counsellor and client to generate that outcome (Comstock et al., 2008; Hansen & Amundson, 2009, p.33; Hartling & Sparks, 2008). Guidance counsellors also need to consider how they will support the existential aspects of personal meaning-making in the vacuum of a secularised society (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2011).

2.6. Conclusion

This literature review has explored key contextual factors regarding the reorganisation of work; and its links to a search for meaning and connectedness. It has discussed new
developments in human development and career development theory for women. The next chapter will use the new concepts examined in this chapter to pose relevant research questions, and outline the methodology to be used in this self-study to answering them.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter will firstly discuss the paradigm underpinning my research and the basis for conducting an autoethnographic study. It will consider the criteria used to select an appropriate autoethnographic genre and the steps taken to establish rigour in the research process. It will discuss the criteria used to evaluate and select methods of inquiry, data analysis and reflexivity. Issues relating to ethics, validity, and the reliability of the study design are also addressed.

3.1. Research questions of study

My literature research unearthed new theories of women’s development of which I was previously unaware. Given the iterative nature of my self-study, I incorporated the language of women’s relational development into my research questions for its relevance to my psychological and career development. My overarching research question therefore asks, “In what ways has my relatedness influenced my relationship with career and my current disconnection with it? ”

The secondary questions ask:
1. How do I describe my relational development and its effect on my career narrative?
2. What relational supports do I need to experience renewal in my relationship with career?
3. What are the implications of these insights for the practice of guidance counselling?

The remaining sections will describe the research approach used in the design frame of this autoethnographic study.

3.2. Situating my spiritual ‘problem’ in a research paradigm: Interpretivist

This section will outline the paradigm and methodology underpinning my study. The choice of paradigm reflects the researcher’s ontological and epistemological standing
(Pitard, 2017). My paradigm describes my worldview as researcher, and the lens I intend to use to examine my topic of study (Thomas, 2009). There are two principal research paradigms, a positivist (quantitative) approach and interpretive (qualitative) approach (Bryman, 2012). The positivism school of thought supposes that our only means of knowing our world is through our senses and that any knowledge acquisition is observable, testable, measurable, objective and certain (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Knowles & Cole, 2008; O’Reilly, 2005). A positivism paradigm is predicated on the belief that the pursuit of knowledge about individuals and our society should be subject to the same rigour that is applied in the empiricist model of the natural sciences (O’Reilly, 2005). In summary, the interpretive researcher immerses themselves in the value judgements inside the heads of their subjects contrastingly the positivist researcher tries to eliminate those value judgements (O’Reilly, 2005).

My ontological perspective is based on my belief about the nature of reality and my existence within it (Pitard, 2017; Butler-Kisber, 2010). My ontological perspective is interpretivist, it is based on a social constructivist and advocacy/participatory worldview (Butler-Kisber, 2010). As a social constructivist, I believe a person’s truth emerges from the interaction between facts and values in their social context, and that there is no single truth (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Furthermore, the focus of my worldview is on creating the space for marginalised voices to be heard to facilitate social change (Butler-Kisber, 2010). My epistemological perspective is my philosophy on how I acquire knowledge about my reality (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Pitard, 2017). Epistemologically, I believe I gain knowledge about the plurality of ‘truth’ by locating myself in my study and interacting with my context; and empathetically exploring the tensions that shape the construction of its truth (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Stanley, 2013). My study is therefore intended to generate knowledge about my subjective experience of career and to explore the relational context of my working life to create an alternative discourse on career for the 21st century (Blustein et al., 2004; Savickas, 2010). In this way, I can avoid becoming a “disinterested scientist” inhibited by logic, and enjoy the potential for renewal offered by becoming a “passionate participant” in my inquiry (Pitard, 2017, para. 6).
3.3. Situating myself in my spiritual problem: autoethnographic methodology

The knowledge acquired in any study is shaped by how the intellectual puzzle is defined and the methods undertaken to resolve it (Mason, cited in Knowles & Cole, 2008). Hence, in this research it was important to select an appropriate methodology for the overall aims of the study and to answer the research questions posed (Knowles & Cole, 2008; O’Reilly, 2005).

An autoethnographic approach is compatible with my epistemology and favoured by constructivist career researchers for the study of a dynamic phenomenon such as career (Savickas et al., 2009). Autoethnographic research is a process of integrating our sense of what is outside of us (ethonography), with what is inside of us (autobiography) in order to promote self-understanding and enable us move on (Le Roux, 2017). The autoethnographic methodology used in this study was sufficiently fluid to create the space for me to externalise my inner logic and unconscious thoughts (Duncan, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005). It provided a scaffold for me to systematically reflect on the data and facilitated me in a process of transformative learning (Duncan, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005). It also enabled me to create a scholarly account of my inner experience while respecting the dignity of my personal voice (Duncan, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005). In another way, it created a space that allowed me to confront the emotional entanglement of being both the observed and the observer (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017, p.190). It did this whilst capturing the potential tension of this entanglement which is not generally disclosed as part of the research process, but is the focus of supervision in training and practice (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017).

3.3.1 Giving voice to me: autoethnographic genre

The next decision involves establishing my voice. The criteria was to find an autoethnographic genre to honour the ‘feel’ of my presence on the study; whilst meeting the needs for rigour and authenticity in that presence (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017; Le Roux, 2017).

Le Roux (2017) describes the autoethnographical spectrum as having at one end an analytical approach and at the other an evocative. They are not mutually exclusive and a
mixed-method approach can be taken (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017). Evocative autoethnography is intended to resonate emotionally, contrastingly analytical autoethnography involves an objective approach to the writing and analysis (Le Roux, 2017). I located myself in the middle of this spectrum (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017; Stanley, 2013). The evocative aspect is intended to engage the reader and evoke the curiosity of the wider profession (Bager-Charleson & Kasap, 2017; Mullen, 2003; Stanley, 2013). However, to exploit the opportunities for personal development and facilitate the wider transferability of the study, I applied critical analysis to my accounts as participant and researcher (Dashpher, 2015; McIlveen et al., 2010; McIlveen & Patton, 2010). I used this blended approach to “inspire thoughtful action” in those for whom my experience has resonance (Mullen, 2003, p. 168); and to ensure that the narrative has theoretical value and is not simply an act of story-telling (Dashpher, 2015; Ellis, 2004).

3.3.2 It’s a one woman performance: the limitations of an autoethnographic study

According to O’Reilly (2005) an autoethnographic inquiry is associated mainly with participant observation; however it can be difficult to define its methods of observation because they are applied in different ways by different disciplines with varying viewpoints. Like other researchers I found the relevant literature to be vague on “what to observe, how to observe and what to write down” (Delamont, 1997, p.211). Conversely, others argue it is intentionally non-prescriptive to create space for a fluid and iterative-inductive study design (O’Reilly, 2005). I deduced from my reading that my autoethnographic study would therefore evolve with the insights I gained as a researcher and participant (O’Reilly, 2005; Duncan, 2004). The inference being that it is not the methodology which was ambiguous at the outset, it is my own ambiguity about the research problem that needed to be worked through for the methodology to become apparent.

Surrendering to the process of autoethnography is hazardous. I could have become consumed by my inner world and neglect to demonstrate the relevance of my study to the outer world (Maddison, 2012; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Alternatively, I could have undermined the findings of my study by transferring of my own preconceptions through the collection, analysis or presentation of my data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Some critics of autoethnography denigrate it as a form of narcissistic expression (Roth, 2009; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, as a social constructivist I believe it is
necessary to view it in its 21st century context. Autoethnography is a method of research cultivated to explicitly explore participant and researcher subjectivity and their interrelatedness (Duncan, 2004). To evaluate its findings and methods as narcissistic reveals the underlying bias of its critics, and neglects its effectiveness in revealing such bias (Madison, 2012). In conducting this study I documented my concerns about whether autoethnography is a conceited process in my researcher journal; in this way I confronted the emergence of my biases and maintained my research rigour. I will address this limitation further in section 3.6.

Additionally, I acknowledged that in the context of this study that although narrative inquiry methods can be self-directed, they are more effective where there is collaboration between the individual and guidance counsellor (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014). Similarly, methods of data analysis which incorporate collaboration are likely to reduce biases and offer more comprehensive contexts (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). A limitation of this self-study was its non-collaborative design and the potential for rumination (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014). I took steps to enhance its rigour using my critical reflexivity and by managing my self-care (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014).

To address these limitations, in my methods of data collection I explored my relational context to uncover my bias in my primary data; I then used my critical reflexivity to acknowledge and monitor these biases (Blustein et al., 2004; Butler-Kisber, 2010). I documented this process in my researcher journal (see Appendix K for samples). It was important to use methods of data collection which fitted with my ontological and epistemological perspective, but also facilitated a contextualised interpretation of the biases contained in my data (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

3.4. Getting into my head: methods of data collection

The main data collection method in an ethnographic study is participant observation (O’Reilly, 2005). It is typically conducted by the researcher immersing themselves as a known outsider in the social world they are studying (O’Reilly, 2005). However in an autoethnographic study the researcher is acknowledged as an insider observing their own social world, the role of participant and observer are thus integrated (O’Reilly, 2005). The
relevant literature on autoethnographic methods of inquiry is however vague on methods of examination (O’Reilly, 2005).

Blustein et al., (2004) provided me with the permission to legitimately use my creative work to express my observations of my relational world in order to create a relational analysis of my career. This new research paradigm known as arts-based narrative inquiry has the potential to instigate a process of meaning, healing, learning and inspiration in the spectator in which the researcher becomes an ‘artful-scientist’ (Brady, cited in Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p.509). I was unable to locate a coherent description of arts-based narrative inquiry in my reading but I came to understand that it is the act of integrating story-telling, story-writing, illustrated and performed story, to generate unconventional forms of research evidence that are representational of an inner experience, and appeal to the heart and mind for personal and social interpretation and inspiration (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Chenail, 2011; Van Schalkwyk, 2010; Mullen, 2003). It is an invitation to a conversation on a research problem and not a conclusive debate, and is intended to be participative and accessible (Bochner & Ellis, 2003). Its use of narrative and metaphor techniques and its fluid research style would also appear to fit with the dynamism and relevance sought in 21st century career guidance research (Savickas et al., 2009).

I selected two narrative techniques to generate and collect my primary data: the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) which is a structured narrative interview; and the written Collage Life Story Elicitation Technique [CLET] (Van Schalkwyk, 2010) which is a narrative performance inquiry method. I applied a relational perspective to my CLET project for the purposes of giving a contextualised insight into my career, my world and my identity (Blustein et al., 2004). In addition, I included in my primary data a variety of self-authored found material created prior to this study; which gave an embodied account of my inner world, as expressed through art, poetry and playwriting. Lastly, I maintained a research journal for my critical reflexivity which I used as a secondary source of data in the study (see Appendix K). A detailed depiction of the data collected by source and method, date of collection and thematic coding is in Appendix A. The next two sections will discuss the two main sources of data collection.
3.4.1 Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995)

The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) is a structured interview which can be self-administered (see Appendix D). It is not a form of therapy and for that reason I was able to address the themes as a researcher using reflection and reflexivity (McAdams, 1995, 2001). The interview explicitly dealt with matters of ideology and spirituality and therefore was an appropriate tool for exploring spiritual experience (Boczkowska & Zieba, 2016).

As part of the study design I did consider the use of other narrative instruments. Career counselling interventions generally require co-facilitation with a qualified guidance counsellor and thus were beyond the scope of this small-scale self-study (Savickas, 1997, 2005, 2009; Guichard 2005; McMahon & Patton, 1995). While the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) is not specifically used as a method of career narrative counselling it is based on constructivist theories like the aforementioned career narrative methods, and has relevance to career construction theory.

I conducted the structured Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) verbally in one sitting (see Appendix F for sample extracts). To illicit genuine responses, I self-administered the interview and did not read the questions in advance. I intentionally framed my life story as a spiritual journey from the outset for relevance to the overall aim of the study. I found the overall experience empowering especially in how the instrument recognised me as the ‘expert’ of my own story. While the instrument was easy to use; its limitations are that is time-consuming and potentially undermines my research rigour (Boczkowska & Zieba, 2016; McIlveen & Patton, 2010). To address the latter issue I made an audio recording of the interview which I also transcribed for transparency (see Appendix F for extracts).

3.4.2 CLET (Van Schalkwyk, 2010)

The CLET (see Appendix E) is a narrative performance inquiry method which uses creative means to tap the individual’s unconscious reservoir and engage their autobiographical memory in the creation of a linguistic and non-linguistic narrative account (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Although it is a time-consuming technique it is underpinned by an epistemology of interrelatedness, and works best in a counselling setting that reflects these values (Van Schalkwyk, 2010).
The first step in the CLET process for me was to create a collage that was representative of “dominant experiences and events” and “tells a story about [me] as a person”, using various text, media and material (Van Schalkwyk, 2010, p.678). An image of the collage and samples of my written reflections on the process are contained in Appendix G. Through a series of related steps I then reflected on my completed collage by: (i) articulating its story of me; (ii) metaphorically positioning myself in the collage in the here and now; (iii) juxtaposing different narrative voices in the collage; and (iv) writing an overall reflection (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Given the non-collaborative design of my study, I completed the written version of the CLET project to establish transparency in my application of its reflective process and documented my reflections in written text to form a pictorial story (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). The technique was particularly useful in the exploration of issues of conflict and morality (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). I used my own artwork in the making of the collage to avoid issues of copyright (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

The CLET method appealed to me because it provided the framework for me to introduce creative evidence of my inner experience in a simple, coherent narrative form. It was also inherently fun, accessible and involved the senses in the story-telling (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). It complemented the fluid and evocative nature of my autoethnographic study. As a narrative style it contrasted with the structured and linguistic nature of the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) and provided a broader range of expression of my inner experience.

3.5. Making sense of what is in my head: data analysis

I based my thematic process and analysis on the six-stages of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) which is explained in detail in my Data Analysis in Chapter 4. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical technique. It is suited to a constructivist ontological perspective; and studies examining personal experience, its context and its impact on the social discourse of that time (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose it because of its simplicity, theoretical flexibility and its capacity to provide rich descriptions and social interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3.6. The space for research rigour and reflexivity in autoethnographic study

Qualitative methods have the potential to create a “socially transformative medium” of research for the postmodern world (Mullen, 2003, p. 167). They enable researchers to explore difference and to confront the messiness of our research and practice for a richer discourse on career (Blustein et al., 2004; McMahon & Watson, 2013; Reid & West, 2010; Savickas, 1993, 2001). The proliferation in the flexibility of qualitative genres of research is not grounds for complacency about the evaluation of its truth (Le Roux, 2017; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Nor is it grounds for using outdated positivist constructs to evaluate constructivist constructs of the truth, instead it should inspire new practices for research rigour (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Although respectful of the need for researcher reflexivity, Butler-Kisber (2010) argues that it is impractical to bracket our biases and then assume that we can set them to one side in the conduct of our research. She posits that the newer practices of “acknowledging, explaining, and monitoring presuppositions and biases” during the research process is the most effective means of confronting questions regarding research rigour (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 60). From a wider perspective using our reflexivity to confront issues of bias also provides an effective tool for the development of self-supervision, critical consciousness and empathetic understanding in our career guidance practice (Blustein, 2006; McIlveen & Patton, 2010; McIlveen et al., 2010).

In my study, my relational approach to my narrative account of my inner experience intentionally located the social context of my study and its influence on me; it acknowledged, monitored and explained my biases and those I encountered in the context of my story so that my narrative account had “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Le Roux, 2017, p. 196). To create an embodied, transparent and authentic account, I accessed my narrative through multiple mediums (art, poetry, playwriting and interview), and sourced materials from different points in time prior to and during the study (Butler-Kisber, 2010). I also conducted a literature review to corroborate my experience and explanations (Butler-Kisber, 2010). I was transparent in my method, documenting the how and the why so that the study can be extended or adapted by other researchers (Braun & Clark, 2006; Butler-Kisber, 2010). I used my research journal (see Appendix K) to monitor my biases and as a secondary data source for the disclosure of
relevant biases which have the potential to influence my study findings (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

3.7. Using my informed judgement: ethical considerations

The scope of this study was to show the relationship between relational development and career development, to add to this field of knowledge; and not to tell my life story (McIlveen & Patton 2010). However, it was not possible to conceal my identity as the autoethnographic researcher, nor was it possible to obscure my vulnerability or sense of self because the rigour of my research was founded on revealing those things about me in order to be credible. Thus, as a methodology it intruded on my privacy and bound me to the version of myself made public in my study (Dashpher, 2015; Maddison, 2012; Delamont, 1997). It also posed complex moral issues regarding my treatment and representation of me, those whom I have interacted with and our context; and my readers’ possible treatment of the content through their critique and interpretation of my narrative account (Dashpher, 2015; Alexandar, 2006).

This research study did not involve any parties other than its author. I was therefore not required to seek institutional ethical approval from the University of Limerick (UL) Faculty Ethics Committee. I addressed the ethical concerns in my study by giving due care to the dignity of participants in my life story (Hearne, 2013). I protected the anonymity of non-family members and organisations. I carefully considered what I revealed using critical reflexivity to consider its implications for me and others, and the academic merit of disclosing it (Dashpher, 2015). Furthermore, I relied on my normal relational supports to assist me in acting with due care during the study including supervision counselling where necessary. In summary, my treatment and representation of me and others was guided by the female moral values of caring which are associated with connection; and which I rediscovered my affinity to in the course of this study (Gilligan, 1982).

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology which underpins this autoethnographic study. I have put forward the research questions and provided a rationale for the use of a qualitative
arts-based narrative inquiry method. I have also discussed matters relating to research rigour, reflexivity and ethics.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Primary Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss my data analysis strategy and present the primary findings of my autoethnographic study.

4.1 Data analysis strategy: an analytical account of what I did and why

I applied thematic analysis to all of the data sources I used in my qualitative arts-based narrative inquiry. To ensure the rigour of my epistemologist approach I demarcated my thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the limited research to date in this area, I studied the entire data set in order to provide a rich overall description representative of the entire data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used an inductive analysis approach to preserve a strong link between the data and the theme; to avoid the imposition of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, I used a latent thematic analysis of the themes to interpret and theorise the relevance of the reported themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This enabled me to explore their wider meaning and applicability; an approach consistent with a constructivist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then applied my demarcated approach to my process of thematic analysis by applying the six phases of the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis.

Firstly, I familiarised myself with all of the data collected in the study (see Appendix A) by repeatedly reading, listening and studying it; and making notes of my preliminary thematic observations. Secondly, I generated a system of coding for discerning the features of interest in the data extracts across the data set as shown in Appendix B (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I coded these data extracts in hardcopy upon identification. I devised and allocated a colour code and an acronym code for the theme identified in each data extract. I based the acronym code on the source of the data extract, the theme of the data extract, and then sequentially numbered each data extract in the order of its appearance in that data source. I did not code my research journal as I did not want to impose themes or patterns from my secondary source on the data collected from my primary sources. I did however disclose my biases as documented in my research journal where relevant in my final report (Butler-
Kisber, 2010). Thirdly, I searched for themes in the data extracts as I transcribed the coded data to a thematic map in Excel.

As part of the fourth phase, I used my Excel thematic map to collate, group and distil the main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the fifth phase, I organised my data into the life chapters that emerged from my Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) and CLET (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). I then analysed each chapter for its key relational turning points and linked these across the chapters to test the coherency and interrelatedness of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis enabled me to observe the development of these themes across my life narrative, their pattern and influence, and the “hierarchy of meaning within the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). To refine my analysis, I selected those themes and patterns with the most pervasive influence on my relationship with career in the context of my primary and secondary research questions (see Appendix B).

With regards to the sixth phase of my thematic analysis, I produced an initial draft of my findings report selecting evocative data extracts from my primary and secondary sources to include in my report to support my findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure its rigour, I systematically critiqued my analysis with the oversight of my supervisor and referenced my findings to my data before finalising my written report in this chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Five overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the primary data which will be explained in the upcoming sections.

4.2. **Theme 1: My relational and interconnected life-work narrative**

The centrality of relationships and their interconnectedness was the first overarching theme to emerge from my hierarchical analysis of my work-life narrative (see Appendix C). A consistent relational theme prevails across my life chapters and links each chapter to my broader story as though each chapter creates the conditions for my relational development, and career development in the next.

My hierarchical analysis (see Appendix C) maps the interconnectedness of my relational development and career progression between my life chapters. For example, arrow (1) shows the disconnection in my relationship with self in adolescence which, leads to a diminished sense of self and manifests in the displacement of my true creative and caring
career interests for career success in an economic context. Arrow (2) illustrates how career success in my early 20s provides an opportunity for renewal in my relationship with self by creating the space to seek help for my severe acne using the financial independence career success affords me. The increased confidence from my reconnection with myself creates the conditions for me to form a long-term romantic partnership later in my 20s, as shown by arrow (3). The mutuality I experience with my partner enables me to establish my self-concept and pursue my relational needs to be a mother and start a family in my early 30s, as depicted by arrow (4). The effects of this are two-fold. In terms of my relationship with God, the advent of motherhood in my early 30s awakens my femininity and creates an opportunity for renewal in my relationship with spirituality, indicated by arrow (5). However, the incompatibility in my mid-30s between my role as mother and careerist as shown in arrow (6a) leads to a disconnection in my relationship with home and work; and later, illness and my withdrawal from the work environment, as indicated by arrow (6b). Arrow (7) shows the adversity I experience in my early 30s which compels me to go and discover new ways of connecting with my spirituality and forms the basis for a new relationship with my faith. My withdrawal from work also creates space for me in my late 30s, as depicted in arrow (8), to find new ways of working to renew my relationship with career. My overall analysis of the pattern of my data is that my narrative plot follows a redemptive sequence, where I seek to frame bad incidents into positive events.

To address my research questions it is necessary to explore the origins of the disconnection which occurred in my relationship with career choice in adolescence. My thematic analysis identifies my parents’ influence on my career decision-making process as a key theme in my findings.

### 4.3. Theme 2: Parental influence on my early career decision-making

This second theme describes the influence of my parents on my career choice and the contextual factors which probably gave rise to their own career biases.

In childhood my career ambitions were to become a writer, a director of plays, a puppeteer or a lawyer seeking “social justice” [CLETCI1]. In adolescence I considered the role of Social Worker, Missionary or more generally working with children [CLETCI2]. Arguably these were career interests suited to an artistic and caring disposition. The data from my
narratives however shows that I experienced a highly relational career decision-making process. At my parent’s persuasion I studied Commerce and chose a career in the financial sector [CLETCl3], an area typically associated with rational and commercial thinking. It appears as though my relational nature led me to subordinate my career interests in order to “to do what I was being told” (CLETCCJ1). I thus lost interest in a career as a means to fulfilment on the grounds that “having an interest in something was not enough” [CLETCCJ2]. Consequently, I disengaged from the career decision-making process for a considerable period.

Furthermore, the findings from the data indicate that I received two particular messages from my relational world during my adolescent development which I interpreted as follows:

- My creative self-expression must be subsumed to preserve my relationships. I observed that “my expression was not received well by adults critiquing my work” [CLETD1], and therefore “I gave up each of these hobbies in turn to avoid further upset” [CLETA2]. [LS Turning Points/CLETImage 2]
- A “nonrelational mode” (Deanow, 2011) is the most effective way to survive [CLETA1-3, LS Turning Points]. I therefore adopted what I describe in my narrative as a “formulaic approach to study which continued to get me results” [CLETA1] because it was “within the system” [CLETD7].

It is apparent that I found this way of being difficult. My metaphor for my school and college studies is of it being “a sentence” [CLETCCJ2] to be served in which I had to be “hard on myself in terms of results” [CLETSP5] because the learning process was not for personal fulfilment.

This pattern of personal meaning-making which involved fixing things by diminishing my own needs continues into my adulthood, where I continue to defer my desires, and cut myself off from my relational self by only occupying the logical spaces in my head.

“...survived by suppressing it all, [I] lived in the head only, on the side where logic prevails and feelings are discounted. [I] formed a strategy to survive” [PlayA4]
According to the findings, my nonrelational mode meant my learning was focused on accomplishing the end-products of employability and financial security espoused by my parents [CLETImage2]. I did achieve “financial independence” [CLETCI7] in my twenties. This created space for me to confront and overcome my self-image issues [CLETT3], and the conditions for me to experience subsequent mutuality in a romantic relationship with another person [CLETRS4].

It is evident from my data that I exhibited a lack of agency in my early career development and decision-making processes; my approach was based on trying “to please others” [STORY2SP3].

“When you don’t hold yourself in regard you tend to do that, and look instead for others to give it to you. I chased career to feel of value and give meaning to my life.” [STORY2SP3]

It is also apparent from my data that my experience of becoming a parent has caused me to reflect on my parents’ influence on my career decision-making and to try to contextualise their viewpoint on career. In their childhood for example they experienced:

“...civil unrest in Ireland... WWII, loss of parents... Corporal punishment.... Dominance of Roman Catholic church... Maltreatment of mothers and children.... Men broken by war....” [CLETPRS2]

While in their adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s, they experienced living on the fringes of a liberal Western culture but in an Ireland immersed in economic instability and the Roman Catholic cultural conservatism of that time.

“I can see how commitment and loyalty to one job/career could become a focus to counter the instability of the times. I can understand how they were almost always waiting for the rainy day or the what could go wrong” [CLETPRS3]

I have reflected further in my written reflections in the CLET how they probably aspired to giving me the gift of career opportunity because to them it represented stability and a better life which they had not experienced for themselves:
“I can also understand how the opportunities of my time were a way to relive opportunities that they would liked to have had. I can also see how security was more important to them then fulfilment.” [CLET PRS3]

There is also evidence of my awareness of my own influence as a parent on my children’s identity, and the need to actively promote authenticity in that collaboration, and to have compassion for the mistakes I will make as a parent [Story2].

The findings from this part of the analysis led me to my third theme, the contextualisation of my career bias. I decided that insights into my psychological experience of the working mother’s dilemma were important to share because of their potential wider applicability in future research on parents’ influence on shaping the next generation’s relationship with career.

4.4. Theme 3: The working mother’s dilemma

This third significant theme relates to the dilemma I encountered in my midlife as a working mother between my rational career identity and my relational role as mother. It is apparent from the insights into my inner world gained in this study, that in my midlife I experienced a particularly difficult dichotomy between the polarities of my feminine relational being and my masculine rational being.

For example my play, Labour of Love – Finding my Life Purpose, reveals a male alter ego which I conceived in adolescence, called “The Marshall”. He personifies my “nonrelational mode” as discussed under theme 2 above. The Marshall promotes self-containment, competition, and the building of relationships based on external referencing; he is also ambitious. In contrast, my feminine character in the play is underdeveloped, out of touch with her identity, and submissive to “Marshall rule” [PlaySCRS3].

The drama in the play unfolds when in my late 20s my maternal instincts took a hold of me. They triggered an inner conflict because of the contrasting “enlightenment offered by motherhood” and the lack of authenticity in my role identity, as a working mother [PlayE1]. I experience the working mother’s dilemma as a situation in which:
“It became impossible for me to inhale softness into being a mother to my children in the evening, from a body shrivelled and dried from exhaling life into her career and workplace trying to be a mother to it too”. [PlayD2/SP3]

The crisis in my role identity reaches its climax when I become conscious that my feminine self would prefer to remain oppressed, otherwise,

“it will fall to her to lead the way and she is scared of what that might entail” [PlayE1]

To overcome my unresolved relational dilemmas regarding my voice and caretaking role from adolescence, I am forced in midlife to choose:

“between letting go and leaning in; the choice between living [my] dream and living the dream spun by commerce; the choice of putting the needs of [myself] above the things that we are told we need and need to be?” [PlayE1]

The play climaxes in the death of The Marshall, whilst I metaphorically labour through my transition to give new life to my femininity in the form of mother. This creates an opportunity for self-renewal. Nevertheless, there are indications in my researcher journal and short stories (Story1 and Story2) that while personally satisfied with my midlife career choice to be a full-time parent, I perceive from a socio-economically perspective that it is not enough to be a full-time parent. Consequently, I seek financial reward for my role as a full-time parent to legitimise it as a career choice and not as a career interruption.

This finding suggests that I measure the value of my work in an economic context and not in terms of the quality of the relationships it is embedded in despite my relatedness. This poses a moral difficulty for me because I am sensitive to the needs of others. From a research perspective I decided it was important to explore this tension between my sensitivity and my career given the postmodern focus on career resilience.

4.5. Theme 4: Sensitivity

The fourth theme of sensitivity provides insight into how a sensitive person such as me, experiences the world and the career development issues that arise. According to Braun
and Clarke (2006) the prevalence of a theme is not limited to the number of its appearances in the data set. If a theme captures a crucial point in the overall research question it merits inclusion in the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I believe a discussion on my sensory and emotional experience of the world gives added texture to my account, and can provide a wider applicability in the context of the rise of the ‘Snowflake’ generation.

By my own admission I am a sensitive human being. My journaling reveals how I experience my sensitivity on a daily basis as though my heart were a sensory organ:

“It’s not easy to walk in the skin of being a sensitised person, sometimes I find it overwhelming because it is as though you are being pricked by injustices and cruelties at a distance from you that you have no business feeling; it is to be moved to tears when you take a moment to feel the simple beauty of an ordinary moment.” [Research Journal entry on 29 September 2017]

It would appear from my data that I was a highly sensitive person from birth but that subsequent life events have increased my sensitivity.

“I have always been sensitive, but having children and falling ill have made me even more sensitive”. [Research Journal entry on 29 September 2017]

While I express no desire to be different, I believe that society does not value this trait and views it as a deficit in my character:

“It’s not an approved state of psychological being, to feel so much” [Research Journal entry on 29 September 2017]

My sensitivity according to the data has a felt sense of morality, social justice and legacy; in essence “I genuinely believe in goodness” [LSB15]. Consequently the influence and importance of love as a tool for making meaning of my world is prominent throughout my data. I express wonder at what I perceive to be the “miracle” of love in how it arrives into the world “wrapped-up in a newborn” whether or not they have been conceived in love [PlayB2/Story2B1]. This is juxtaposed with a profound sense of sadness that one of the “greatest tragedies” in our world is the loneliness of “feeling unloved” and the lost potential “to grow and form the person they were intended to be” [PlayB2/Story2RS4]. Regardless of circumstance however it is apparent that I believe “love is a choice” [Story2B3], and it involves surrounding ourselves in love [Story2B5]. While it is evident
post midlife that I have chosen to create a safe space to construct my “love story” [Story2CI1], this contrasts with how I approached my sensitivity in the first part of my life.

In addition to the suppression of my career interests in adolescence, I neglected to attend to my self-care when making rational career choices. My logical thinking placed me in environments that I found “inhospitable” to my sensitive and relational disposition [CLETRRS12]. I lacked the relational competence to know how to cope; the workplace experience was at times overwhelming for me. In my data I recall that “I could be extremely shy” and how “I hated talking the talk” [CLETD4]. As a result, in the workplace I experienced the incompatibility between my career identity and being the “nice person” [LSB13] in the form of loneliness [CLETC16]. To adapt to this environment the data shows that I positioned my career identity to “champion the alternative view, or the overly sensitive view” [PlaySP2].

I also found that sustaining my career goal for “financial independence” was a form of “incarceration” [PlayE2] due to the addictive behaviours that it gave rise to. On the one hand I became a workaholic competing at work to maintain my status in work and society; and on the other a shopaholic and television addict to “distract myself from the drudgery of my daily routine and difficult interactions” [CLETCC14]. Having realised the working mother’s dream in my early 30s, I felt aggrieved not celebratory. My sense of “bereavement” [PlayT3] lay in having to continue to defer my enjoyment. My life purpose was now to defend the demise of the “dream spun by commerce” [PlayE1] and serve the “penance for having a dual career” for the rest of my working and parenting life [CLETC19]. My dislike for my future life purpose coincided with the realisation that “I wasn’t happy dying as that person” I had become [PlayT3].

Furthermore, the level of imbalance in the multiplicity of my work and life roles, and my way of working as though it was a form of “martyrdom” [PlayA1] emptied “my stores” [PlayD3]. Whilst work dominated my way of life it did not provide any relational supports to help me address the meaninglessness that was engulfing me, this affected my inner stability. Thus, I held on tighter to my old way of being which resulted in additional anxiety and heightened sensitivity.
“Dreams become vivid and full of obscure meaning. They tell me what will come…. They show me the depths of despair I will reach trying to ascend all of this and how this will test my reserves... they tell me it is the only way I can make my transition.” [PlayDK9/T9]

I surmise that the rational mode which I had created “to protect me” in adolescence had come to “intimidate me” in midlife [PlayDK11].

From these findings it is clear that I lacked self-awareness and understanding of my sensitivity and relational development until my mid-30s and therefore neglected to build the relational supports I needed to overcome my relational obstacles. Given the importance of promoting healthy psychological growth in postmodern society I have focused my final theme on relational supports.

4.6. Theme 5: My relational resources

This final theme discusses the relational resources and strategies which have helped me to “find the resilience to cope” [PlayFaith1] with my midlife transition and to begin the process of creating the life I have always wished for. The analysis of my relational resources is presented in the following sub-sections: positive self-talk; a redemptive narrative; a safe relational context; ongoing self-development, and critical reflexivity.

4.1.1 Positive self-talk

This sub-section will examine how I use self-talk to positively reframe my thoughts.

In examining my findings, I realise that I have been unconsciously transforming obstacles into lessons throughout my life to make them meaningful and to see them as necessary to my development. This is reflected in the development of my self-talk, for example:

“I do believe that I have brought these lessons and these challenges into my life as I needed to overcome them or reconcile them…. and once you overcome them it just evaporates...” [LSB9]

My self-talk includes the use of affirmations, gratitude’s and prayer to reinforce my faith in goodness and in love and exploit their hope and healing qualities:
“I have decided to be grateful for the good that happens to me, and to see the good that has and can come from the bad; and in that way keep faith that my love story will be a happy one and lead to other happy stories”. [Story1B7/RS6]

4.1.2 Redemptive narrative

This sub-section will examine how I position myself positively in my narrative to give meaning to my actions.

It would appear that this ability to redeem my life narrative was formed by me in early life through viewing myself as a “Born Survivor” able to overcome difficulties [Story1SP6]. Its development continued through adolescence and adulthood so that I was sufficiently resilient to handle the magnitude of reframing my midlife transition and its conversion from a negative to a positive life occurrence [LSSP15]. My agency in constructing a redemptive plot arguably grew from my spiritual outlook and faith which informs my viewpoint:

“our journey in life is almost preordained and intended to educate us in the way we need to be ready for our life purpose when it comes around” [LSB8]

And in that way:

“I can see how the things that have happened to me had to happen in order for me to learn and to move on and apply that learning and grow” [LSB10]

4.1.3 A safe relational context

This sub-section will examine how I manage my relational context.

Another important resource for me has been the making of a conscious choice that I will take the necessary steps to create and occupy “a safe place” for my self-care [Story1SP12/CCJ1/CI1]. Consequently, “my world has become much smaller” as I have “switched-off” [CLETRS14] from the mainstream social discourse and other negative relationships. I have also begun to question the legitimacy of others’ truth rather than mine as I did before my midlife transition [CLETRS14].
4.1.4 Ongoing self-development

This sub-section will examine how I maintain and sustain my relational growth.

Prior to, during and since my midlife transition my constant relational resources have been: my relationships with my husband and children and my personal relationship with my spirituality. Other forms of self-development include: books that educate me on my personal-development; the use of creative writing and artistic expression which helps me connect with my truth (see Appendices I and J for samples of my self-authored work); and regular exercise which stops me from ruminating. [CLETImage8]

4.1.5 Critical reflexivity

This sub-section will examine how I challenge the beliefs, values and assumptions underlying my viewpoint to consider alternative points of view.

My capacity for critical reflexivity has developed considerably during this self-study and facilitated my understanding of myself and others, in order to let go of old issues (see Appendix K for samples). This self-study has become a relational resource for me. It has provided me with new insights and a purpose on how to redeem the construct of career for me personally. But it has also given me a wider sense of purpose that I might give hope to other women like me who feel marginalised by career:

“It is as though Savickas was talking about me when he said that, individuals are motivated to use their career to overcome hurtful obstacles they have experienced in their private life, by mastering their unconscious preoccupations and transforming them into an occupation (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011).” [Researcher Journal November 2017].

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the data analysis strategy and process involved in this autoethnographic study. It has described the key themes that emerged in the data analysis namely: my relational and interconnected life-work narrative; parental influence on my early career decision-making; the working mother’s dilemma; sensitivity; and my relational resources. The next chapter will synthesis these findings with the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this discussion chapter is to synthesise the primary findings with the findings of my literature review, in the context of my primary and secondary research questions.

5.1 Overview of research findings

The overall aim of my self-study was to use a spiritual perspective to find connection and meaning in my work and consider its implications for guidance counsellor practice. In order to investigate this, I posed a number of research questions underpinned by a constructivist epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the study’s emphasis on relationships, I adopted a relational approach to answering these research questions. In this way, I could contextualise my primary findings on my career development process in terms of my relationship with self, others and my socio-cultural environment (Blustein et al., 2004).

Four research questions guided this autoethnographic study. The main research question asked, “In what ways has my relatedness influenced my relationship with career and my current disconnection with it?” The primary findings showed that I use my work to relate to others which correlates with the literature findings (Blustein et al., 2004; Fox, 1994). They revealed how my relational context has influenced my career identity, and how the quality of my relationships has in turn influenced my experience of work and my career progress. My experiences correspond with the assertions of the relational-cultural models on career development proposed by a number of authors (Blustein, 2006; Motulsky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). Arising from this autoethnographic study I have identified that the origins of my disconnection with career occurred during my adolescent career decision-making phase when I suppressed my true career interests to position myself as the ‘good’ girl in my parental relationship. This appears to have distorted my career identity and established a life-long pattern of diminishing myself in my work to remain this ‘good’ girl. This analysis concurs with models of women’s moral reasoning and relational development (Deanow, 2011; Gilligan, 1982).
A secondary research question asked, “How do I describe my relational development and its affect on my career narrative?” My primary findings show that I am sensitive to confrontation and relational contexts. Furthermore, I am susceptible to withholding parts of my ‘real’ self and giving the version of me that I believe will be accepted in that relationship (Deanow, 2011). In this way, I can preserve the harmony of the relationship, support the need of the other and position my diminished self-concept in the relationship (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011). My experience is consistent with the literature findings on the effects on women of underdeveloped relational competence (Deanow, 2011). Hence, disconnection is an evident theme in my career narrative as are its symptoms: isolation, diminished sense of self and burnout (Comstock et al., 2008).

Another question asked, “What relational supports do I need to experience renewal in my relationship with career?” A prerequisite for me to experiencing a positive connection is that I am positioned in a place where I feel it is safe to be me (Comstock et al., 2008; Hartling & Sparks, 2008). In a positive connection, I experience increased confidence, performance, creativity and a renewed interest in my relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). My findings elucidate that I need to renew my interest in my adolescent hobbies to reconnect with my true career interest (Schultheiss et al., 2011). There is consensus in the primary and literature findings that I need to: develop my relational competence and resilience; learn to read the relatedness of my work environment; manage the work environment by positively using my relationships with co-workers; but also maintain a balance in my non-work relationships and roles (Hartling & Sparks, 2008; Moltusky, 2010). In this way, I will create opportunities to experience my workplace as a “culture[s] of connection” and exploit the meaningfulness of my work and life (Hartling & Sparks, 2008, p.169).

My final research question asks, “What are the implications of these insights for the practice of guidance counselling?” The research findings indicate that the most effective approach to career mobility and labour market volatility is to prepare individuals for inevitable career transition by enabling them relate to their context (Moltusky, 2010; Savickas, 2011). They also show that regardless of how we define career success and whether individuals are motivated by separateness or connectedness, career progress and performance is shaped by their relational context and the quality of their relationships
within it (Lent, 2016; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). My primary findings unearthed the extent to which relational contexts distorted my relationships and my career identity, and consequently, hindered my career development and well-being (Deanow, 2011; Schultheiss, 2003; 2009). These insights show the psychological significance of exploring relational contexts in the development of a stable and authentic career identity (Blustein, 2006). They also highlight the importance of developing relational competence and resilience for healthy career development, particularly in women and marginalised groups (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss et al., 2011). The research findings also underline how important critical reflexivity is in guidance practice, to avoid the transference of the guidance counsellor’s preconceptions that undermine the client’s self-efficacy (Lent 2013; Schultheiss, 2003). Correspondingly, the guidance counsellor’s critical reflexivity fosters the conditions for mutual empathy in the client relationship which heals relational disconnection and enhances career progress (Hartling & Sparks, 2008).

The overall findings will now be discussed under two overarching themes selected based on their wider meaning and applicability for guidance counselling (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- The interrelatedness between the quality of women’s relationships and career progress
- The relational factors influencing the development of women’s career identity

### 5.2. The interrelatedness between the quality of women’s relationships and career progress

This theme will examine how the quality of women’s relationships with others affects women’s experience of career progress. The analysis of my relationships is presented in the following sub-sections in the order of my career development milestones. Each relationship is examined in terms of how it influenced my progression in respect of that particular career milestone. A tabular analysis of the interconnectedness between the quality of my relationships and my career progress (Schultheiss, 2003); in the context of my relational development (Deanow, 2011) is presented in Appendix H. The implications for guidance counselling practice will be discussed in the final sub-section.
5.2.1 Relationship with parents and early career decision-making

This sub-section will examine the interconnection between the quality of my adolescent relationship with my parents and my career progress in my early career decision-making.

The relational theme in adolescence is authenticity and this correlates with my own experience (Deanow, 2011). The developmental task for the girl is to establish her sense of self and negotiate a new relationship with her parents, which enhances her emerging self-concept. I failed in adolescence to establish my self-concept in my career identity and to negotiate a new relationship with my parents (Deanow, 2011). I positioned the ‘good’ version of myself in my relationship with my parents to meet their needs in a career context, and muted my self-expression in that relationship and in my career identity (Gilligan, 2004; Moltusky, 2010). This lack of authenticity resulted in a disconnection in my parental relationship in the context of my career development, and also in my relationship with career (Deanow, 2011). As my career progressed I became more entrenched in the latter disconnection, and more reliant on strategies of disconnection to cope with the frustration (Comstock et al., 2008). The financial independence provided to me by my career, however, afforded me the opportunity to create the space to renew my relationship with self in my 20s.

5.2.2 Relationship with self and the formation of my career identity

This sub-section will examine the interconnection between the quality of my relationship with self over the course of my adolescence and early adulthood; and my career progress in respect of the formation of my career identity.

Other relational themes which posed a challenge for me in my adolescence were relational differentiation and the development of relationship skills (Deanow, 2011). These obstacles were largely attributable to my severe acne and manifested in a felt sense of unworthiness and hurt within me in my adolescence (Deanow, 2011). As I was ashamed of my skin condition I experienced a disconnection with myself (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011). I tried to separate myself from it, however practically speaking, this could only be accomplished by physically keeping myself outside of relationships, which I did when I felt I risked being rejected for my appearance (Deanow, 2011). Comstock et al. (2008, p.282) describes this as “condemned isolation”. As I could not live in my bedroom for my
entire life I created an alter-ego “The Marshall” in my adolescence. This strategy of disconnection enabled me to cope with the individualistic career identity I was socialised into pursuing in adolescence (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011). It also positioned me as a ‘good’ girl despite my appearance (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011).

In my 20s, career gave me the financial independence to cure my skin condition which enabled me to trust my appearance and work through my disconnection with self. Once in connection, I experienced less anxiety about my appearance, and with this increased confidence I began to seek new connections in the form of a romantic partnership (Comstock et al., 2008). In terms of my career progress, the reconnection with self enhanced my effectiveness. I experienced increased self-esteem which meant less energy was absorbed by anxieties about my appearance and my natural relatedness began to re-emerge in the shape of a growing business network (Comstock et al., 2008).

5.2.3 Relationship with romantic partner

This section will examine the interconnection between the quality of my romantic relationship and my career progress in terms of my role as a parent.

In early adulthood, the relational theme is mutuality and individuals seeking a mate, similarly I sought to be a part of a couple (Deanow, 2011). This mutuality developed for me through a long-term romantic partnership that I formed in my mid-20s. It empowered me to accomplish the development tasks that I had not previously accomplished in my adolescence namely: establishing my self-concept and renegotiating my relationship with my parents (Deanow, 2011; Gilligan, 2004; Lent, 2016). Concerning my career progress, the establishment of my self-concept and its relational needs prompted my maternal instincts to emerge; and I chose to pursue a dual-career and become a parent.

In adulthood, the relational theme is dexterity. This manifested in my 30s whereby I experienced the challenge of juggling the needs of my spouse, work and children (Deanow, 2011; Schultheiss, 2009). The experience of motherhood altered my self-concept (Josselson, 1996). I experienced my nurturing side on maternity leave and a strong sense of fulfilment in parenting work; it awoke my feminine aspect. “The Marshal” perceived the threat posed by my parenting career to my ‘real’ career. I began to experience the internal
conflict between my ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits; the former seeking dominance and separateness; the latter underdeveloped but seeking some kind of communion (Gilligan, 2004; 2005). The Marshall’s anxieties about losing my career success dominated me and therefore I prioritised my paid work and created imbalance (Deanow, 2011). I was unable to attend to my parenting with the authenticity and presence that offered me connection (Deanow, 2011). As the disconnections increased and deepened, my resilience diminished, my strategies began to fail and my overall well-being suffered (Hartling & Sparks, 2008). I could no longer occupy the inauthentic career identity I had created in adolescence and I withdrew from my paid work to experience “condemned isolation” again (Comstock et al., 2008, p.282). In summary, my relational development sought authenticity not only in my personal life but in my professional life too and enforced a career transition (Deanow, 2011).

5.2.4 Relationship with God

This section will examine the interconnection between the quality of my relationship with God and my career progress, in terms of my self-development and inner ‘spiritual’ work. According to Thorne (2002), it is a belief in the transformative power of the relational encounter and not the language of existentialism that channels a sense of connectedness and meaning. Thus this section will focus on how I experience God rather than trying to define spirituality.

With regards to my primary findings my ‘spiritual work’ has remained a constant theme in my career progress; as has my relationship with God which has moved between connection and disconnection throughout my life. My primary findings show that as I have moved towards authenticity in my social relationships, a corresponding movement has occurred in my career (Schultheiss, 2003). However, it was not until my imposed career transition in adulthood that I accomplished mutuality with my ‘spiritual work’. At this juncture, I experienced a mutually empathetic encounter with my faith (Boczkowska & Zieba, 2016; (Comstock et al., 2008). I positively exploited the connection it provided to work through the crisis of my “condemned isolation” in adulthood (Comstock et al., 2008, p282). Arguably, my career progress had a reciprocal effect on my spiritual relationship and facilitated the emergence of my faith, and the realisation of it as a relational resource (Schultheiss, 2003).
5.2.5 What are the implications for guidance counselling?

This first theme illustrates how the quality of women’s relationships are positively correlated to their career progress in terms of their paid work, caregiving work, and self-development work (Fox, 1994; Hansen, 1997; Schultheiss, 2003; 2009). Similarly, it reveals the significance that our life themes hold in our self-development and within the broader context of our career development (Savickas, 1997; Schultheiss, 2003). It also illustrates the vastness and complexity of these relationships, and why as John O’Donoghue alluded to in my introduction in Chapter 1, we can sometimes perceive a void in our lives because we are unable to comprehend their interconnectedness and meaning (Bowman, 2015). The implication of this finding is that there is a merit in expanding the concept of spirituality present in some career and counselling theories by recognising spirituality as a relational context and as a life-work role (Fox, 1994; Miller-Tiedeman, 1999). In this way, career counselling can be truly holistic and support integrative life-planning and different experiences of work (Blustein, 2006; Hansen, 1997).

Another implication of these findings for guidance counsellors is the importance not only of client’s relationships generally, but Guidance counsellors’ presence in the client relationship (Lent, 2016, Schultheiss, 2003). Guidance counsellors need to appreciate that they are a key relational support for women encountering career obstacles (Comstock et al., 2008; Lent, 2016; Schultheiss, 2003). Furthermore, it is important that the guidance counsellor considers the prerequisites to supporting such an empathetic encounter. This emphasis on relationships is time-consuming and not consistent with the policy and economic context that guidance counsellors work within (Reid & West, 2011). The challenge for guidance counsellors is whether they can resist the relational pressures of their practice setting and create the conditions for a transformative therapeutic relationship that enhances the self-efficacy of their client (Hartling & Sparks, 2008; Lent, 2016; Reid & West, 2010).

5.3. The relational factors influencing the development of women’s career identity

This second theme will examine how my relational contexts influenced the development of my career identity in adolescence and adulthood.
5.3.1 The socialisation of adolescent girls to be all things nice

This sub-section will examine in the context of my primary findings, how the role socialisation of girls from childhood to be sensitive to others affects their relational development and may cause them to develop an individualistic career identity in adolescence to fit in (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010; Muuss, 1988).

As discussed earlier in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, my relational development was hindered in adolescence by my inability to negotiate authenticity, relational differentiation and ‘chumship’ respectively (Deanow, 2011). This lack of relational competence subsequently affected my adolescent career decision-making (Deanow, 2011). During relational differentiation, feminist theorists outline how the moral development of a girl is predicated on the notion that it is wrong for her to be ‘selfish’ (Deanow, 2011; Gilligan, 1982). A moral pressure is exerted on girls from childhood to be ‘good’ and if necessary to sacrifice their own needs to take care of others (Deanow, 2011; Gilligan, 1982). Girls sometimes interpret this as not being worthy to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship (Deanow, 2011). Girls also begin to notice gender bias in their lives and the greater value given to the accomplishments of men in society (Deanow, 2011). This experience of diminishment can foster a lifelong practice of self-depreciation amongst some girls and women (Atwood, 2001; Deanow, 2011).

From my findings it is evident that I felt a duty to ‘do the right thing’ in my adolescent career decision-making (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010). I appear to have internalised the diminishment of my career interests in adolescence “as a felt sense of unworthiness”; and in adulthood used work as a means of reaffirming my negative self-concept (Comstock et al., 2008, p.282). I have come to the realisation through this study that I position my career identity in the context of demonstrating my integrity, nurturing others, and as a means of atoning for not being ‘good’ enough. Related to this, I locate this career identity in environments “inhospitable” to my relational perspective so that mutuality is an unlikely outcome for me, as according to my self-concept I will never be ‘good’ enough to be in a mutually enhancing relationship (Deanow, 2011; Lent, 2016).
Another relational complexity in the development of girls is how they learn to respond to hurt when acquiring the skills to mend conflict in their relationships, during chumship (Deanow, 2011). Girls can sometimes respond to hurt by keeping “unacceptable aspects” of themselves outside of their relationships to avoid the shame of their imperfections (Deanow, 2011, p.130). In my narrative, I appear to have carried some emotional hurt in response to negative feedback from examiners and adjudicators concerning my creative self-expression, which prompted me to discontinue those hobbies to avoid the risk of future rejection (Comstock, et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011). My decision had the effect of excluding my creative and relational interests from my early career decision-making.

As previously discussed in section 5.2.1 authenticity is a relational theme in my adolescence (Deanow, 2011). This developmental task is relationally challenging because it coincides with a socio-cultural pressure on adolescent girls to abandon the nurturing behaviours engendered in them from childhood, for austerity and separateness in adolescence to accomplish individualistic career success (Gilligan, 1982). As an adolescent I subsumed my creative and caring career interests to concentrate on career stability and financial reward and to meet my parents’ preconceptions about career that were predicated on their fear of uncertainty. Deanow (2011, p.131) describes this experience for girls as the “cultural push” to give-up a relational way of being for separateness as this is perceived to be a prerequisite for succeeding in career. My inability in adolescence to establish my self-concept in my career identity resulted in a relational disconnection with career; and lowered my expectations of positive outcomes and thus my self-efficacy (Deanow, 2011; Kidd, 2006; Lent, 2016). In other words, I disassociated from my feelings about career and ceased to expect any form of fulfilment from it, increasing my felt sense of unworthiness (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010). According to feminist theories, I experienced the central relational paradox; by not bringing my true self into my career decision-making process no real relationship ever existed between my adolescent career identity and I; this relational disconnection continued into my adulthood (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011).

5.3.2 The socialisation of women to be productive and reproductive

In this section, I will discuss how mothers are socialised to prioritise individualistic career success over concomitant parenting in order to matter (Byrne-Doran, 2012; Schultheiss, 2009). In adulthood, the critical relational development tasks that undermined the
continued development of my career identity were mutuality and dexterity. Adulthood
presents individuals with numerous opportunities to develop mutually enhancing
relationships with others than our spouse. My next opportunity to develop my relational
skills was with my co-workers and later with my children (Deanow, 2011). The challenge
that arose for me however, was establishing the balance that was required to be truly
present in each of these relationships at the same time (Deanow, 2011).

In my 20s, I had little balance in my life as my career was my focus and the principal
source of my social connections. My lifestyle was heavily influenced by this relational
context and lacked sustenance (Deanow, 2011). I believed in working hard and this meant I
should enjoy the comforts in life I could now afford (Helliwell et al, 2012). I no longer had
hobbies and my leisure time was spent consuming and seeking escapism (Fox, 1994). My
relational contexts were greatly influenced by the media and advertising industry of our
booming economy in Ireland which generated endless wants and promoted dissatisfaction
in life to create the consumer behaviour needed to drive its continued growth; my
consumerist behaviour was therefore, endorsed (Fox, 1994; Helliwell et al., 2012). To
survive this disconnection I had to compete in this relational context; therefore, I had to
work harder, earn more and buy more (Comstock et al., 2008; Fox, 1994; Hartling &
Sparks, 2008; Helliwell et al., 2012). The materialist wants I acquired to dispel my
unhappiness, however, only deepened my disconnection with career as I became ensnared
in an addictive spiral of work and spend behaviours (Fox, 1994; Helliwell et al., 2012).

Additionally, the literature highlights that there is a presumption by the dominant social
discourse that sensitivity in an individual is a deficiency, particularly in the context of
accomplishing career success (Blustein, 2006; Morrisey, 2017). As the modern workplace
appears to be dominated by the socio-economic values of individualism, women can
experience a relational vacuum in their work environment (Blustein, 2006; Moltusky,
2010; Schultheiss et al., 2011). Despite my disconnection with my career choice, my
subsequent repositioning of my career identity around my relatedness in my late 20s gave
me an opportunity to connect meaningfully with others through my work (Blustein et al.,
2004). During this period of my career development, I experienced shifts in work cultures
towards and away from relatedness (Hartling & Sparks, 2008). The latter culture
disempowered me and isolated me in my role and from relational supports within these
organisations (Hartling & Sparks, 2008). Over time, I found the lack of relational support and the scale of the disconnection depleted my resilience (Hartling & Sparks, 2008).

When I became a mother in my 30s, while I had mutuality in my relationship with my long-term partner, it was absent in my relationship with work because of my career identity and setting. My career identity remained one of subordination and dominated my dual-career as a parent (Deanow, 2011). These competing relational demands meant that from the perspective of my moral reasoning that I would never be ‘good’ enough in either domain. During this period, my data findings show that I succumbed to the cultural view that my maternal obligations were an “expensive nuisance” in the workplace (Oak, 2003, p.1981). I experienced a felt sense of guilt about being a parent, as though it showed a disloyalty to my career. Previous fears of rejection from adolescence resurfaced, as well as insecurities about the sustainability of my career success in the context of being a parent. I positioned my career in a way that I had to “work harder than before” to compensate for the incompatibility of the flexibility required by my paid work with the stability of parenting (Blustein, 2006; Byrne-Dolan, 2012). It is this working mother’s dilemma which heightened my sense of disconnection in my work-life roles. According to the feminist literature, my inability to work through the various disconnections and my subsequent burnout, illness and withdrawal from the workplace was inevitable (Comstock et al., 2008; Deanow, 2011; Pipher, 1994). It is apparent, however, from these findings that it is my sense of legacy as a mother that is perpetuating me in my late 30s to redeem my career narrative in this autoethnographic study, and heal the disconnection with career for my personal healing; in order to leave a work-life legacy worthy of my children (Byrne-Dolan, 2012; McAdams, 2001).

5.3.3 What are the implications for guidance counselling?

Broadly speaking career success is defined by some authors as either putting the individual or relationships at the centre of the career narrative (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2004; Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). Regardless of how we define career success our performance in attaining this goal is dependent on our relational context and the quality of our relationships in that context (Lent, 2016; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). This suggests that further research is required into the interrelatedness of these variables in a career context. Furthermore, it suggests that there is a need to conduct research to
investigate the learning and behavioural outcomes of guidance, to broaden our measurement of effective guidance for policymakers and to adapt to the “careerquake” shaking our current paradigm (Watts, 2005, p.67).

Women, and particularly working mothers, who are marginalised by the historical or dominant social discourse are more likely to be negatively impacted by relational processes because of systemic stigmatisation of their difference (Schultheiss, 2003). Guidance counsellors need to be sensitive to this and consider whether their theoretical approaches contain any underlying biases that might cause a relational disconnection in their relationship with clients (Comstock et al., 2008). Similarly, they should consider whether career obstacles experienced by a client are rooted in discrimination rather than a lack of self-agency (Comstock et al., 2008; Kidd, 2006; Lent, 2016; Schultheiss et al., 2011).

Furthermore, given the lack of career recognition generally for women’s mothering and care-giving in society, it is apparent from these findings that guidance counsellors have a unique opportunity to effect social change in their practice (Schultheiss, 2009). This can be accomplished by giving such roles career recognition and implementing life-design plans that incorporate women’s reproduction, parenting and caregiving roles (Schultheiss, 2009). In conclusion, these findings suggest that women’s experience of guidance counselling might be enhanced by placing less reliance on client’s self-reliance and separateness and more emphasis on client’s relationships and interdependencies (Moltusky, 2010; Sampson et al., 2011; Schultheiss, 2003). Thus, guidance counsellors can help female clients identify potential relational resources to support their career development, and exploit the benefits of connection, including enhanced performance and networks.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has critically discussed the findings of my autoethnographic study through a synthesis of the previous literature and the findings from my arts-based narrative primary data analysis. It found that my experiences of career development and career decision-making broadly align with those of a relational-cultural model of development identified in the feminist literature. The findings raise issues about the importance of confronting relational contexts in the formation of an authentic and psychologically healthy career.
identity for women. However, wider debate is necessary regarding the critical reflexivity of guidance counsellors, to support such an approach.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of this autoethnographic study within the framework of its aims and objectives. The chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of the study, provides recommendations for guidance counselling practice and considerations for future research in this field. Lastly, the chapter presents my key learning from my researcher reflexivity.

6.1. Overview of findings within the context of the study’s aims and objectives

The overall aim of the research was to employ a spiritual perspective to find connection and meaning in my work; and consider its implications for the practice of guidance counselling. To address this aim, I set myself three research objectives which were achieved:

1. To critically review the literature on relatedness as a factor in women’s career decision-making and career development, and its relationship with finding meaningful work and connectedness.
2. To use experimental arts-based narrative inquiry methods in an autoethnographic study to access my authentic voice, my experience of work and the relational factors that have influenced me.
3. Critically analyse the overall findings and the implications for guidance counselling of exploring relational context with women marginalised by career to provide opportunities for career renewal.

This section provides an overview of how these objectives were addressed in the course of the study. At the outset, I acknowledged that femininity and relatedness are understudied areas of career development. My first objective was, therefore, to conduct a critical review of the literature related to the discourse on women’s experiences of work, career
development and the relevance of connection in their lives. My literature findings revealed new theories of women’s development based on relatedness, their interconnectedness with women’s career progress and performance and their sensitivity to relational context (Lent, 2016; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). I then incorporated these findings into the iterative design of my self-study by posing relevant research questions on my relational development in the context of my career.

To realise my second objective, I designed my study as an autoethnographic study in order to locate myself in my research and observe my interaction with my context as advocated by constructivist career theorists (Savickas et al., 2009). I used arts-based narrative inquiry methods to collect data descriptions of my relational world and its tensions (see Appendices G, I and J for samples). These methods provided a rich insight into a woman’s experience of career for the practice of guidance (Blustein et al., 2004).

Finally, with regard to the third objective to ensure the overall theoretical value of my self-study, I analysed and explicated the practical and ethical considerations that arose from the research findings. The study also highlighted the implications of these for guidance counsellors’ critical reflexivity in their work with clients. A summary of my autoethnographic findings is presented below in terms of its: support for existing theories; the depths of its insights into a lived experience; and the inferences that can be drawn for wider applicability (O’Reilly, 2005).

One of the key outcomes of this research study is how the primary findings corroborate some of the relevant theories. The findings show that women’s career development and decision-making, and the practice of guidance counselling are relational processes influenced by the dominant social discourse of the time (Lent, 2016; Schultheiss, 2003). Regardless of whether career development, guidance counselling theory and practice place individual achievement or relational growth at the centre of its approach; our career performance and progress is developed and revised by the quality of our relationships and relational context (Lent, 2016; Kidd, 2006; Moltusky, 2010; Schultheiss, 2003). These insights drawn from my primary findings concurred with models of relational efficacy (Lent & Lopez, 2002) and relational-cultural theory (Deanow, 2011; Miller 1976) in the ways that relational context can enhance or undermine our identity, performance and well-being. In my adolescent account, I experienced role socialisation as the suppression of my
relational aspects for individualistic career success, which affected the formation of my career identity and positioned me in relationally challenging settings (Deanow, 2011). Subsequently in my 30s, I experienced the socio-economic pressure to diminish my role as a parent to preserve my individualistic career success, and this caused me to experience imbalance, disempowerment and reduced performance in my life-work roles (Blustein, 2006; Deanow, 2011).

Although disconnections are part of the continuum of any relationship, if they are not worked through they are likely to become chronic and cause emotional distress, particularly during a career transition (Moltusky, 2010). Similarly, strategies of disconnection, although intended to be a coping mechanism, can cause the disconnection to deepen and flood the individual psychologically (Comstock et al, 2008). This mirrors my personal insights into the way that my adolescent alter ego “The Marshall”, which shielded my sensitivity in adolescence, caused my burnout in my mid-30s as ‘he’ was unable to cope with the relational demands of my career and my parenting in adulthood (Comstock et al., 2008). Thus, I was forced to work through my relational disconnections from adolescence through a difficult career transition in adulthood (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010).

According to Schultheiss (2003) by guidance counsellors helping client’s to understand their relational connections they can develop the competence to positively exploit their relationships with others as a career development resource. From my new understandings, it is evident that it was the mutuality of my long-term romantic relationship with my partner that created the conditions for my overall healthy relational growth towards greater authenticity in my life-work roles (Deanow, 2011; Moltusky, 2010). Expanding on the power of transformative encounters, the literature findings confirm that the guidance counsellor is a relational resource for the client (Lent, 2016; Schultheiss, 2003). Consequently, guidance counsellors need to exercise critical reflexivity to ensure their relational context can support such an empathetic encounter (Reid & West, 2011).

Finally, the literature and primary findings uncovered two significant interrelated themes for future consideration: the importance to mothers’ of their life-work legacy to their children (Byrne-Dolan, 2012); and the need to develop the relational resilience of our young people to help them cope with their higher sensitivity and our work-life legacy.
(Byrne-Dolan, 2012; Morrisey, 2017). This self-study has given me an opportunity to work through my disconnection with career and to leave a healthier work-life legacy to my children (Byrne-Dolan, 2012; O’Shea & Kirrane, 2008). Additionally, I believe that inferences can be drawn from my experiences of sensitivity in this self-study, to the sensitivity of younger generations and their career development.

6.2. **Strengths and limitations of the study**

6.2.1 **Strengths**

One of the main strengths of this study is its application of an underused but recommended methodology in constructivist career research (Savickas et al., 2009). Autoethnographic approaches are capable of capturing the contextual factors that characterise a culture and shape the career identities within it, unlike quantitative methods which obscure these value judgements (O’Reilly, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009).

Another related strength of the study is its experimental use of arts-based narrative inquiry methods and the use of a relational perspective to contextualise my narrative. This created an opportunity for the study to “weave[s] life spaces together in a pattern that defies the regularity that has defined psychological research” (Blustein et al., 2004, p.435). This irregularity illuminates alternative experiences of career, and also makes them exciting, participative and accessible to new audiences (Blustein et al., 2004; Mullen, 2003).

From a professional development perspective, this autoethnographic study has aided the development of my self-reflective and self-reflexive practices (McIlveen & Patton, 2010). Consequently, I can better monitor counter-transference while supporting a mutually empathetic encounter in my personal and professional relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; McIlveen et al. 2010).

6.2.2 **Limitations**

The inherent limitation of this study is that it is a self-study which leads to concerns of rigour (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Le Roux, 2017). To counteract this, I used critical reflexivity throughout the study, as outlined later in section 6.4 of this chapter. I was also transparent in the selection and application of my methodology and ensured its relevance to the aims and objectives of my study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Another limitation is the narrative techniques used in the study were time-consuming and required my sustained attention and commitment as the inquiry was self-directed (McIlveen & Patton, 2010; Van Schalkwyk, 2010). In a practice setting, the collaboration of a guidance counsellor would sustain the client’s engagement (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014).

A final limitation of this study is it reveals the identity and vulnerability of the researcher for public interpretation, and therefore, poses complex moral issues regarding the protection of my dignity and those who have participated in my story (Alexandar, 2006; Dashpher, 2015).

6.3. **Recommendations for future policy, practice and research**

Based on the findings of this autoethnographic study, a number of recommendations are proposed with regard to policy, practice and research:

6.3.1 **Policy recommendations**

1. Investment in research to devise a broader measurement than cost to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance interventions to reflect the contemporary paradigm shift in our conceptualisation of life, work and career.

2. It is recommended that policymakers legitimise paid and unpaid caregiving as a career through equitable financial reward and elevation of its societal value.

3. Rebalance the focus of schools career guidance on third level entry and outdated assumptions about career, to prepare students for career transition in a volatile economy.

6.3.2 **Practice recommendations**

1. Guidance counsellors ought to consider the biases which underpin career guidance approaches to minimise the risk of perpetuating those injustices in a practice setting.

2. Guidance counsellors should consider whether the relational context of their guidance practice is supportive of their therapeutic presence and professionalism.
3. It is suggested that guidance counsellors use autoethnography as a tool for self-reflection and self-reflexivity to minimise counter-transference.

4. It is recommended that guidance counsellors recognise and explore relational context with clients to exploit the benefits of relationships in career progress and performance.

5. It is suggested that guidance counsellors legitimise all work whether paid or unpaid as a career including: motherhood; parenting; care of elders; and inner ‘spiritual’ work.

6.3.3 Research recommendations

1. To expand the existing study to sample a diverse group of male, female and transgender midlife participants and explore the influence of their relational contexts on their career narrative.

2. A further study to explore the benefits of integrating relational cultural theory into school guidance to develop students’ relational competence and resilience.

6.4. Researcher reflexivity in this self-study

The practice of researcher reflexivity provided me with a process for confronting questions about my interpretations and analysis of the data (Thomas, 2009). As a constructivist autoethnographic study the exploration of my relational context and my value judgements was critical to the development of my narrative account (Braun & Clarke, 2005). I documented my biases and their emotional impact on me as they surfaced during the research process in my research journal, and used it as a secondary source of data (Butler-Kisber, 2010). For research rigour, I disclosed my biases from my secondary data source in my analysis where it was relevant to the themes being discussed (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

In the literature, I experienced a validation of my own narrative on my lived experience of connection and disconnection. I reached a new understanding of myself as a relational and sensitive person and have a greater appreciation of my self-care. The exploration of my narrative has given me a greater self-awareness of and respect for my personal philosophy; “to grow in love”. This autoethnographic study has empowered me to connect my life themes, interests and motivations and to use their coherence to provide inner stability; and
to relate them to my career development (Savickas, 1997). This study has facilitated me in clearing my unfinished business from adolescence, and laying to rest my old relational issues that had resurfaced in adulthood (Savickas, 1997).

While the study caused my fears of rejection for being me to resurface, it is exactly this struggle that this self-study was designed to unearth (Blustein, 2006; Gilligan, 2004). The study was undertaken to give voice to me so that I can be heard as I am without a rewrite or without being muted and so that I might overcome this obstacle to my relational growth (Gilligan, 2004). This self-study has been a transformative experience for me. It has renewed my belief that “tragedy can turn into a road leading to freedom” (Gilligan, 2005, p.735). In contrast to Gilligan’s (2005) academic journey mine, has been a spiritual one. Nonetheless, like Gilligan’s (2005) journey, I have been inspired to resume my “love story” (p.735; [Story2CI1]); and from this point on “set[s] the stage for the birth not of tragedy, but of pleasure” (p.737).

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter concludes my autoethnographic study on my spiritual journey to find connectedness through meaningful work. It has provided an overview of the main findings of the study in the context of its aims and objectives. It has highlighted the strengths and limitations of the research process and made recommendations for policy, practice and research. Lastly, this chapter discussed my reflexivity and personal learning journey.
References


Byrne-Doran, J. (2012) ‘A qualitative study of working mothers in Ireland: An exploration of ‘lived experiences’, The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, 6, 11, 101-113, ISSN: 1833-1882, [online] available: http://web.b.ebscohost.com/abstract?direct=true&profile=host&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrn=18331882&AN=91821688&h=Tcb%2bTlxdlThSPfqulu466av9Osm7uF7MxM7cUpQ9wA1MMuEqK3dYSrfRd%2bfpmA9cGD4k3kFOI1KrSh2B%2bjQ%3d%3d&crl=c&resultNs=AdminWebAuth&resultLocal=ErrCrlNotAuth&crlhashurl=login.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26profile%26host%26site%26authtype%3dcrawler%26jrn%3d18331882%26AN%3d91821688 [accessed 24 March 2018].


## Appendix A: Table - Analysis of the data collected by source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Method of Inquiry</th>
<th>Form of Inquiry</th>
<th>Form of Data Collection</th>
<th>Date of Collection</th>
<th>Thematic Analysis Coding for Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary</td>
<td>Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995)</td>
<td>Semi-structured verbal narrative account</td>
<td>Audio recording and transcript</td>
<td>Generated for study 25 September 2017 (prior to literature review)</td>
<td>LS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Primary</td>
<td>CLET (Van Schalkwyk, 2010)</td>
<td>Visual collage and written narrative reflection</td>
<td>Visual and written account</td>
<td>Generated for study in late December 2017 (post literature review)</td>
<td>CLET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Primary</td>
<td>“Labour of Love – Finding My Life Purpose”</td>
<td>Self-authored found material – script for a stage play</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Generated in June 2015 prior to self-study</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Primary</td>
<td>Image with expectant mother</td>
<td>Self-authored found material – paintings/drawings</td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Acrylic painting August 2017</td>
<td>Art1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image of individual emerging from the crowd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acrylic painting August 2017</td>
<td>Art 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image of family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chalk pastel drawing September 2015</td>
<td>Art 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image of family on the road</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chalk pastel drawing October 2015</td>
<td>Art 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image of Sile na Gig</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chalk pastel drawing October 2015</td>
<td>Art 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Method of Inquiry</td>
<td>Form of Inquiry</td>
<td>Form of Data Collection</td>
<td>Date of Collection</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis Coding for Data Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Primary</td>
<td>“The preoccupation that became my occupation”</td>
<td>Self-authored found material – short stories</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Incomplete essay May 2016 March 2016 May 2016</td>
<td>Story1 Story2 Story3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A love letter”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Anger is a feeling but you can choose your reaction”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Secondary</td>
<td>Researcher journal</td>
<td>Critical reflexivity</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix B: Walkthrough of coding for thematic analysis

**Step 1: Preliminary observations and note-taking:**

I familiarised myself with the entire data set and took notes of my preliminary observations as per the image above.
Step 2: Identification and coding of data extracts:
I identified data extracts of interest across the data set. I coded these data extracts in hardcopy upon identification. I then transcribed them to my thematic map for further analysis.
Step 3: Key for colour coding of data extracts

As I identified data extracts of interest I colour coded them and allocated them an acronym. The colour code made patterns more easily identifiable.
Table: Overview of coding system for sources of data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Data Extract</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995)</td>
<td>LS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET (Van Schalkwyk, 2010)</td>
<td>CLET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Labour of Love – Finding My Life Purpose” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Disclosure” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Poem1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Source” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Poem2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image with Expectant Mother (self-authored)</td>
<td>Image/Art1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of Individual Emerging from the Crowd</td>
<td>Image/Art2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of Family (self-authored)</td>
<td>Image/Art3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of Family on the Road (self-authored)</td>
<td>Image/Art4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image of Sile na Gig (self-authored)</td>
<td>Image/Art5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Anger is a feeling but you can choose your reaction” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Story1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A love letter” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Story2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The preoccupation that became my occupation” (self-authored)</td>
<td>Story3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 4: Key for acronym coding of data extracts

Each data source was coded by its type and allocated a sequential number for multiple sources of the same type, for example: Story1, Story2 and Story3.

Table: Overview of coding system for themes identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme of Data Extract</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Theme of Data Extract</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mixed Message</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Patriarchal World</td>
<td>Patriarchal World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Choice Justification</td>
<td>CCJ</td>
<td>Parental Relational Space</td>
<td>PRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Interest</td>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Parental Transformation</td>
<td>PT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection Relational Space</td>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>Reconnection</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnection</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Redemptive</td>
<td>Redemptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness</td>
<td>Dk</td>
<td>Relational Support</td>
<td>RS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>Dp</td>
<td>Socio-cultural Darkness</td>
<td>SCDk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Socio-cultural Enlightenment</td>
<td>SCEnlightenment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Socio-cultural Relational Support</td>
<td>SCRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Socio-cultural Transformation</td>
<td>SCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Constraint</td>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Self-portrait</td>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears</td>
<td>Fears</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 5: Key for acronym coding of data extracts:

Each data source was coded by its theme and allocated a sequential number for multiple examples of the same theme in the same data source for example: LSSP3 represents a data extract from the Life Story Interview relating to the theme of self-portrait and it is the third instance of that theme from that particular source.
Step 6: Thematic map:

This map enabled me to repeatedly interrogate the themes and patterns of my data using table filters and to easily access data extracts to include in my findings.
### Appendix C: Table - Analysis of data by life chapter and relational development

The table is organised according to the chapters of my Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995) and CLET (Van Schalwyk, 2010). The narrative to accompany this table is contained in Chapter 4 section 4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3(Part I)</th>
<th>3(Part II)</th>
<th>3(Part III)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Adulthood - 20s</td>
<td>Adulthood - Early 30s</td>
<td>+ Mid 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with God</td>
<td>Connection – sensitivity to existence of God, manifest in curiosity with Catholicism</td>
<td>Disconnection – disillusionment with and subsequent engagement from Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Renewal – curiosity with spirituality resurfaces with motherhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with self</td>
<td>Connection – extroverted, artistic and sensitive</td>
<td>Disconnection – acne condition causing introversion, feedback on hobbies, interests causing hurt, defense mechanisms develop.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Renewal –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with career choices</td>
<td>Connection – creative and career interests</td>
<td>Disconnection – subordination to parents, logical subject choice and career choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection – affirmation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Renewal – illness and withdrawal from work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with romantic partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection – unconditional love</td>
<td>Renewal – creation of a family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Renewal – recreation of role identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with motherhood and children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection – reawakening of sensitivity and femininity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disconnection – incompatibility of work and home identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connection – discovery of faith whilst overcoming illness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: The Life Story Interview

Dan P. McAdams, Northwestern University
Revised 1995

Introductory Comments
This is an interview about the story of your life. We are asking you to play the role of storyteller about your own life -- to construct for us the story of your own past, present, and what you see as your own future. People's lives vary tremendously, and people make sense of their own lives in a tremendous variety of ways. As social scientists, our goal is to collect as many different life stories as we can in order to begin the process of making sense of how people make sense of their own lives. Therefore, we are collecting and analyzing life stories of "normal" adults from all walks of life, and we are looking for significant commonalities and significant differences in those life stories that people tell us.

In telling us a story about your own life, you do not need to tell us everything that has ever happened to you. A story is selective. It may focus on a few key events, a few key relationships, a few key themes which recur in the narrative. In telling your own life story, you should concentrate on material in your own life that you believe to be important in some fundamental way -- information about yourself and your life which says something significant about you and how you have come to be who you are. Your story should tell how you are similar to other people as well as how you are unique. Our purpose in these interviews is to catalogue people's life stories so that we may eventually arrive at some fundamental principles of life-storytelling as well as ways of categorizing and making sense of life stories constructed by healthy adults living at this time in history and in this place. We are not interested, therefore, in pathology, abnormal psychology, neurosis and psychosis. We are not trying to figure out what is wrong with you. Nor are we trying to help you figure out what is wrong with you. The interview should not be seen as a "therapy session." This interview is for research purposes only, and its sole purpose is the collection of data concerning people's life stories.
The interview is divided into a number of sections. In order to complete the interview within, say, an hour and a half or so, it is important that we not get bogged down in the early sections, especially the first one in which I will ask you to provide an overall outline of your story. The interview starts with general things and moves to the particular. Therefore, do not feel compelled to provide a lot of detail in the first section in which I ask for this outline. The detail will come later. I will guide you through the interview so that we can finish it in good time. I think that you will enjoy the interview. Most people do.

Questions?

I. Life Chapters

We would like you to begin by thinking about your life as a story. All stories have characters, scenes, plots, and so forth. There are high points and low points in the story, good times and bad times, heroes and villains, and so on. A long story may even have chapters. Think about your life story as having at least a few different chapters. What might those chapters be? I would like you to describe for me each of the main chapters of your life story. You may have as many or as few chapters as you like, but I would suggest dividing your story into at least 2 or 3 chapters and at most about 7. If you can, give each chapter a name and describe briefly the overall contents in each chapter. As a storyteller here, think of yourself as giving a plot summary for each chapter. This first part of the interview can expand forever, so I would like you to keep it relatively brief, say, within 20-25 minutes. Therefore, you don't want to tell me "the whole story" now. Just give me a sense of the story's outline -- the major chapters in your life.

[The interviewer may wish to ask for clarifications and elaborations at any point in this section, though there is a significant danger of interrupting too much. If the subject finishes in under 10 minutes, then he/she has not said enough, and the interviewer should probe for more detail. If the subject looks as if he/she is going to continue beyond half an hour, then the interviewer should try (gently) to speed things along somewhat. Yet, you don't want the subject to feel "rushed." (It is inevitable, therefore, that some subjects will run on too long.) This is the most open-ended part of the interview. It has the most projective potential. Thus, we are quite interested in how the subject organizes the response on his or her own. Be careful not to organize it for the subject.]
II. Critical Events

Now that you have given us an outline of the chapters in your story, we would like you to concentrate on a few key events that may stand out in bold print in the story. A key event should be a specific happening, a critical incident, a significant episode in your past set in a particular time and place. It is helpful to think of such an event as constituting a specific moment in your life story which stands out for some reason. Thus, a particular conversation you may have had with your mother when you were 12-years-old or a particular decision you made one afternoon last summer might qualify as a key event in your life story. These are particular moments set in a particular time and place, complete with particular characters, actions, thoughts, and feelings. An entire summer vacation -- be it very happy or very sad or very important in some way -- or a very difficult year in high school, on the other hand, would not qualify as key events because these take place over an extended period of time. (They are more like life chapters.)

I am going to ask you about 8 specific life events. For each event, describe in detail what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. Also, try to convey what impact this key event has had in your life story and what this event says about who you are or were as a person. Please be very specific here.

Questions?

Event #1: Peak Experience

A peak experience would be a high point in your life story - perhaps the high point. It would be a moment or episode in the story in which you experienced extremely positive emotions, like joy, excitement, great happiness, uplifting, or even deep inner peace. Today, the episode would stand out in your memory as one of the best, highest, most wonderful scenes or moments in your life story. Please describe in some detail a peak experience, or something like it, that you have experienced some time in your past. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are. [Interviewer should make sure that the subject addresses all of these questions, especially ones about impact and what the
experience say about the person. Do not interrupt the description of the event. Rather ask for extra detail, if necessary, after the subject has finished initial description of the event.]

Event #2: Nadir Experience
A "nadir" is a low point. A nadir experience, therefore, is the opposite of a peak experience. It is a low point in your life story. Thinking back over your life, try to remember a specific experience in which you felt extremely negative emotions, such as despair, disillusionment, terror, guilt, etc. You should consider this experience to represent one of the "low points" in your life story. Even though this memory is unpleasant, I would still appreciate an attempt on your part to be as honest and detailed as you can be. Please remember to be specific. What happened? When? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has the event had on you? What does the event say about who you are or who you were?

Event #3: Turning Point
In looking back on one's life, it is often possible to identify certain key "turning points" -- episodes through which a person undergoes substantial change. Turning points can occur in many different spheres of a person's life in relationships with other people, in work and school, in outside interests, etc. I am especially interested in a turning point in your understanding of yourself. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point. If you feel that your life story contains no turning points, then describe a particular episode in your life that comes closer than any other to qualifying as a turning point. [Note: If subject repeats an earlier event (e.g., peak experience, nadir) ask him or her to choose another one. Each of the 8 critical events in this section should be independent. We want 8 separate events. If the subject already mentioned an event under the section of "Life Chapters," it may be necessary to go over it again here. This kind of redundancy in inevitable.]

Event #4: Earliest Memory
Think back now to your childhood, as far back as you can go. Please choose a relatively clear memory from your earliest years and describe it in some detail. The memory need not seem especially significant in your life today. Rather what makes it significant is that it is the first or one of the first memories you have, one of the first scenes in your life story. The memory should be detailed enough to qualify as an "event." This is to say that you should
choose the earliest (childhood) memory for which you are able to identify what happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Give us the best guess of your age at the time of the event.

**Event #5: Important Childhood Scene**
Now describe another memory from childhood, from later childhood, that stands out in your mind as especially important or significant. It may be a positive or negative memory. What happened? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has the event had on you? What does it say about who you are or who you were? Why is it important?

**Event #6: Important Adolescent Scene**
Describe a specific event from your teen-aged years that stands out as being especially important or significant.

**Event #7: Important Adult Scene**
Describe a specific event from your adult years (age 21 and beyond) that stands out as being especially important or significant.

**Event #8: One Other Important Scene**
Describe one more event, from any point in your life, that stands out in your memory as being especially important or significant.

**III. Life Challenge**
Looking back over the various chapters and scenes in your life story, please describe the single greatest challenge that you have faced in your life. How have you faced, handled, or dealt with this challenge? Have other people assisted you in dealing with this challenge? How has this challenge had an impact on your life story?

**IV. Influences on the Life Story: Positive and Negative**

**Positive**
Looking back over your life story, please identify the single person, group of persons, or
organizational/institution that has or have had the greatest positive influence on your story. Please describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he, she, it, or they have had a positive impact on your story.

**Negative**
Looking back over your life story, please identify the single person, group of persons, or organization/institution that has or have had the greatest negative influence on your story. Please describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he, she, it, or they have had a negative impact on your story.

**V. Stories and the Life Story**
You have been telling me about the story of your life. In so doing, you have been trying to make your life into a story for me. I would like you now to think a little bit more about stories and how some particular stories might have influenced your own life story. From an early age, we all hear and watch stories. Our parents may read us stories when we are little; we hear people tell stories about everyday events; we watch stories on television and hear them on the radio; we see movies or plays; we learn about stories in schools, churches, synagogues, on the playground, in the neighborhood, with friends, family; we tell stories to each other in everyday life; some of us even write stories. I am interested in knowing what some of your favorite stories are and how they may have influenced how you think about your own life and your life story. I am going to ask you about three kinds of stories. In each case, try to identify a story you have heard in your life that fits the description, describe the story very briefly, and tell me if and how that story has had an effect on you.

**Television, Movie, Performance: Stories Watched**
Think back on TV shows you have seen, movies, or other forms of entertainment or stories from the media that you have experienced. Please identify one of your favorite stories from this domain -- for example, a favorite TV show or series, a favorite movie, play, etc. In a couple of sentences, tell me what the story is about. Tell me why you like the story so much. And tell me if and how the story has had an impact on your life.
Books, Magazines: Stories Read
Now think back over things you have read -- stories in books, magazines, newspapers, and so on. Please identify one of your favorite stories from this domain. Again, tell me a little bit about the story, why you like it, and what impact, if any, it has had on your life.

Family Stories, Friends: Stories Heard
Growing up, many of us hear stories in our families or from our friends that stick with us, stories that we remember. Family stories include things parents tell their children about "the old days," their family heritage, family legends, and so on. Children tell each other stories on the playground, in school, on the phone, and so on. Part of what makes life fun, even in adulthood, involves friends and family telling stories about themselves and about others. Try to identify one story like this that you remember, one that has stayed with you. Again, tell me a little bit about the story, why you like it or why you remember it, and what impact, if any, it has had on your life.

VI. Alternative Futures for the Life Story
Now that you have told me a little bit about your past, I would like you to consider the future. I would like you to imagine two different futures for your life story.

Positive Future
First, please describe a positive future. That is, please describe what you would like to happen in the future for your life story, including what goals and dreams you might accomplish or realize in the future. Please try to be realistic in doing this. In other words, I would like you to give me a picture of what you would realistically like to see happen in the future chapters and scenes of your life story.

Negative Future
Now, please describe a negative future. That is, please describe a highly undesirable future for yourself, one that you fear could happen to you but that you hope does not happen. Again, try to be pretty realistic. In other words, I would like you to give me a picture of a negative future for your life story that could possibly happen but that you hope will not happen.

[Note to interviewers: Try to get as much concrete detail as possible.]
VII. Personal Ideology
Now I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and spirituality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1. Consider for a moment the religious or spiritual dimensions of your life. Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs or the ways in which you approach life in a spiritual sense.
2. Please describe how your religious or spiritual life, values, or beliefs have changed over time.
3. How do you approach political and social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view? Are there particular issues or causes about which you feel strongly? Describe them.
4. What is the most important value in human living? Explain.
5. What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world, the spiritual dimensions of your life, or your philosophy of life?

VIII. Life Theme
Looking back over your entire life story as a story with chapters and scenes, extending into the past as well as the imagined future, can you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme of your life story? Explain.

IX. Other
What else should I know to understand your life story?
Appendix E: Extract of the steps of the Collage Life Story Elicitation Technique (Van Schalkwyk, 2010)


The process of scaffolding life story remembering unfolds in five sequential steps. The participant completes each step before commencing with the next one. Step 1 entails the making of a collage, followed by ‘story-telling’ (Step 2), positioning of the dialogical self (Step 3), narrative juxtaposition (Step 4) and self-reflection (Step 5). The tasks for each of these steps are explained to the participant in writing and using simple and easy English and/or translations in their native language. In the next section, I explicate the steps in the process in more detail.

Steps of the CLET

Step1: Collage making

The first step in the CLET entails the making of a collage. During a first interaction with the participant, either in person or via electronic mode, I ask her or him to make a collage that represents dominant experiences and events in her or his personal life in the past and that tells a story about her or him as a person. I give some description of how to make a collage using simple and easy language (English) or a translated version (Box 1).

**Box 1. Create your own life story collage. Try to answer the question:**

“Do these pictures/images represent significant or important experiences in my life (as a young person in Macao) so far?”

Use at least 12 (minimum) photos, pictures and cuttings (also text) from magazines and other media. Paste all images and pictures on the A4 (or A3) page provided. Because the collage forms part of a research project, I will keep the collage after the interview. I suggest you make colour copies of your personal photos and special images that you paste on the collage so that you do not lose them when you hand over the collage to me.
The collage is a poster or visual representation in which the participant makes use of photos, pictures and cuttings (also text) from magazines and other media, and any other print material that tell something about her or him as a person. Participants are encouraged to include pictures and images that stand out in one way or another, and that represent situations and/or events, feelings, high points and low points in their lives and that tell a story about their development as a person. The main objective of the collage is to tell a story about whom they are and how they came to be the person they are today. Although the collage is composed on paper, it is possible also to do it on the computer similar to ‘blogging’, which is a popular form of narrating using modern technologies.

In Steps 2-5 the participant reflects upon and comments on the collage compiled in Step 1. These steps unfold in a sequential manner in either of two settings.

1. As a ‘conversation’ in writing for non-English speaking participants, Steps 2-5 evolve in written assignments over a period of five days or weeks. The participant collaborates throughout the process as co-researcher generating and constructing her or his life story narrative (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The written text can be either in English or in the participant’s native language. In the latter case, of course, the text will have to be translated for the analytic process if the researchers cannot speak/read the local language.

2. Alternatively, in a discursive setting using semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996) suitable for native language speakers, Steps 2-5 unfold in one or more face-to-face conversations between researcher and participant, and audio recordings are made of the storytelling for later transcription and translation. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the setting for a written CLET project (see Setting 1 above), although the CLET has been implemented in conversational practice (Setting 2) as well and purview of a future article.

**Step 2: Story telling**

In the story-telling task, the participant engages actively in life-story remembering (McAdams, 1993) and in generating autobiographical memories. They have to (a) tell a story about each picture/image on the collage, (b) describe as best they can what each picture/image means to them, and (c) how it contributed to their development as a person. They write, either in their native language or in English (if possible), a story about each picture and/or image on the collage, giving reasons for selecting it, the connotations it has
for their lives, and the associated thoughts, feelings and meanings each image brings out. Numbering the images on the collage consecutively as they progress through telling the stories, helps to provide a point of reference for later steps and the content and thematic analysis (see discussion of analytic procedures further on in this paper).

Step 3: Positioning the self and eliciting silent voices
Continuing the reflective process and reminiscing autobiographical memories, the third step involves positioning the self and the elicitation of silent voices. The participant has to (a) position her or himself on the collage where she or he sees her or himself now (at the time of doing the task); and (b) describe an image she or he could not find but would have liked to add to the collage. They have to mark their selected position clearly and give reasons, meanings and emotions related to this positioning of the self. Whereas describing an image they could not find offers access to the silent voice(s) in the collage, placing the self in the collage engages the participant in actively dealing with the conflicting voices of the past and present, and with finding harmony amongst the different I-positions represented in the narrative.

Step 4: Juxtaposing
In step four, the participant engages in juxtaposing the different narrative voices and inter-subjectivities (Markova, 2003) portrayed in the collage. By juxtaposing different voices, she or he has the opportunity to reflect upon and explore the many I-positions adopted in the dialogue between voices that are part of the outside or the inside world of the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001). McAdams (2001, p.482) poses that, “when telling their life stories, people will sometimes juxtapose clearly negative events with positive outcomes (redemption sequences) and highly positive events with negative outcomes (contamination sequences).” In similar vein, the participant now has to select three images on the collage that involve (a) two pictures/images with similar meanings (positive or negative events) and (b) one with an opposing meaning (positive or negative outcome). After selecting the three images, they then describe the similarities and differences of these images, and give reasons why they consider them similar or different. This step extends the self-reflective process as the participant engages in dynamic dialogue with relationships and functionalities embedded in the different images on her or his collage.
Step 5: Reflection
As a final step, the participant reflects upon the process of making the collage and writing her or his life story (Box 2). The self-reflection provides a space in which she or he can create a sense of coherence amongst the many I-positions occupied in the process of creating autobiographical memory (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). They get a chance to reflect upon the “existence of unity in the self, as closely related to continuity, although it does not contradict the existence of multiplicity as closely related to discontinuity” (Hermans, 2001, p. 248). Some question prompts might be added to help with the reflective process and with (re)constructing identity and integrating the multi-voiced self (Box 2). As a reflective process, this step also provides a form of debriefing for the participant who can recollect her or his thoughts about possible unresolved conflicts or emotional distress. It creates a narrative space for re-storying her or his narrative (White, 2007) and thus contains an embedded therapeutic component (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Box 2. Instructions self-reflection in the CLET project
Reflect upon the process of making the collage and telling your life story. You had to write some intimate stories. Now is the time to think about the feelings and thoughts you had when telling these stories. How did it affect you making this life story collage and telling your stories? What did you feel when doing the project? Can you think of anything you would like to add that you did not include previously?
Appendix F: Extracts from the transcripts of my Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995)

Section I: Life chapters

Time of extract: 00:00

Life story interview by Van Mc Adams the 1995 version done by Aoife Shevlin on 25th of September 2017. The time now is 11.30 am. The interview requires an hour and a half and I will try and do it in one complete take. So I am going to begin with section 1 which is Life Chapters, and I have been asked to divide my story into two or three chapters and giving a plot summary for each chapter. So in completing the interview I am looking at my life story in the context of my spiritual journey for connectedness through meaningful work.

So the key chapters I think em.... Childhood Chapter [first chapter] in terms of my spiritual journey would relate to memories I have of I suppose my curiosity in religion. Religion for me was in a very structured type of exposure in that I was christened Roman Catholic, I attended a Roman Catholic school and so I received the sacraments in a school setting, beginning with Communion, and then also Confession, ... and then Confirmation and em.... as per my recollection of confession I was trying to find sins to disclose .... em having a discomfort with that and the sense of I suppose shame in em.... I didn’t feel I had sinned sufficiently to have sins to declare.

Time of extract: 11minutes 13 seconds

So, then I suppose the second chapter would be Adolescence and my challenge towards not being comfortable with being a soldier of Christ manifested itself, and I found myself openly saying “I do not believe in God”, and “I am an atheist” at the age of 13. And I was quite an opinionated teenager. I went to a quite liberal school. It was a Jesuit school, and em I decided that I would refuse the Communion at school masses which I did, and that was when I think back on it.... that, that was quite a daring thing to be doing, that was in 1992, it was in 1991 or 1992, so quite an unorthodox thing... I think a lot of adults were taken back that I was so preoccupied with this, and felt so strongly about it that I had to protest and that. But it was a very open-minded school, and really no particular heed was passed, and ..... You’d get a raised eyebrow if you did not move from your seat to receive [communion], but other than that nobody passed any particular comment.
And in my... I suppose thinking of religion at that time I began to separate it in my own mind, and I would verbalise this concept of religion being separate to the people. So my issues with religion weren’t to do with necessarily how the church treated a number of things..... be it a number of things from contraception to child abuse, ..... all the different things that were going on and are still going on with the church. My issues weren’t around that. I saw it as that was the way they interpreted it, and I don’t agree with it, but my religion and faith isn’t bound in the people who administer em ... the church, priests, nuns etc. My concept of religion was a separate matter; and the existence of God. And I really had trouble believing God to be a merciful God.

*Time of extract: 15 minutes 26 seconds*

So my **third chapter** then, **Adulthood and my Spiritual Journey.** Em...It has little subplots in that em chapter, possibly. My twenty’s and my thirty’s... I think would be the themes of those. And in my twenties I’d kinda moved passed religion, and it didn’t bother me anymore.

I remember in my twenties people being very up in arms about the church, about the scandals were coming out more and more, you had the Magdalene Laundries, and all of those horrible things that had been done to people and children and to women in particular, but I didn’t have that anger that others had about the church, I saw it more as a reflection of humanity, and em.... the short comings of humanity were reflected in the shortcomings of the church. Em... And I had a genuine philosophy around people, because I suppose a humanistic side begun to emerge in my thinking which was, isn’t it great that we even have this desire through religion to want to be better people, and the aspiration is a good one, and a pure one, and as long as we can keep striving to that, that’s something. Em and.. So, I didn’t get hung up on getting angry with the church, that didn’t mean I excused the church for bad behaviours and that ... but I saw it as reflective of humanity, rather than it being a particular issue of the church alone.

So in my twenties I kind a got on and spirituality in my life began to decline in my questioning and I got on with enjoying my life and em work and I hadn’t consumed alcohol until actually in my early twenties. And I began to when I started work it was such a big part of the social aspect of work that I felt excluded or I was excluding myself if I didn’t partake in the drinking aspect. And so I began I suppose to let my hair down and had a bit of fun, work hard, play hard is the kind of motto of the line of work I was in and I did
work very hard, very long hours so my weekends if not working or even if I was, it was that release on the Friday and Saturday nights and you would go for a couple of beers. So that was really my twenties were spent being very ambitious in work, a lack of spirituality, a lack of hobbies and interests to be actually perfectly honest it was all about work.

**Time of extract: 20 minutes**

I had met my partner in my late twenties and so in my very early thirties we wanted to start a family. In actual fact I wanted to start it in my late twenties... we wanted to start a family, but it took us a while to get into a position to I suppose go do that. Realisation on my part that... one from a career perspective... although I was in a big role for my age. You know I really had a lucky break in terms of the role I was in, I was working for a big multinational, skies were the limit, having said that I realised when I looked at my boss who was Director that it was going to be another ten years before I could realistically be seen as... before I could be hired for that level of a role and it would not necessarily be with that company. I would have to move, but there was ten years more of this drudgery to be done. I was kind of questioning the imbalance in my work life and if I wanted to have a family how was that going to be possible? And all the financial commitments of buying a house, because the housing boom was going on in Dublin at the time. There was a lot of pressure you know. You needing to be in a good job, a secure job, pulling in a good salary and then able to afford the mortgage.

**Section II: Critical events**

**Event 5: Important childhood memory**

**Time of extract:**

Important childhood scene, another memory from childhood, from later childhood that stands out in my mind as being important or significant. Em as a child, am I remember I was probably 7 or 8 and my parents had work done to the back of the house. They had recemented the back yard and they built a shed. And I remember the builder, he put so many layers of concrete that he had to let each of them dry before the next layer went on. This was going on for ever and I began thinking to myself: ‘you know what I could draw something on that shed and no one will ever know because it is going to be cemented out anyway’. So I did I wrote my name and I got into a bit of a panic while I was doing it as nobody was watching as I forgot to put in a letter of my name. I think it was the ‘f’. The second last letter of my name and off I scarpered and nothing more was said of it. But that evening the builder came in, and he was sitting down with my parents and myself, and he
was quite em.... I think he was genuinely a nice man but he had an austerity about him that would frighten a child. And I say it in the context of thinking of my own children. I have to remind myself sometimes to think of myself as a child, not as an adult. Aoife, she was a child and was entitled to be considered in that context. And he spoke to me in a chastising manner saying do you know anything about what was written on the side of the shed. And I instantly knew what this was about and em... I was scared and eventually I confessed to having written my name. No before I confessed, actually I don’t think I confessed. But inadvertently I confessed by saying it couldn’t have been me because there was no “f” in it, in the name. And of course that was me admitting guilt, pointing the finger at myself. So the adults were amused by this. But I remember the commentary being by my parents, you wouldn’t expect it of Aoife. And that kind of shame that I had. I let everybody down because I am supposed to be, I’m not supposed to do anything like that. I am supposed to be the good girl.

Time of extract: 109 minutes

Section VI: Alternative futures for the life story

Negative future:

....So I have a second crack of becoming who I need to be; and I need to do that this time. And so I need to be brave. And being brave in the context of putting my artistic expression out, is actually a big challenge for me, and possibly this thesis is a big part of that, putting it out there for others. How they react I have no control over and I am not responsible for that. I am responsible for putting out what I need to for myself; for my health and my wellbeing.
Appendix G: Photograph of self-authored Collage Life Story Elicitation Technique (CLET) project and written reflections

Extracts of written CLET Reflections

These extracts are taken from Step 2 in the CLET project where I tell a story about each image to explain its meaning.

Overall Image:
There are 8 images in the collage drawn by me. They are attached to a web. The web is dotted with symbols to illustrate my relational world and the factors influencing my world. At the centre of the web is me depicted by a small round mirror glass which is intended to reflect my image. The closer the symbols are placed towards me at the centre of the web the greater their influence on me at that time.
Image 1: Connection (Teenage Years)
It depicts the Golden Bridge in San Francisco. It is inspired by a painting I made for my Junior Certificate art project when I was 15 years old. The theme I selected for my art project was ‘My Surroundings’, and I expanded it to be ‘My Surroundings as God’. I drew the image as a teenager because it represented man-made beauty to me in terms of the brilliance of its architecture. I used it in the collage because I thought it depicted the serenity I got from art and other creative hobbies such as drama and debating that I had at that time. The image reflects my curiosity about the spiritual which has remained a pattern throughout my development as a person.

Image 2: Disconnection (Teenage Years)
It depicts the sadness I experienced in my teens. I was ashamed of my face because of severe acne and so I tended to try and hide myself so I didn’t have to be seen and I didn’t have to look at others directly. The image is therefore of me cloaked in darkness and surrounded by chains. The chains depict how I felt constrained from being myself because of my acne but also in respect of my self-expression. My hobbies of art, drama and debating which had brought me a personal sense of connection subsequently led to a feelings of disconnection for me when my expression in these areas was not well received by adults critiquing my work. The overall feedback was that I had plagiarised my work. I felt misunderstood and without a forum to challenge, so I gave up each of these hobbies in turn to avoid further upset for myself.

Image 3: Reconnection (Late Adolescence/Early Twenties)
It depicts me as a lone figure setting off on a journey into unmarked territory. There is a path because I had a sense of direction in terms of the studies and career I was pursuing. The landscape is bleak but with possibilities in the distance over the mountainous terrain. It represents my heavy heart at studying commerce in college and pursuing a career in the financial industry. I broke my ties with my friends from school during this period, although they were in the same university none were in the same faculty and I used the opportunity to try out new ways of being.
**Image 4: Reconnection (Twenties)**
It depicts city life in Dublin. I moved there to train in my profession. It was fast city living with lots of people and activity; and it was a little like a circus. From once I left my home in the morning it was a full on experience dealing with the world of work and the nightlife of the city. I enjoyed it.

**Image 5: Connection (Twenties)**
This image depicts the apartments that I lived in on my own. I had green and lilac walls and flowers. I loved having my own space. I had parties with friends over. I came and went as I pleased. I painted and decorated it in my own style. Although I was living alone, I felt very happy in my own place with no one to please but myself.

**Image 6: Connection (Late Twenties/Thirties)**
It depicts meeting the love of my life my husband. We have always been together since our first meeting and I have never felt alone since. His unconditional love and support has been there since the beginning of our relationship, so I have always been able to be who I am and become more of who I am. He created the conditions for me to actually grow into my own skin and I possibly have done the same for him. Together we have created our home and family, and the way of life that is important to us. The image depicts the fit that we are together. I have also gained an extended family through his which has given me another perspective on family life.

**Image 7: Disconnection (Late Twenties/Thirties)**
It depicts the turbulence in my life created by being a workaholic and seeking to please everyone through my work but myself. It shows my habit of finding inhospitable situations in which to locate myself as a way of reaffirming my worth by showing I can make the inhospitable hospitable.

**Image 8: Reconnection (Present)**
It depicts the intricacy of my roles and their polarity, and the conflict I feel in trying to resolve what it is that I am and do, what is my work. The image is of a fetus (the role of motherhood and parenting, the feminine, the emotional side) and a brain (the role of breadwinner, the masculine, the logical side) and them beating like a heart inside the body
of a woman. I feel as though having left my career and ‘old ways’ of doing things I now have to confront my identity and at last decide who I am and what it is I do but in an unconditionally supportive environment.

These extracts are taken from Step 3 in the CLET project regarding positioning myself in the collage where I see myself whilst doing the project

I have positioned myself at the 8th image. I feel I am struggling with being a woman and finding an equilibrium between motherhood/parenting using my heart, and work using my brain. Over the last while I have contemplated heavily on having a fourth child. It has been said to me that right now I may be using this as a distraction to avoid getting on with what I need to right now. I know that I have loved carrying my babies and always have fond memories of this time and the nurturing after. It is a safe and happy place and time for me. I know that it would be an easy way to reconnect for a time.
Appendix H: Table - Analysis of the correlation between the quality of my relationships, relational growth and career progress

This is a table of the synthesis of my life narrative in terms of the correlation between the quality of my relationships and career progress (Schultheiss, 2003); in the context of my relational development (Deanow, 2011). The narrative to accompany this table is contained in Chapter 5 section 5.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP (Schultheiss, 2003)</th>
<th>CAREER PROGRESS (Schultheiss, 2003)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with parents</td>
<td>Subordination (adolescence)</td>
<td>Career decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with self</td>
<td>Authenticity (20s)</td>
<td>Unworthiness (childhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutuality (30s)</td>
<td>Hurt (adolescence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dexterity (post midlife)</td>
<td>Imbalance (early-mid 30s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP (Schultheiss, 2003) | CAREER PROGRESS (Schultheiss, 2003)
--- | ---
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS | SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
**Connection** (Deanow, 2011) | **Connection** (Deanow, 2011)
**Disconnection** (Deanow, 2011) | **Career Development**

| Relationship with romantic partner | Mutuality (20s onwards) | Parenting | Mutuality (maternity leave periods)
Dexterity (post midlife) | Imbalance (early to mid 30s)

| Relationship with God | Primary empathy (childhood) | Unworthiness (childhood) Hurt (adolescence) | Authenticity (30s) Mutuality (midlife) | Self-development |
Appendix I: Extracts from thematic map of primary data (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Extract 1: Filtering for data extracts coded as examples of connection in my primary data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Extract</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>[experience of connection] .... Coming together of lots of things... Finding a wholeness....</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>[experience of connection] .... I felt safe, no longer in need of protection or its suffocation. I was free to be me in that space between us.</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>[overcoming self-denial inhibiting sexuality] .... I stopped thinking altogether and focused on feeling</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story2</td>
<td>C/R1</td>
<td>I too lost my faith as a young person you know, that’s part of being young losing your faith in some kind of established belief system or establishment. That’s how you figure out your identity at least for a time by denying everything and anything</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extract 2: Filtering for data extracts coded as examples of disconnection in my primary data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Extract</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>D1</td>
<td>[If] ... God is not happy to have me in heaven because I was not a believer in this life, well, that's fine..... Not Christian himself... [Adolesence ]</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>D2</td>
<td>[When ill]... I realised that it didn't matter how much I had done for others in the work context I was out of that particular loop [now]...</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D1</td>
<td>.... My expression was not received well by adults critiquing my work...</td>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>[school] I found it boring but I knew how to work within the system.... On the whole I was compliant</td>
<td>Coping strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D2</td>
<td>I didn't want to share my real thoughts and be made vulnerable and probably misunderstood</td>
<td>Fear of hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D3</td>
<td>[Description of disconnection] no direction overwhelming because of the chaos aimlessness</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D4</td>
<td>I could be extremely shy... I hated 'talking the talk'...</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D5</td>
<td>[evening lectures]... I did not attend... I studied alone....</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Data Extract</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D5</td>
<td>[sharing house] ... Too little privacy, real issue was sharing a house with people I did not share the same values in life with on simple things [like bills]....</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D5</td>
<td>Becoming a mother brought out my softness and it didn't fit with my work environment. The tension of trying to be what everyone needed me to be and being myself became too much and my health suffered.</td>
<td>Contradictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D6</td>
<td>[reflection on disconnection] when I have felt disconnected my creative energy was at its peak</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>[experience of disconnection]... Everything has been lost in the process of disconnection</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>D2</td>
<td>It became impossible for me to inhale softness into being a mother to my children in the evening, from a body shrivelled and dried from exhaling life into her career and workplace trying to be a mother to it too. I couldn’t replenish my air supply fast enough between breaths to keep-up the constant inflating and deflating of myself, to meet the needs of all.</td>
<td>Contradictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>D3</td>
<td>My babies; you know sometimes I couldn’t tune into the high pitch of their tiny voices, so free and full of love. I was afraid that they would pierce me and find my stores empty; that I had nothing to offer them. And why didn’t I have anything to offer them? Because I had given it away to others whose favour I sought, never to have anything returned. Why? Because I never put a value on what I had to offer, and never asked myself the value to me of giving it away to them in the first place.</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>D3</td>
<td>But I can’t be a mother and remain defensive and hard, in denial of my intuition. Its time I became what our defences were protecting all this time and which now will destroy that defence, from the inside.</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art3</td>
<td>D1</td>
<td>It represents my sense of hope and my connection to family. I felt compelled to sketch four children in our family</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extract 3: Filtering for data extracts coded as examples of reconnection in my primary data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Extract</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>[Children]... Bring up for me some unresolved issues.... Miracle of life.... Almost orchestrated for you</td>
<td>Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Data Extract</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>I used the opportunity to try out new ways of being [college]</td>
<td>Becoming myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>This period was also sustained by the breaks that maternity leave.... Offered me</td>
<td>Reconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R6</td>
<td>[period of ill health]... Awfulness of the period was however offset by the surprise of falling pregnant with my third child and a 'creative explosion'.....</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>[manifestation of new life in FT parenting, thesis]</td>
<td>Dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>[being pregnant].... Fond memories... Safe and happy place... I know it would be an easy way to reconnect for a time...</td>
<td>Motherhood as a way to relate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLET</td>
<td>R9</td>
<td>[reflection on reconnection] Process of trying to reconnect ... You have to focus on yourself first (connect to self)</td>
<td>Reconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>I stand out now in these underground anarchist conversations a sitting duck waiting for the punch to come because I refuse to cower. I am asking to be found out and punished. I am spoiling for a confrontation to have this all out in the open.</td>
<td>Starting to regain spirit to fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art1</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>it reflected my particular struggle that summer with what I should do next following my career transition; I had a desire for another baby</td>
<td>Reconnection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art2</td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>It is my reflection on moving on from career, breaking away from the crowd, and stepping into me.</td>
<td>Reconnection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Photographs of self-authored artwork

Art 1: Image of expectant mother (August 2017)

Art 2: Image of individual emerging from the crowd (August 2017)
Art 3: Image of family (September 2015)

Art 4: Image of family on the road (October 2015)

Art 5: Image of Sile na Gig (October 2015)
Appendix K: Extracts from research diary

Date of reflection:  25 September 2017 (Monday)
Week 1 of thesis study: I met my supervisor this day last week. I prepared my immediate ‘reaction’ to do list. I remain excited by my research if anything I need to manage my enthusiasm to continue to enjoy it, and not use this as a form of martyrdom. I think as I think about meaningful work this last week I realise I have had a penal attitude to my work like it were a penance that I have to serve. I truly enjoy working but I see within me a pattern of sabotaging that pleasure by pushing myself too hard, feeling though I have to prove something.

Date of reflection:  9 October 2017 (Monday)
[Reflections on reading Reinvention of Work by Matthew Fox]
I was particularly moved by his concept of changing from a traditional paradigm to a new paradigm where God is within and not a sentimentalised figure projected out onto the world. Instead we should begin to integrate our knowledge of the world rather than seek to separate and consume everything. I could identify with the symptoms of workaholism as he described them, and infact I think I am a workaholic in recovery. That is possibly why I have struggled since my career transition to define my identity and role in the absence of having work that has an extrinsic value, my work does not measure up, none of it is paid as mother, as ‘researcher’, as trainee GC, and so I question its value and my own value. I am struck by the theme in all I read this last week, by the view that we should focus on the process and not the end-product, and thereby realise that the journey is the reward. I think that is true for all of my roles.

Date of reflection:  17 January 2018 (Wednesday)
Sick over Christmas with flu (like most) so had to postpone doing most work on thesis. I was struck while sick that it was a form of ‘disconnection’ a necessary switch-off and downtime from the routine of my world..... I decided to do ‘fun’ things as I recovered so I focused on completing the CLET collage..... I finished the CLET story and reflection documentation. I tried recording it as audio but found it did not work as too easy to stray from collage into tangents. Unlike the McAdams interview I had no structure to follow only my collage therefore my audio had the potential to meander and not cover the points.
Gilligan describes how Anne Frank dreamed of being a famous writer and took up the invitation of a museum to display her diary (Gilligan, 2005). However her original diary was subject to two edits before it was handed over. Anne precipitated the criticisms that would be used to dismiss her work, and she elected “to cover herself” (Gilligan, 2005). One of the edits was at her own hands in which she toned down her pleasures specifically her sexual, and the other was at the hands of her father who “for the most part followed her editing, presenting his daughter to the world as she wanted to be seen” (Gilligan, 2005). In my critical reflexivity I consider how I too toned down my sexual pleasure in the version of my self-authored play I submitted to this study. I judged that it would be considered crass and perceived my behaviour and morality would be judged accordingly. I therefore censored myself because of a perceived bias and rewrote my representation of myself, thus perpetuating the myth that there is something deficient about a woman who enjoys sex.

Should I mute the distress career has caused me in what I disclose in my self-study? Does that protect my personal dignity? Or my career reputation? My loved ones? Protect everyone from the discomfort of acknowledging the distress I experienced. Or does it offer dignity and hope to those in the midst of that distress right now? Or does it help to highlight an issue for action? Will it bring social change who knows but it’s true to my identity to reveal it. I have to resist disconnecting however because of it, I must use disclosing it as a means to reconnect.