

A need to heal: An autoethnographic bildungsroman through the shadows

by

David T. Culkin

B.S., United States Military Academy, 1991  
M.S.A., Central Michigan University, 1995  
M.M.A.S., United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2005  
M.L.I.S., Florida State University, 2009

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2016

## **Abstract**

How can an adult make meaning from and develop through experiences of mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death? The purpose of this autoethnographic bildungsroman is to explore how a male in the general population describes how life events have influenced his identity development over a period of 23 years, spanning three decades. The researcher-participant asks two primary questions: 1) How does the individual describe his adult development in terms of life events or “individual and cultural episodes” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) related to mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over time? and 2) How does the individual describe his possible selves in constructing a new sense of identity? Addressing these questions contributes to the literature of adult and continuing education by providing a glimpse into stories of lived experiences over time in the light of adult development.

A need to heal: An autoethnographic bildungsroman through the shadows

by

David T. Culkin

B.S., United States Military Academy, 1991

M.S.A., Central Michigan University, 1995

M.M.A.S., United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2005

M.L.I.S., Florida State University, 2009

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2016

Approved by:

Co-Major Professor  
Royce Ann Collins, Ph.D.

Approved by:

Co-Major Professor  
Kakali Bhattacharya, Ph.D.

# Copyright

© David T. Culkin 2016.



## **Abstract**

How can an adult make meaning from and develop through experiences of mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death? The purpose of this autoethnographic bildungsroman is to explore how a male in the general population describes how life events have influenced his identity development over a period of 23 years, spanning three decades. The researcher-participant asks two primary questions: 1) How does the individual describe his adult development in terms of life events or “individual and cultural episodes” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) related to mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over time? and 2) How does the individual describe his possible selves in constructing a new sense of identity? Addressing these questions contributes to the literature of adult and continuing education by providing a glimpse into stories of lived experiences over time in the light of adult development.

# Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	x
List of Tables .....	xi
Acknowledgements .....	xii
Dedication .....	xiii
Chapter 1 - Prologue .....	1
Research Purpose and Questions .....	2
Writing to Understand .....	3
The Narrative Begins .....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Organizational Rationale .....	14
Chapter 2 - Personal Stories and Possible Selves .....	17
Preparing for a Pilgrimage .....	17
How My Narrative Got Here .....	18
Unworthiness and Vulnerability .....	24
What I was Like .....	26
Diary of a Mad Man—A Perfect Storm.....	28
Military Structure as a Therapeutic Mask.....	33
What I am Like Now.....	34
Why I Chose These Stories.....	36
Starting the Stories.....	37
Cast of Archetypes-Pilgrims .....	38
Possible Selves and Archetypes.....	40
Personal Stories.....	42
Deidre’s Tale: Airborne School!.....	44
Digging Deeper .....	45
Aron’s Tale: Marrying my Best Friend .....	47
Digging Deeper .....	49
Vince’s Tale: Adjusting to a New Job and Role.....	50
Digging Deeper .....	54

(H)erb’s Tale: A Professional with Mental Illness .....	55
Nature and Context .....	55
Effect on my Life and Need for Help .....	57
Diagnosis and Relief .....	59
Treatment—Lifelong and Continuous .....	60
How It Has Changed my Life .....	61
Conclusion .....	63
Digging Deeper .....	64
Colleen’s Tale: Losing My Parents .....	66
Digging Deeper .....	70
Unger’s Tale: Major Happy .....	71
Learn/Study the Boss .....	72
Understand the Command Environment .....	72
Prepare for Division Deployment .....	73
Conclusion .....	73
Digging Deeper .....	73
Laura’s Tale: Toxic Climate—The Presentation Hijacker .....	75
Digging Deeper .....	78
Kevin’s Tale: Pop-pop’s Memoir .....	78
My Grandfather .....	80
Digging Deeper .....	81
Ingrid’s Tale: A Journey Toward Carmel .....	82
Digging Deeper .....	88
Nara’s Tale: Journey as an Artist .....	91
Digging Deeper .....	94
Chapter 3 - Context of the Plot .....	96
Context .....	96
Research Design and Alignment .....	100
Rationale for Qualitative Study .....	102
Epistemic Alignment .....	105
Significance and Implications of Research .....	107

Subjectivity and Roles .....	108
Theoretical Framework Regarding Adult Development .....	109
The Bildungsroman: Linking Identity Development to Adult Learning .....	124
Methodological Framework.....	127
Why Narrative Inquiry? .....	129
What is Autoethnography?.....	130
Autoethnographic Narrative as Inquiry.....	133
Autoethnography as a Vehicle for Personal Development in Adults .....	141
Role of Personal Narratives .....	145
Digging to Understand.....	148
Limits and Possibilities of the Study .....	149
Cultures of Silence and Invisibility .....	150
Adult Development Theory Related to Mental Illness, Spirituality, and Death.....	151
Ignore the Mute.....	155
Wear the Mask .....	157
Gaps in the Literature Present Opportunity .....	158
Setting the Plot—The Narrative Process .....	160
The Narrative Process in Adult Learning .....	160
Collecting the Tools: Data Sources and Methods for Data Collection.....	163
Sorting the Data for Narrative Analysis.....	165
Writing Samples.....	177
Cleaning the Gear for the Continued Journey .....	184
Document Protocols.....	184
Confidentiality and Ethics.....	185
Rigor and Trustworthiness.....	187
Research Sites and Access .....	189
An Archaeological Dig .....	190
Chapter 4 - Summary and Conclusion.....	194
Constructing Meaning in Identity Development .....	196
Intersectional Analysis.....	199
Answering the Research Questions .....	201

Summary.....	203
Representing My Self-concept Over Time.....	206
Mental Illness.....	208
Spiritual Development.....	209
Death and Grief.....	210
Some Implications for Adult and Continuing Education.....	211
Adult Learning in a Narrative Context.....	211
Ties to Informal and Reflective Learning.....	217
Conclusion.....	222
Chapter 5 - Epilogue: A Conversation with Pop-pop.....	224
Haiku Pilgrim: An Intersectional Dialogue.....	225
The Story Continues—The Nested Doll.....	243
Future Chapters—A Way Ahead.....	247
Nature of the Narrative.....	248
Message.....	250
Call to Action.....	250
Conclusion.....	252
References.....	254
Appendix A - List of Primary Research Sources and Active Pages.....	277
Appendix B - Research Timeline.....	279
Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Letter and Reviews.....	283

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Research Conceptual Linkages.....	101
Figure 3.2 Research Space of Narrative Inquiry.....	138
Figure 3.3 Cranton’s Question Framework Coupled with Hoggan’s Typology.....	167
Figure 3.4 Word Cloud Analysis .....	176
Figure 3.5 Sample Journal Entry—Setting the 1 <sup>st</sup> Level of Data Sorting.....	178
Figure 3.6 Journal Entries Inform Personal Narratives—Reaching 2 <sup>nd</sup> Level of Data Sorting..	179
Figure 3.7 Draft Samples from Intersectional Narrative—Attaining 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Levels of Sorting .....	182
Figure 4.1 Cultural Spaces and Shadows.....	202
Figure 5.1 Illustration for Day 1 .....	227
Figure 5.2 Illustration for Day 2 .....	232
Figure 5.3 Illustration for Day 3 .....	237
Figure C.1 Compliance and Co-reviewer Forms.....	284

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 <i>Data Inventory from Study</i> .....	163
Table 3.2 <i>Summary of Emergent Themes from All Personal Stories by the First Two Levels of Data Sorting</i> .....	169
Table 3.3 <i>Compilation of Emergent Themes to Re-story the Present (Level 3 Sorting)</i> .....	174
Table B.1 <i>Research Timeline</i> .....	279

## Acknowledgements

There are many people, alive and dead, who remain present in my life—may they continue to contribute to it. I learned from them in the past, continue to develop under their mentorship, and will consider them as guardians for the rest of my life. I am confident because of the precious gift of faith—an all too uncommon commodity in contemporary society. To my now departed parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, and relatives who showed me how to love, laugh, and respect—thank you. My committee members and co-reviewers never wearied of my revisions and azimuth changes. To God, thank you.

Also, Robert Stone (1985) reminded me about the importance of story in extracting meaning from life experiences:

We *need* stories. We can't identify ourselves without them. We're always telling ourselves stories about who we are: that's what history is, what the idea of a nation or an individual is. The purpose of fiction is to help us answer the question we must constantly be asking ourselves: Who do we think we are and what do we think we're doing? (italics in original)

We tell who and what we are. It is a continuous process of learning and development, feeding each other over the life course.



## **Dedication**

To my wife, my rock, and my best friend.

To those professionals, spiritual mentors, friends, and family—known and unknown,

alive and deceased—who have helped us over the years.

Thank you.

## Chapter 1 - Prologue

My nested doll is layered, chip- ped, with dark spa.....ces in between....  
When I dream , I ponder uncertainty An d wo/ander  
What I should have told Mom & Dad before they died 8 months apart...  
Why I have uncommanded thoughts that I must share with my wife...  
Fear telling others about mental illness because of social stigma, so  
I wear a mask of professional aloofness to fit in—then realize...  
My voice has been muted but I cannot cope alone.  
Who can mentor me along the path to spiritual maturity & peace  
And fulfill God's will for me? What is that path, and  
How can I navigate through its shadows?  
My soul casts the darkest shadow.  
How do I know if I am on the right path?

I journey on this unknown path to develop who I am, and  
What I am changes over time, marked by  
Life events that have value related to time, space, and  
Context. I am tired of fighting the masked silence.  
I am over 40 looking at what I wrote when I was 20. Really?!  
Am I a singular existence or multiple, possible selves over the life span?

Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?

Lord, release me from this prison, keep me in it if it  
Is Your will. I cannot understand what I cannot know, but  
Poetry gives me insight into multiple truths and possible selves.  
It exposes artifacts of my past, present, and future.  
I can express the polarity of human experience and nature  
And show their nexus through the window of haiku....

Uncertainty reigns—  
shadows cast on unmarked paths  
keep following me.

I desire to learn—  
spiritual growth here, now  
but dark clouds hover.

All paths wash away—  
grief strickens but strengthens too,  
new seeds sprout boldly.

This poem frames a narrative inquiry into life events that have influenced my identity development over a span of three decades. The text graphically evolves from chaos—an emotional response to disruptive life events—in the opening lines where spacing and grammar rules do not seem to exist to a gradual integration of thoughts, words, and form in succeeding stanzas. The first line highlights a metaphor of a nested doll, representing the layers of masks, possible selves, and interspersed shadows I have accumulated over three decades. The concluding three haikus have a traditional format; but, rather than focus on nature, they emphasize the dichotomy between human life events experienced and propagated.<sup>1</sup> The final stanzas address very personal life events that have particularly influenced my identity development over time: diagnosis of a mental illness, seeking spiritual peace through my chosen divine entity, and the deaths of my parents within eight months of each other. These events specifically have affected my personal culture regarding coping with mental illness, striving for spiritual development, and grieving the death of loved ones. Asking introspective questions along the journey has helped me to compile the pieces to construct some meaning.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

How can an adult make meaning from and develop through lived experiences of mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death? The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore how a male in the general population describes how life events have influenced his identity development over a period of 23 years, spanning three decades. The researcher-participant asks

---

<sup>1</sup> When translated into English, the traditional haiku structure calls for five syllables in the first line, seven in the second line, and five in the final line. Additionally, haiku normally examines a person's relationship with nature to "create an emotional response in the reader through the haiku's imagery of a particular moment" (Patt, Warkentyne, & Till, 2010, p. 4). This emphasis on significant moments well suits this research on the meaning(s) of particular life events.

two primary research questions: 1) How does the individual describe his adult development in terms of life events or “individual and cultural episodes” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) related to mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over time? and 2) How does the individual describe his possible selves in constructing a new sense of identity? Addressing these questions contributes to the literature of adult and continuing education by providing a glimpse into stories of lived experiences over time in the light of adult development. In short, this research helps fill in a gap of adult education literature at the nexus of these three cultures. The multi-layered personal narrative responds to these research questions in a visceral and intimate manner, thereby inviting the reader to examine the fragmented nature of the researcher-participant’s identity development and perhaps reflect upon her own.

### **Writing to Understand**

Over the past three decades, I have journaled to help make sense of some challenges and transitions I have faced—especially in terms of mental illness, spiritual development, and grief. These transitional life events have occurred over time; and understanding how they—even expected or desired transitions—can alter “one’s roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159; see also Smith & Taylor, 2010) can help one cope with the stress that accompanies them. This autoethnographic research examines the process of my adult development within three cultural domains: living with mental illness, striving for spiritual growth, and coping with death/grieving. Autoethnography can provide the socially dispossessed and those wounded by invisible disabilities a means to better understand and renegotiate their social-cultural positions "within educational structures and institutions" (Congdon, 2014, p. 1). Congdon (2014) particularly includes Digging Deeper sections at the end of his personal stories to link the experiences described to theory. These introspective interludes provide useful insights

for lay readers as well those in the academy because they help connect my lived experiences to adult and, in particular, identity development theory.

Writing autoethnography uniquely provides a researcher the space to analyze transcendental data and construct meaningful knowledge from lived experiences (Ellis, 2004; Polanco, 2013). In this research, I examine my experiences of identity development while coping with a mental disorder through an autoethnographic inquiry using personal narratives of transition and challenge from my journals and other family primary sources. The refractive lens I used is that of an over-40-year-old person looking at journals I wrote when I was as young as 20. The purpose of my personal narratives is to position my subjective self as a narrative researcher-participant in the dynamic social-cultural context of this study throughout, starting from the beginning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The chunking of life events into personal stories by transitions facilitates an ongoing performance in which I can witness the development of my identity and social context over time and to make sense of the “hidden, unknown connections between lived experiences and theory” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5; see also Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Riessman, 2002). Furthermore, the interweaving of personal narrative and theoretical reflection promises significant opportunities for adult learning and teaching (Brookfield, 2013). As a result, by narrating my possible selves through the disparate voices of archetypal characters representing aspects of my personality who experience particular life events significant to me, I can effectively construct meaning while concurrently analyzing and representing the data. This autoethnographic approach lends itself to a bildungsroman organization of story, naturally linking my examination of identity development and possible selves over time to adult development and learning theories.

A bildungsroman is a coming-of-age novel in which a character normally learns, through a journey of adversity against the odds, to become a contributing member of society; it has become a methodological approach to adult education research (Michelson, 2013; Sameshima, 2007; see also Lander, 2000). Over the past three decades I, as the researcher-participant, have documented several life events consisting of invisible wounds (e.g., coping with mental illness, toxic leadership, social stigma) and masks (e.g., wearing uniforms, discreetly seeking counseling, and exuding social conformity). These events have not only informed my journaling but have become the raw data for personal stories that represent periods of transition and challenge in my life course. I have become the subject—both protagonist and sometimes an antagonist—in this narrative, and the personal stories of transition and challenge have become the plot tracing my identity development for the audiences.

There are four primary audiences for this research. First, my committee presents the most immediate audience because it must approve the process and final product. They are a subset of the larger academy, but the members contribute invaluable insights from their own fields (history, psychology, qualitative inquiry, and adult education) to the literature of adult and continuing education. Second, adult education professionals—i.e., as educators, administrators, curriculum developers, policy makers, and author-researchers—have a stake in this research because they can better understand the agony and hidden costs paid by many of their students who are increasingly diverse. Consider the many adult learners who must confront the grave barriers of mental illness: not seeking treatment due to denial and/or social stigma, relationships broken from emotional abuse, or the psychological prisons levied by such disorders. In this context, this project serves to help adult educators learn about some precise challenges their students confront daily and how autoethnographic research methods can augment learning and

development over time. Third, a closely related audience are fellow adult learners who suffer from anxiety disorders. This group includes their under-appreciated care givers. Anyone can relate to grief from death or sickness of loved ones, but only those who experience the pervasive, insidious fragility and insecurity that my anxiety disorder imposes can understand this disorder and its impact on identity development. Reading the experiences of an adult learner who has overcome similar adversity may remind them they are not alone. Finally, my family and I are inherently an audience because we have co-created this research. Any story about me invariably reveals some illuminating moment, crack in the concrete, or an embarrassing factoid about family members or friends who are committed to our collective legacy.<sup>2</sup> These four audiences help provide parameters for the research questions and epistemic alignment.

In summary, this research uses autoethnography to understand in depth (the *why*) personally experienced social-cultural phenomena associated with identity development (the *what*) over a life course (the *when*). The *who* consists of four multivariate audiences, including my intimate family members and friends. Autoethnographic inquiry (the *how*) provides a narrative methodology to answer the research questions situated within the field of adult development and life events/transitions in particular.

### **The Narrative Begins**

I'm an adult educator and I have a story to tell. When I tell the story, it seems that time is of no importance, because in one instant I may be teaching graduate students about qualitative inquiry or in the next reflecting how past toxic bosses still influence my behavior and thinking. Over the span of decades, I could feel that I was the same person on the outside like the stoic

---

<sup>2</sup> That a story about personal experiences is necessarily a story about intimate others has ethical implications that will be addressed later (Boylorn, 2013; Ellis, 2007).

façade of a matryoshka doll, but I somehow was changing intrinsically—intellectually, spiritually, and psychologically—in an evolutionary way. Sure, time has been a factor, but the reflections of my experiences with other people have mattered most. These relationships included those with God, others, and myself.

To document these transitions and challenges over three decades, I have journaled. These personal documents have served as a means of autoethnographic narrative inquiry into the meaning I have derived from my own adult developmental experiences and life events. I hope to scaffold an understanding of the qualitative research process by modeling how I have approached this research with an attempt to humbly reveal vulnerability. While journaling is inherently introspective, it expands beyond navel gazing because it, through autoethnographic inquiry, shares personal stories with readers who may decide the lived events are not so different from their own (Pelias, 2013). They may find they are not alone.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms help clarify the scope and purpose of this study. These terms relate to the concept of adult development in that they describe a fundamental aspect of individual cognitive, behavioral, psychological, and spiritual growth over a lifespan (English, 2005; Smith & Taylor, 2007; Tisdell, 2003). In this sense, they serve as building blocks for the story of the researcher-participant's adult development over his life course.

**Active Page.** Describes any page not blank or torn out of a primary source in this study (see Appendix A). Thus, any human-made symbol, doodle, or mark on an otherwise blank page would make it “active” and thus count toward the page count tracked in Table 3.1. The page size varies according to the size of the source document.



**Autoethnography.** Autoethnography as a term evolved from anthropology and originally referred to how researchers could get people to describe their own experiences (Heider, 1975). The contemporary term describes the personal experiences (personal stories) and the cultural phenomenon to be studied, linked to the research questions: e.g., analyzing life events on the journey of identity development. Stories, and consequently autoethnographies, may be judged partly by how readers rather than respondents choose to respond to them and compare them to their lives (Ellis, 2004). Ellis (2004) explains that autoethnography is both process and product and is bigger than the sum of its components: autobiography and ethnography. Autobiographers can have a temporal subjectivity, that studying past selves can inform current possible selves (Barbosa & Amaral, 2010; Ross & Wilson, 2012). At the same time, autoethnography is more than a scholarly personal narrative. Nash (2004) observes that scholars write such personal narratives to “create a life by imposing a series of narrative-specific meanings on it” (p. 9). In autoethnography, one not only seeks to tell a personal story, but she also strives to construct integrated meaning about specific social-cultural phenomena by telling that story using a diverse array of tools (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Writing in and reflecting upon personal journals constitutes autoethnographic practice.

**Bildungsroman.** A bildungsroman narrative of the researcher-participant’s developmental journey concerns figuring out one’s self-concept: who one is and whom one wants to become.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> A bildungsroman is a novel of identity development that provides a narrative structure (e.g., characters, voice, plot, scenes) related to a person’s experiential learning through adversity. Because it normally consists of an individual writing his/her “way into self-authorship” (Michelson, 2013, p. 203) in a multilayered manner using rich text to create meaning, this structure complements the life events perspective coupled with informal learning throughout the life course (Sameshima, 2007).

**Death.** This is a culture of death as it impacts the researcher-participant and possibly the reader. It also refers to grieving for the loss of loved ones as well as for one's mortality. Disruptive life events such as the unexpected death of a loved one can provide perspective and insight into one's spiritual development over time, marking moments of increased awareness of who one is in a larger context (Poulos, 2012).

**Identity Development.** This term refers to both identity development and self-concept. Studying identity development is of value to higher education in terms of designing creative and "inclusive learning environments" (S.R. Jones et al., 2012, p. 699) that embrace diverse perspectives (see also Dey & Associates, 2010). In other words, identity is a social construct, but it is often not yet described in terms of cultures of invisibility or silence. Furthermore, there is a strong connection between narratives and identity development. Both the content and process of identity development play roles in narratives that explore personal journeys marked by particularly challenging life events in order to make meaning coherent in a psycho-social context (Marcia & Josselson, 2013; McAdams, 2012; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; see also Bruner, 1997; Erikson, 1959/1980).

**Invisible Wound/Disability.** This term refers to a culture that disregards others impairments due to ignorance or a lack of concern. There is an often unspoken stigma attached to such wounds, making them similar in effect to the culture of silence. For example, many adults refuse to seek mental health assistance because they fear (self stigma) that their superiors and/or peers will view them as unpredictable and weak in body or character (structural stigma) or that they will lose their access to key positions or privileges (Overton, 2008).<sup>4</sup> See also Masks.

---

<sup>4</sup> In this study, it is important to protect the confidentiality of the researcher-participant as well as that of intimate others (Ellis, 2007). This relational aspect of ethics in autoethnography will be treated throughout the report.

**Journaling.** A narrative method that facilitates reflection. In the online learning environment, several tools enable this: journals, discussion threads, partner-shared learning activities, and interactive digital case studies (Griffin, 2009; Omiunota, 2010). The research journal used in this study exemplifies this technique.

**Life Events Perspective.** This is a perspective of adult development which connotes change over time and has significant implications for the roles of adult educators (Hansman & Mott, 2010; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Whereas a life event connotes an external action coupled with a personal response, a life *task* implies that the adult has a choice regarding the activity which can be concurrent with a life event (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, & Nurius, 1986). For example, a wife may grieve (life task) at her husband's funeral (life event) which will influence the rest of her life course. A related concept is that of life course, "the engagement of self with world" (Levinson, 1986, p. 3; see also Erikson, 1959/1980) over time. Underlying the life course is another idea of life cycle, that a singular rhythm of seasonal change occurs throughout any life course (Levinson, 1986). Over time, a pattern in life tasks may also indicate perceptions of possible selves (Cantor et al., 1986).

**Masks.** Metaphorical, and sometimes literal, devices to avoid facing personal shadows. Poulos (2012) uses a mask as an autoethnographic means for participants to hide shadows from others and perhaps themselves. Masks also foster alternative self-concepts. The dynamic nature of possible selves, enabling adults to change them like masks as they accomplish goals or experience certain life events, fosters self-directed learning and development over a life course. "This dynamic nature exemplifies how possible selves are consistent with the self-directed nature of development and theories of intentional self-development" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1787). See also Possible Selves, Shadows, and Invisible Wound/Disability.

**Mental Illness.** This factor is attributable to any culture of any medically diagnosed mental illness (according to the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM)) and the impact on those afflicted, their care givers, and researchers. As a result of societal ignorance and misperceptions, diagnosed survivors often experience the burden of stigma and invisibility. Mental disorders indicate a rift between knowledge and faith: "It is as if two different persons were making statements about the same thing, each from his own point of view, or as if one person in two different frames of mind were sketching a picture of his experience" (Jung, 1957/1958, p. 74). This inner struggle for sanity marks a person and can proffer a good background for personal stories of development through adversity.

**Narrative.** A narrative is a story or tale, but in this research, it also connotes an integration of personal experiences over time in a cultural context. In the literature, narratives and stories are often used interchangeably: "Narratives, or stories, have the capacity to integrate the individual's reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future..." (McAdams, 2012, p. 231). That said, *narrative* is often a more broad term referring to how a *story* that describes a series of life events is told (Walsh, 2011). McAdams (2012) applies the notion of integration to the concept of story by describing the essence of a life story: "...one's life can be told through a more or less coherent narrative that makes sense both to the self and within" one's cultural context in terms of "the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (McAdams, 2012, pp. 237 & 247). In this context, a narrative is a personal story with social and cultural implications (McAdams, 2012). For this reason, autoethnography is a narrative practice—rather than just story telling.

Narratives can facilitate adult development through a reflective interpretation of lived experience over a life course (Rossiter, 1999a, 1999b; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Polkinghorne

(1988, 1995) helped solidify the practical value of narrative inquiry in the social sciences. Even the U.S. Army sees the analytical power of narrating to better understand complex operational environments:

In a broad sense, a narrative is a story constructed to give meaning to things and events. Individuals, groups, organizations, and countries all have narratives with many components that reflect and reveal how they define themselves.... To narrate is to engage in the production of a story—an explanation of an event or phenomenon by proposing a question or questions in relation to the artifacts themselves. These questions may include—What is the meaning of what I see? Where does the story begin and end? What happened, is happening, and why? (Department of the Army, 2012, para. 2-27)

Put another way, to narrate is a way of inquiry that adult learners can use to learn and better understand themselves and their cultures.

**Possible Selves.** Possible selves indicate differentiated, personal goals set by open-minded adults to develop potential identities over time depending upon social and/or historical contexts (Cantor et al., 1986; Dey & Associates, 2010; S.R. Jones et al., 2012).

**Reflective Learning.** Reflection links individual constructive learning to personal or social experiences. In this sense, reflection entails “the process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences...” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 260). This type of learning often employs autobiographical tools such as journals to record and thereby create deeper levels of meaning.

**Shadows.** Adults have shadows or dark facets of their personalities that they would rather not address. The persistent shadows of challenge and transitional stress resonate with the autoethnographic work of Poulos (2012) who examines the often unspoken, toxic cultures in

family life. Saint John of the Cross (1987), a pioneer Carmelite mystic, used the night as a metaphor for a life of faith, built through a relationship facilitated by prayer and spiritual poverty. His was one of the first uses of shadow in classic Spanish literature to explore this relationship.

**Silence.** This refers to a culture of silenced voices that yearn for emancipation. This concept is related to invisible wound/disability.

**Spirituality.** This is a culture of spiritual awareness. English (2005) provides an operational definition of spirituality pertaining to adult education that emphasizes its secular aspects over institutionalized religion (Tisdell, 2003). English (2005) explains that the primary trend in adult education literature concerns "personal growth and development" as well as "an understanding of spirituality as both inner- and outer-directed" (p. 1171). There is a "cultural-spiritual" (E. Taylor, 2008, p. 10) facet of transformative learning that informs narrative learning and inquiry.

Newman (2012) questions the existence of transformative learning as an independent phenomenon, but he does not explicitly argue against the premise that spirituality in the context of adult education is linked to meaning construction and identity development (English & Tisdell, 2010; Newman, 2012).

**Story.** See also narrative. In this study, the researcher-participant uses a particular type of story—i.e., a parable or tale which metaphorically expresses experiences and relates them to meaning—to analyze and represent the data. Storytelling is not only an action but a developmental process of meaning construction that can take many forms.<sup>5</sup> Storytelling is also a

---

<sup>5</sup> Visual storytelling is another mode of narrativizing lived experience. Visual storytelling is already used in pre-teacher education as a pedagogical tool to encourage critical development (Rifa-Valls, 2011).

form of narrative pedagogy that contributes to adult learning and development (Artistico et al., 2011).

**Voice.** This concept represents a goal of adult education: to empower learners, particularly those on social peripheries. Narrative inquiry facilitates this emancipatory process through the personal reflection upon and expression of lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). When those layered experiences have been shadowed by mental illness and grief, the researcher-participant has found poetic inquiry—exemplified throughout this manuscript—helpful in self-agentic expression (Bhattacharya, 2013; Cahnmann, 2003; Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016). More specifically in this research, the term refers to the inner voice that expresses the researcher-participant’s heart-felt thoughts, emotions, reflections, and beliefs as a result of learning from life events at particular places and times (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013).

### **Organizational Rationale**

This research project is organized in a narrative format to facilitate its primary methodology (autoethnographic narrative inquiry), promote a deeper understanding of my personal experiences within the context of three particular cultural contexts (mental illness, spiritual development, and grief), and examine these experiences as part of a continuum of life events over time. In this section, I describe the proposed structure of the study chapter-by chapter and based upon a foundation of narrative inquiry which naturally examines human experience over time (Ellis, 2004; Poulos, 2012).

Additionally, this research interweaves adult development theory with personal experience. Because these topics normally consist of different tones and persons of linguistic structure, they will frequently be set in different sections separated by either headings or

asterisked lines. For instance, autoethnographic sections concerning the analysis and representation of life events in personal narratives will be in separate sections in the first person using a prosaic or poetic format. Contrarily, theoretical and some methodological interludes (i.e., digging deeper sections) will be in the third person using academic prose. By presenting the material in this interwoven manner, I will justify this organization as illustrative of autoethnographic epistemology and as optimal for addressing the research purpose and questions.

Chapter 1-Prologue introduces the research questions, narrative structure, operational definitions, and organizational rationale. I describe a show-tell format which iteratively illustrates how the personal stories shared connect to adult identity development theory. The concept of poetic representation and the metaphor of a nested doll foreshadow analytical methods I employed in this research.

Chapter 2-Personal Stories and Possible Selves presents (i.e., shows) ten personal stories derived from primary sources from my journals, personal correspondence, and my grandfather's autobiography (see Appendix A). These stories construct a fragmented narrative that, grounded to theory in Digging Deeper sections, challenge readers to reflect on their own fragmented possible selves.

Chapter 3-Context of the Plot examines the context of the personal stories in terms of the research design and the theoretical and methodological frameworks. While this chapter *tells* the outline of the framework, it concludes with (i.e., *shows*) a shadowed illustration of how life events have shaped my identity development. It discusses some of the ethical challenges of rigor inherent to autoethnographic research.



Chapter 4-Summary and Conclusion includes a summary of how the research addresses the research questions and provides some implications of this project for the academic field of Adult and Continuing Education. In particular, descriptions of an evolved self-concept in terms of the cultures of mental illness, spiritual development, and death and grief are presented.

Chapter 5-Epilogue: A Conversation with Pop-pop represents data through an intersectional dialogue with my grandfather. It concludes with a way ahead for future research pertaining to shadowed meaning in adult education.

## Chapter 2 - Personal Stories and Possible Selves

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

There are many possible versions of *I* as a concept that develop over the lifespan. These possible selves emerge in particular social-cultural contexts of time and space, but they represent self-knowledge and development—or change—over time (Barreto & Frazier, 2012). As a younger adult, I felt invincible and in control. This emotional response perhaps helped to perpetuate my motivation and forward momentum in my early career. Indeed, the perception of control impacts our health over our lifetimes (Infurna, Gerstorf, & Zarit, 2011). Over time, my experiences often have caused me to question my perceptions and inherited assumptions. I would periodically discuss with myself, largely through journaling, what these discrepancies between experience and beliefs or values meant.

When learners question their assumptions (reflect) through dialogue (reflective discourse), they engage in transformative learning (Lamoreaux & Taylor, 2011), often in an informal context. As a result of this introspective dialogue over time, I have actively developed my own identity but realize that change and growth continue. Narrative inquiry of my adult development helps me to not only make sense of past experiences but to discern future paths. Constructivist-developmental theories in adult development can help clarify the linkage between autoethnography and constructed knowledge (Smith & Taylor, 2010). By placing the life events of my possible selves into context, I can thereby further develop my identity and invite others to do the same.

### **Preparing for a Pilgrimage**

I often ponder the concept illustrated by the introductory couplet because it symbolizes my mental illness in various ways. The disorder has caused me to seek answers to my problems,

my complaints, and my responsibilities. It is easy to avoid facing individual and social expectations, and it is hard to fulfill them. Learning to live with the disorder has also been developmental, leading me to grow as a person who must take responsibility for *my* disorder and not blame others for its inconveniences. In other words, I must travel my own path and begin it on my own terms. Edith Stein, the renowned philosopher-saint who converted from Judaism to atheism to Catholicism, dying in Auschwitz in 1942 (Stein, 1985/1986, chronology), envisioned human development in terms of body, mind, and spirit synergistically seeking union with God.<sup>6</sup> By writing about life events experienced, I actually reflect upon places visited along an ongoing pilgrimage.<sup>7</sup>

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

### **How My Narrative Got Here**

I do not want to write this. I'm a private person. I don't want to expose my fears, uncertainties, or vulnerabilities to strangers. No offense. But I have spent my entire adult life putting on masks of professional aloofness, military uniforms, logical thinking, and task lists to hide from myself and others the truth of my mental disorder. Only immediate family members—and not all of them—have known about the diagnosis. I am not sure saying it in public will help me or other sufferers or caregivers. If I am to be honest, having a mental illness has been an

---

<sup>6</sup> Stein (1922/2000) believed that individuals were uniquely comprised of body, mind, and spiritual dimensions—ultimately trying to achieve union with God (Maskulak, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> My mentor incidentally describes autoethnographic practice because it involves writing about lived experiences (including transitions and challenges) within specific social-cultural contexts over time to better understand personal identity and relationships (Anonymous, 2015; Cardinal, 2010; Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Cook, 2014; Emerald & Carpenter, 2014; Poulos, 2012; Tillotson, 2012). Furthermore, writing about life events and possible selves can help clarify my life course (King, 2001).

integral part of my personal experience that a part of me fears a public revelation would release some essence of who I am. I would never be whole again. It scares the heck out of me to expose my weaknesses, but exploring that vulnerability with the sterile instrument of methodology is precisely the point of autoethnography.

Being a completely satisfied individual is an irrational illusion I have created to convince myself that I must continue to obsess and relieve the insidious perseverations with ritualistic compulsions to be sane and at peace—to be whole. I remember one of my first instances that something was wrong. I was in third grade and cried for 10 minutes not because I had homework for the first time but because I was frustrated that it would not be perfect, no matter how hard I tried. By the time I was in high school, I thought nothing of manually retyping a complete page or two to erase the evidence of a typographical error. By conducting rituals such as hypersensitive lamentation or excessive task repetition over a long period of time in my youth; I had convinced myself that continuing them in adulthood was normal. In a sense, I have created myths of my competence and stability as a mask to shield my greatest fears from discovery.

*What if?*

I have Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and likely reside somewhere on the Autism spectrum. There. It's out. I'm not happy. I'm ticked off, in fact, that I have to say this to feel better or come to terms with a disorder I've had most of my life. The etymology of dis-order appropriately describes OCD and its effect on my life story. The *dis* indicates a malformed version of what follows. *Order* certainly does not follow in OCD. The sufferer creates a temporary sense of order (i.e., perform a compulsion) in response to an obsession (i.e., a fear of uncertainty). Because caregivers understandably prefer to avoid personal repercussions (e.g.,

tantrums when compulsions are not supported), they often give in and facilitate—thereby fostering—the disorder.

This invisible but lurking, virus-like disease invades a person's mind and has amplified my innate tendency to think life is against me, that other people somehow have some agenda against me. In this way, OCD has reinforced a self-centeredness over time that has not been healthy for long-term relationships. This research explicitly describes the toll it has taken on my marriage over time based upon journaled documentation. The disorder has invaded every crevice and vulnerable niche in the armor of my personality. It is more than the stereotypical perception of OCD sufferers as a bunch of hand washers or hoarders. It's a real bastard. *What if?*

I write this personal narrative to put together the puzzle pieces of my life. Writing autoethnographically is not a monolithic exercise, highlighted by logically sequenced experiences that lead to a denouement and clear implications for my future. Rather, it has entailed decades of journaling and iterative reflection upon particular life events that—for one reason or another—have percolated to the top of my memory and self-concept at seemingly arbitrary moments. Goodall (2006) sees humans first as *homo narrans*, storytellers who are "better understood as a species defined by our use of language rather than as descendants of the upright apes called *erectus*, or the tool makers called *habilis*, or the merely modern-bodied *sapiens*..." (italics in original, p. 28). In other words, it is a uniquely human trait to make sense of our life experiences narratively. Some memories of my experienced life events haunt me from the shadows, resulting in nightmares that take place within the recesses of repressed memories that may offer some clues to the overall puzzle that is my life course. In this sense, I write to select, document, and somehow organize my life events so I can eventually put them together in

a meaningful way. If the process has taught me anything, it is that it cannot be rushed or imposed—one must freely choose to develop.

Perhaps it was the death of my parents within eight months of each other that helped trigger my reflections. Mom died on September 6, 2012, and Dad died across the country on May 1, 2013. Neither parent would tell my brother and me much about personal details regarding sex, family psychological histories, or their own shadows. Their generation, which had come of age during World War II and Korea, prided itself in self-reliance and a can-do attitude. They were no doubt successful. Mom was one of the first women to break glass ceilings in the male-dominated publishing industry as a pioneer in typography (Culkin, obituary, 2012). Dad ultimately became a world-class commercial banker, running the US branch office of a West German bank until his retirement at age 55. Like most trappings of middle-class success during the Cold War era, however, not everything was placid.

Mom and Dad divorced after thirteen years or so of marriage. Dad moved on to two other wives, explaining to me once that he never wanted to grow old alone. Mom never seemed to move on and, in some ways, receded into the shadows of the past. For example, she relished her apprenticeship in Paris as a painter or her time in Chicago as an art director; but she didn't realize her dreams of becoming an independent artist or published cookbook author. Perhaps her dreams were squashed—by her or someone else. I'll never know.

What I do know is that my grandfather and mother's father (we called him Pop-pop) died in 1979 at age 91 after a life of integrity and achievement. I was proud of him, but rarely interacted with him. Mom apparently respected him, but she also harbored some resentment for his lack of support for her educational and professional pursuits (Brother, phone conversation and e-mail, August 1, 2016). He was a self-educated man with a nineteenth-century perception of

women and had made a name for himself as a construction manager for projects such as the US post office in Washington, the Missouri capitol, the United Nations headquarters building, and the Julliard School. He documented many of these accomplishments, including a flight alongside Charles Lindbergh, in his autobiography completed in 1968, a year before I was born (Aronberg, circa 1969). He certainly left a proud legacy defined in terms of skyscrapers and marvels of 20<sup>th</sup>-century engineering.

As I have matured, I also have come to realize that, like other families, there were more complex facets of his legacy. My nine-year-old mind did not comprehend in 1978 how strange it was that my mother's mother and sister did not inform her of his death until after his funeral. I thought it was also normal that emotional debates on the rotary-dial telephone were highlighted by Mom's crescendos and plastic-splintering hang ups. Family is tough, and death sucks. I got it.

But I had not perceived the depth of layered angst, faded memories, or past infringements of prideful righteousness that permeated my mother's family relationships. Mom never really discussed these shadows with me. I did know that the shadow of mental illness somehow lurked in my aunt and grandmother's experiences. Our parents, even after the divorce, always kept us a measured distance from Mom's sister and mother. Talk of Grandma's extended hospital stays and Pop-pop making Mom come home to take care of her periodically resonated with me, but they quickly vanished into the shadows of collective memory. Family memory is funny in that way. One may not know all the specific facts pertaining to a particular life event or phenomena, but a blend of imagination and logical inference can fill the empty spaces. Over the years, my brother and I concocted our own legend grounded in these relevant truths. We needed to make sense of the unconnected points, so we constructed a narrative that connected them.

Essentially, the narrative we have created concerns the presence of psychological disorder on my mother's side. We don't know if this is true, or if it is even worse on my father's side. Some of my brother's memories about our parents do not align with mine, but I guess that is normal. Indeed, being almost five years apart in age and having individual relationships with our parents, it would seem inevitable that we each remembered certain conversations and not others. Years later, we have shared some of these fragmented, overlapped life events only to discover more of our mutual life picture—a more comprehensive collaborative understanding of our heritage. With mental disorders in my mother's family, she apparently worried about her sons (and me in particular) with a maternal guilt that, somehow, she had done something wrong while pregnant to cause any life problems we had (Brother, phone conversation, August 1, 2016). In this context, it was good that I never told her any of these personal stories, especially that of my diagnosis. The truth is literally relative in familial narratives, perhaps because the aim is not wisdom but sense making. My brother and I really take the narrative of mental illness for granted, and it has taken many years for me to realize that normalcy itself is a relative term.

As I grew into adulthood, I kept taking it for granted that I could look at Pop-pop's autobiography but never take it with me to study. I had suspected Mom didn't want me to take it with me, using my military career as an excuse. But it seemed to me at the time (i.e., over my twenty-one year career) that she was preventing me from accessing it, to really study it. As a result, I only first examined the text and accompanying photos of Pop-pop's autobiography during the year following Mom's death and my military retirement. Reading a book my grandfather wrote before I existed was not only surreal, but it opened a door into my past that—until that experience—I could not have expected. This “narrative inheritance” (Goodall, 2006, p. 23) of his autobiography ultimately arrived complete with the shadowed fears, familial strife, and



cloistered secrets invisibly tethered to its bindings. It took me over thirty years to be able to see Pop-pop's opus not just as a metal-pinned binder but for what it truly is: a foundational piece of my ancestor's legacy that has influenced my family relationships, how we think of ourselves as a family, and how I envision my self-concept. In that sense, his long-imprisoned autobiography is much taller than any skyscraper he ever built. It has become a rally point around which my own journaling mustered the hope that I could make better sense of my life within the context of my family's multi-layered legacy.

### **Unworthiness and Vulnerability**

Why cannot God just send me a handwritten note—notarized of course—when He wants to convey something? Such a small demand; but the seemingly innocuous expectation comes from a dark, irrational place that can cause great harm. The source of this continuous search is the fear of uncertainty. Over several decades, this seed has germinated into an insidious vine, finding all of my fears and making me question my ability to cope with all of them.

A few examples of these obsessive episodes recurred for years or still continue. An early fear was that I would lose my school bag when I commuted on public transportation. “What if a paper fell out because I failed to zipper the pocket?” I would think nothing of checking the bag to ensure nothing had fallen or that the zipper had not become unfastened. On rare occasions, this follow-through served me well. Over time, and little by little, the checking became more habitual—as if checking the bag would prevent any loss of contents. My synapses formed new pathways which led me to become convinced that bag checking was a critical aspect of my daily commute. I was convinced of the logic (i.e., checking bags means avoidance of losing biology papers and any valued item). Another part of me wondered if I was doing this checking more than other kids. No one, however, seemed to mind, so I didn't question the soundness of my

choices to repeatedly check. I was OK with being a checker. We all have quirks. After all, the compulsion of checking soothed my concerns, albeit temporarily. Over the years and after cognitive-behavior therapy and medication, I still check. I no longer check my school bag, but consider how many times I check travel bags at airport security checkpoints! As of this writing, I check my wallet at least twice every time I take it out of my pocket for the very same rationale.

*What if?*

As I grew into adulthood, my experiences became more varied and complex; and my OCD (my wife and I call it Herb) was up for the challenge. Checking grew into scrupulosity, a form of ritualistic obsession rooted in uncertainty and the fear of taking a shortcut to sanctity without doing the hard spiritual work (Penzel, 2000). If a sound, no matter how slight, interrupted a prayer of mine, I would have to restart. One day, I yelled at a blue jay singing loudly by my window because he rudely interrupted my ritual.<sup>8</sup> Why couldn't I just have one perfect day or a moment of complete peace? That one day came once when I had a contemplative moment laying on our lawn, gazing into the summer sky. I felt God was sharing with me his warm love through Matthew, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, New American Bible Revised Edition). When I learned to drive a car, I feared I would want to drive off a cliff, noting how little effort it would take on some mountainous roads. This did not settle well with my bride when we honeymooned at Estes Park, Colorado. As I grew physically, socially, and cognitively, I eventually became overwhelmed with the fast-paced complexities of life. *What if?*

---

<sup>8</sup> My mother later got me a blue jay ornament as a humorous way of responding to this incident. I didn't see the humor in it, and it would take me years to realize how pathetic my behavior had been.

All of these factors contributed to my decision to attend Mass regularly (ours was not a religious family during this phase of my youth).<sup>9</sup> With all the static in my young life, the muted voice in the back of my mind sounded amazingly clear for once: “You can’t do this thing called life alone. You need all the help you can get.” What could I lose by seeking the help of an all-powerful entity? If I was wrong, I’d be back where I had been. If correct, I could hope for a pretty good payoff. I haven’t turned back from this spiritual investment since then....

### **What I was Like**

The narrative in the next section captures most of the extreme examples of my obsessions when I was not medicated. This is a snapshot of my most vulnerable self. I have experienced every obsession and then some at some point in time.<sup>10</sup> The catch is that obsessions don’t all happen at once like this. They adapt over time, but their intensities do seem to increase if left untreated. Obsessions are virtual viruses that lie in waiting, hoping to latch onto a deep-seeded fear or doubt. I wrote this narrative around 2002 as a therapy to record and confront my fears in one space and have adapted it for ethical and privacy reasons.<sup>11</sup> By identifying these insidious fears and doubts, I could address them in turn, with the most harmless first. It has taken me over 15 years to reveal these personal vulnerabilities. Please do not judge me; rather, I hope my fear portrait Perfect Storm can help open the door to your own....

---

<sup>9</sup> My brother has clarified that while he went to regular Catholic religious education (named CCD after the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) classes and received the sacraments on a normal schedule, our parents’ divorce and subsequent move resulted in my religious education being sporadic during this period (phone conversation and e-mail, August 1, 2016). “I think the ball was dropped for you a bit when they [our parents] split, but I know Mom did try to make it up to you by teaching CCD at least one year....” (Brother, e-mail, August 1, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> My wife and I have edited these to help protect our mutually exposed spaces.

<sup>11</sup> Hyman, B., & Pedrick, C. (1999). *The OCD workbook: Your guide to breaking free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc. We used this resource for cognitive-behavior therapy coupled with medication treatment.

Since childhood, I have had uncommanded thoughts—mostly sexual and/or violent thoughts—particularly about loved or vulnerable ones. The obsessions seemed to mirror any fear. If I watched a horror movie in which a young woman was killed, I wondered, “Could I do that? What would prevent me from doing that?” If I saw a pretty woman and admired her, I would ask, “Does this mean I married the wrong person? Is my wife not my soul mate?” Once I married, I got worse, sensing the more that I cherished someone (i.e., my wife), the more she seemed to be the object of my obdurate thoughts. Some of my worst OCD symptoms covered a wide spectrum of fears:

- Ritualized recitation of common Catholic prayers, repeating them when interrupted by *any* sound.
- Ritually placing my hands on my wife’s head in public places to ensure she would receive the benefit of my spontaneous prayer.
- Sexual thoughts of women other than my wife.
- Intrusive violent thoughts in which I harmed loved ones.
- Continuously asking my wife if I was OK, particularly before an enjoyable activity such as a movie.
- Daily briefing my wife in which I would emotionally force her to listen to my list of events. These were written in very small letters, meticulously detailing my activities. The smaller the piece of paper, the smaller the letters. Everything would fit. The fear was that if I didn’t tell her everything, we would gradually lapse into miscommunication and indifference, the cause of many divorces. I reasoned then that failure to brief would lead to miscommunication and therefore

divorce. This faulty syllogism exemplifies the irrationality of OCD and how it can greatly harm a family.<sup>12</sup>

These fears surfaced from every weakness in my personality, character, and identity as a human being. They scared me, but I finally realized I was not alone. I learned to write about my struggles, first to myself and then with my best friend and future wife. In *Journal 16*, my troubled 26-year-old self reveals itself to her: “From the deepest recesses of my neurotic brain and heart, God Bless you.... P.S: You put and keep me at peace and in hope. Thank you” (Culkin & Family, June 17, 1996). From the earliest days of our relationship, she must have seen my insecurities, kept them close to her heart, and then chose to love me anyway. What a blessing.

### **Diary of a Mad Man—A Perfect Storm**

The following story never happened. It is a fragment from the researcher-participant’s cognitive-behavior therapy circa 2002 during which he wrote out a scene that entailed every major obsession or recurring thought that haunted him at that time and place. A feature of such exposure-response work consists of mentally placing oneself in the worst-case situation to generate the feared anxiety without doing the compulsions that provide short-term relief (Hyman & Pedrick, 1999; Penzel, 2000). The compulsions do not entail carrying out the obsessions; rather, the OCD sufferer realizes from the beginning that these are irrational thoughts that he wants to erase. The more intense the desire to erase the thought, the more it holds on, clawing at the synapses. Resultant compulsions for the research-participant normally included ritualized prayers, making intricately detailed briefs for his wife, or aural clicking.

---

<sup>12</sup> Fifteen years later, my wife and I believe she may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of more than one of these compulsions which I have now learned to manage.

In this scene, the participant experiences the obsessions almost concurrently, which meets the needs of the therapy but is hardly realistic. More often than not, the researcher-participant would experience only one of these obsessive themes at a time, usually caused by particular triggers such as movie scenes, dialogue, personal humiliation, misperceptions, or someone's vulnerability. As a result of this exposure-response activity and many others, the participant has learned to become more methodically introspective about his recurring thoughts, realizing the causes for the anxiety are often irrational and thus unfounded. Some parts have been modified to comply with the ethical concerns of my family-member reviewers. Welcome into the mind of someone with OCD.

\* \* \* \*

I am sitting alone down on the sofa, watching a movie, *Nightmare Dolls*, in which demon boys grow up to become devils and agents of Satan. They also have sex with anyone. Some of them kill or traumatize others.... Could I do anything so nasty? If I think of this, doesn't it mean I like it? I realize I must be evil and that the police will come after me next—that I'll be on the headlines eventually.

I try to pray, to convince myself that I'm good. But, there's the gnawing feeling that, like Damien, I'm the appointed Son of Satan or somehow evil. I say a Hail Mary once to myself but do not concentrate on it. I don't hear me saying the words and stanzas, especially, "Jesus" and "death." I try to say the Act of Contrition (forgetting to say it first, meaning I must really think I'm better than most) and the Our Father. I repeat them a couple of more times to ensure at least one is right. Making an aural click by swallowing signals to my body and separated mind that the prayer is officially over. But images of me being an evil agent coming out as my true self interrupt my thoughts. I accidentally finish the Our Father with the second half of the Hail Mary

and realize that must be a sign of the Devil beckoning my services. I feel crazed, like I've been lying to myself all my life and that I should let the inevitable happen: become crazy, lose control of my mind, and do terrible things. I haven't said the prayers well enough or with enough faith and care, so God won't listen to me.

I remember wondering what it'd be like to jump off a bridge or stab myself. I remind myself I still wonder what would I feel like if I just turned the car off the highway through the railing and over into a steep cliff. It's more vivid if my wife is with me. I think of what it'd be like if I hit her.

I then remember I did not check the oven or hot water (coffee) heater. I go to the kitchen to see the appliance sparking, and a gas fire erupts. I yell up to my wife that we need to get out. I am indifferent, cold of heart, and so don't go upstairs. *Am I so unfeeling?* She comes down anyway. We stand at the top of the steep basement stairs and we hug. I think of the movie I was watching in which a man pushed a woman downstairs. I think I'm a man and wonder what would prevent me from doing that to my wife? I can't think of a reason, so I push her downstairs, unsuspecting. She is so vulnerable in my arms—so giving—that I fear I like being cruel to her and anyone else indefensible that much more. I think of the time that I could have cracked her neck when resting her head in my arms so trustingly. I guess I wasn't good enough to maintain her trust. I became scared because I may like being cruel to others.

I think of the times in the past almost entertaining the idea of hitting other, vulnerable people. That I must have been deranged and antisocial then for not always hanging out with kids my age. I would have lost my wife if we had children, I thought.

I go see my wife and present her my brief list. I spend all day constantly updating it; yet, I hate to do it because I don't like to bring work home with me. I hope she realizes all I do for

her. I relate to her things that I need to share like thoughts about other women in the past. I must confess in order to right things with her. Marriages crumble on lies. If I lie or omit something, I fear our marriage will disintegrate. My wife tells me she doesn't like to hear these things about other women, but my cruel, unthinking self does it anyway. This thinking makes me wonder if I married the right person? *Am I the right person? Do I want to be with someone else because I think of others?*

My wife is crying. She's blaming herself for everything and then I think she's being selfish. I'm just trying to get through my brief list and save our marriage, but she broke down at Item 8 (12 more to go). I have to stop the presentation to console her; otherwise, I may start to become indifferent and be judged as a bad husband by society. I don't understand it. I feel all her unhappiness is due to me.

I go into the kitchen and pick up a knife behind my wife. An image of the knife going into her back appears and agitates me. I don't like this image, but I am powerless to erase it. The more I emotionally invest in the image, the more imprinted it becomes. It must be indelible. *Why do I have these thoughts?!* I ask her if everything will be OK.

She nods but does not say, "It'll be OK and you're a good person, Dave." There's no sign or message from God either.

"Do you think so?" I ask again. She's visibly agitated and I'm desperate for a response.

I change the subject to this past weekend. Though I know she's upset, I bring my feelings up anyway because if I don't, that may be the beginning of the end of our communication and thus our relationship. If I hold little feelings from her, what else may I keep from her—a possible affair when I could be overseas? I mention that I was jealous with all the happy moments she spent with her parents. I don't have that close a relationship with my own. It makes me feel low



because she seems to prefer spending time with them rather than alone with me. I fear separation from her, but I don't realize I'm pushing her away. She's silly with them because they make her happy; she's upset with me because I make her sad, scared and drain the life out her.

I'm down and frustrated, so I go to my room to dream of other women. I feel guilty because the church frowns on that stuff. I must feel bad—I am bad because I don't mind it. I'm tired, so my mind wanders. I think about my mother's visit last month. Like always, she never lets me talk nor does she apologize. (My wife reports the same behavior from me toward her, but I don't see it.) The world owes her an apology. I can't get close or open to her. I feel despair...like I'll lose control because of the "crazy gene" I inherited from her. I don't know what I can do about any of this.

I also think about conflicts at work. It reminds me of confrontations with a superior officer control freak who wanted me to do things his way. About the doctor who told me, "You don't know what you're talking about," reminding me of other strong, authoritative women from my adolescence.

I'm emotionally drained and decide I need a break, so I plan a trip. I pack the night before. The next morning, I feel I need to check the bag 2-3 times to ensure I didn't leave behind anything I'll need. It takes me 3 hours to pack for a week-long trip because I hesitate to pack the clothes. Closing the suitcase is final. I leave without checking the door if it's locked, the water heater if it's off, or the iron if it's unplugged. I worry on the plane that I'll feel guilty for leaving my wife alone and if the house burns while she's in it. *Or do I want that?* I'm not sure of anything. The cycles are snowballing. I wonder because I feel I have constant doubt about everything, especially things I most fear—like losing my wife.

## **Military Structure as a Therapeutic Mask**

The preceding story has described the prison-like conditions experienced by the researcher-participant as a person with OCD. These conditions were like walls, built brick-by-brick with each bio-chemical failure along the grand synaptic highway of the brain. This section illustrates how the disorder affected his military career.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was diagnosed and received therapy for OCD while I was a career officer in the military. The service traditionally has not openly accepted mental illness as a means for progression in the ranks, and several members still feel the stigma when seeking help or making declarations on security clearance applications. While a decade of war has produced an increased demand on military health care providers for behavioral health issues, the stigma may have faded—but it remains. Who would, in a practical sense, want to follow a *crazy* person? Do not our youth deserve the best and fittest to lead them into harm's way? In this cultural context, it took some courage for me—and others like me—to seek help while in uniform. I still pray for those whose stigma and machismo-istic pride still blockade them from treatment.

Only having gone through drug and cognitive-behavior treatment can I see the stigma of mental illness in the military from a non-normalistic point of view. Anxiety disorders such as OCD can be sources of motivation for identifying weaknesses and working to ameliorate them, applying a keen attention to detail to tedious tasks, and a sharp sense of responsibility for tasks assigned. These virtues allowed me to succeed as a young platoon leader in an attack helicopter battalion, as a pilot following safety and operational checklists, and as a company commander responsible for over 80 personnel and an equipment inventory valued over one million dollars. Uncontrolled, these same characteristics sometimes have made me hypersensitive—almost

paranoid—of others’ opinions, slow due to repetitive checking, or indecisive on minor matters. For example, I excelled in staff work and following memorandum distribution protocols, but I would spend inordinate amounts of time worrying if the boss was upset at me because I was not somehow meeting his unstated expectations. When I am tired or going through transitional phases—e.g., illness, deaths of my parents, retirement from the military—I find myself susceptible to falling into these old cognitive ruts. Ironically, these same ritualized habits (i.e., protocols, deference to sequential logic, constant inventorying, re-checking, and obedience to authority) were protective masks freely provided by a military career. It seems I chose a well-suited path that allowed me to hide my shadows from myself and others.

### **What I am Like Now**

The reason many OCD sufferers do not seek professional help is the fear of judgment. The fears and thoughts are very real and unwanted. Sufferers are aware of their symptoms, know they are irrational, and never act upon them (Penzel, 2000). My wife put it in perspective for me once: You worry so much about things you will never do, and there are psychopaths out there who never think about the things they have done (paraphrase). Put another way, if I were a compact disc in shuffle mode, I would be stuck in a repeat cycle (personal communication, April 24, 2016).<sup>13</sup> No person with OCD “prefers to do what they are doing, no matter how frantic they may seem as they do it” (Penzel, 2000, p. 17). Penzel (2000) notes that OCD differs from

---

<sup>13</sup> The Serotonergic Theory of OCD is the leading bio-chemical explanation and holds that the neurotransmitter serotonin fails to latch on to receptors when crossing synapses, thereby causing heightened anxiety and symptoms (Penzel, 2000). Serotonin-specific reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are a class of medications used to treat the symptoms by normalizing this synaptic cycle. In my mind, literally, there is no doubt that my compulsive *cycling* is linked to this neuro-chemical process. While there is as yet no cure for this disorder, the medication has enabled my family and me to manage it.

common phobias in that “sufferers can sometimes fear things that they have never heard of before, and which have never happened to them or anyone else they know” (p. 325). We have learned to live with my OCD because we must; it is incurable. I have taken medication for over 15 years. Many do not have the patience to allow the systemic psychotropic drugs to take effect, but I needed to save my marriage and my sanity.

During this period of treatment, I found poetic expression to be therapeutically beneficial. Poetry allows me to consider the disorder from different angles, using metaphors to maintain a healthy distance while facing my fears. The following poem, *Prison* (Culkin, November 25, 2005), describes mental illness for what it is—a mental prison.

The man looks up and around,  
to discover his new-born self, only  
newly arrived with the knowledge  
of his abnormal youth and mental term.

As a youth, he mulled and culled,  
repeated and doubted, sought re-  
assurance and certainty. None was  
found but much deprived.

This prison of the mind.

While intelligence in books grew,  
so did they as a refuge—a sanctuary,  
other growth was stunted, to be found  
at a later period, after the release.

Freedom came with the knowledge that  
he was neither alone nor bad, just im-  
balanced and in need of certain chemicals.  
But the way has started, the path to  
self-discovery begun.

We have also made several mutually acceptable accommodations to my compulsions which my wife initially—and unknowingly—facilitated:

- Responding to my repeated questions: *Is everything OK?*

- Creating the character of Herb to discuss the disorder with humor in order to put it into perspective.
- Avoiding situations with attractive women present.
- Avoiding rated D (for Dave) movies such as horror films that might spur morbid thoughts.
- Weekly e-mail briefs instead of daily in-person interrogations.
- Trusting my wife when she tells me, “You’re cycling,” or “doing *it*.”

I accept that I have a disorder labeled OCD and will likely have it for the rest of my life, but my wife and I refuse to let it define us or me. When I first was diagnosed with OCD, after recovering from the initial relief of knowing the source of my problems, I committed an act of informal learning. I went to the library the next day and checked out Penzel’s (2000) *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders* to study the symptoms, causes, and possible treatment options. Suddenly, I was not alone and discovering a new world. His acknowledgment that a person with OCD does not normally act out “a morbid or sexual impulsion” (Penzel, 2000, p. 216) changed my life. I finally realized that, while still responsible for my behavior, I no longer needed to fear—so much—that I would act out my obsessions.

### **Why I Chose These Stories**

The following personal stories of my companion pilgrims provide insight into particular life events related to transitions and challenge in my own life course. They are puzzle pieces within the multi-dimensional research space of an ongoing narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). More importantly, these stories of particular life events illustrate the process I have used over time to develop a self-concept, to more deeply understand these transitions as phenomena, and to better cope with their innate stresses (Schlossberg, 2011). From

a different aspect, these stories constitute a purposeful sample of personal experiences related to transition and challenge and form the foundation of this bildungsroman. By retelling these stories together at a different age or perspective than when I originally lived them, intersectional and inter-story themes can emerge from a collaboration of sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Clandinin, 2013). Examining these life events from multiple perspectives told through different possible selves contributes to the triangulation and rigor of the research.

Archetypes are narrators who also represent possible selves in my shadowed world. Jung (1957/1958) explores the nature of the modern individual, one bifurcated between a conscious self and an unconscious aspect that resides in the shadows. He discusses how both religion and psychiatry can help in this identity development process, but we must choose to first face our own shadow before we can see our true selves (Jung, 1957/1958). The narrators are arranged to spell out my name by first letters. In this sense, these tales help illustrate my development through life events over the course of the past three decades. What future pathways do they suggest for me, for you?

### **Starting the Stories**

To tell my story as my current self is one thing; to narrate it through archetypes is quite another. Archetypes are mythical characters that represent certain aspects of my personality, character, and/or experience to represent a possible self. If my story is an ongoing pilgrimage, then these narrators could be considered as fellow pilgrims along the road of space and time. Chaucer's (1948) description of the road to Canterbury captures the anticipation of learning and developing over a life span:

Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage  
*Ready to wend on my pilgrimage*

To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,  
*To Canterbury with a fully devout heart,*

At night was come in-to that hostelrye  
*At night there came into that inn*  
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye,  
*Full nine and twenty in a company,*  
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle  
*Of sundry folk, by chance fallen*  
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,  
*Into fellowship, and pilgrims were they all,*  
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde....  
*That toward Canterbury would ride....* (pp. 2-3)

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

### **Cast of Archetypes-Pilgrims**

I can envision each one as an individual, linked to each other. They stand holding hands, living together. They don't always get along, but they must in order to survive. To represent this interdependence, the first letters of their names spell out mine, DAVE CULKIN.

**DEIDRE**—a Celtic noble woman. She represents my predominantly Irish heritage which could be linked to Celtic leaders regarded for their wisdom. She also represents the “D” in my first name, which is the name of my grandfather. Had I been born a girl, my name would have been Deidre (Brother, phone conversation and e-mail, August 1, 2016).

**ARON**—an Ashkenazi Jewish merchant fresh from trading along the Silk Road.<sup>14</sup> He represents my Jewish heritage, the second largest component of my ancestry. My ancestors may very well have traversed Europe and Asia along the Spice Route. The name is also the root of my

---

<sup>14</sup> Recent DNA testing through Ancestry.com indicates my Jewish heritage is indeed from eastern Europe and Asia in areas touched by the Silk Route. Additionally, most of my heritage hails from Ireland.

grandfather's ethnic surname, Aronberg. I am proud of my Jewish heritage, but I know very little about it and would like to know more.

**VINCE**—a very quiet scholar/monk from northern Italy. This archetype represents my passion for contemplation and study, two attributes of professed Carmelites. As a Lay Carmelite, I resonate with a charisma of contemplation and prayer in solitude. I also enjoy studying. As an introvert, I can also find it hard to express my voice.

**(H)ERB**—a peculiar narcissist hailing from all places with his hands seemingly in everything; yes, the H is silent. He is notorious and unwelcome; yet, he has a major role in my identity development over time.

**COLLEEN**<sup>15</sup>—a strong, young widow seeking closure. She represents the resilience of a friend whose husband committed suicide. She also represents the impact of strong female characters in my life—mother, aunts, role models—who have taught me the value of perseverance.

**UNGER**—a young man from Sweden. He represents the Scandinavian ancestry of my wife and my respect for her family's background. In this context, he indicates the value I place on the relationship with my care giver.

**LAURA**—a peasant woman from Odessa. She represents the feminine aspect of my Jewish heritage. My ancestors may have emigrated from this area of Eastern Europe, known for hosting one of the first pogroms in the modern era.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Letter and Reviews regarding steps the researcher has taken to protect the privacy of the person upon whom a part of this archetype is based.



**KEVIN**—a Celtic nobleman, brother to Deidre. He represents another aspect of my Celtic heritage. His Gaelic name also indicates my Gaelic surname and that I now study Irish to learn more about my roots.

**INGRID**—a middle-aged nurse from Germany. Saint Edith Stein, one of my role models, hailed from Germany and served as a nurse during World War One.

**NARA**—a young librarian from Persia. The name is an acronym for the National Archives and Records Administration, for whom I would not mind working one day. Additionally, Persia represents my short military deployment to Afghanistan as well as respect for a linguistic culture rich in poetic expression and mysticism, both of which play major roles in my spiritual development.

### **Possible Selves and Archetypes**

Autoethnographers, and adult education researchers in particular, frequently use metaphors as tools of inquiry. They use metaphoric language to not only represent data but also to discover multi-dimensional “meanings and implications in...personal and professional identity” (Pourreau, 2014, p. 1) as adult learners situated in unique socio-cultural contexts (Brookfield, 2005; Cahnmann, 2003; Lander, 2000; Mezirow, 1997). Arts-based inquiry—particularly through narratives, poetry, and images—can help frame reflexive dialogue that leads to a deeper understanding of the multiple layers within unique educational and socio-cultural contexts, particularly pertaining to ethnicity and social identity (Cutcher, 2015; MacDonnell & Macdonald, 2012). Using journey as a metaphor is not new to educational studies and can be a powerful tool for interpreting lived experiences (Boylorn, 2009; Tillotson, 2012). Anzaldua (2015) presents a theory of writing as a means of healing through deconstructing and

reconstructing facets of human experience using a fateful Aztec mythical character as a metaphor for destruction and regeneration of humanity:

Coyolxauhqui<sup>16</sup> is your symbol for both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering. (p. 124)

Ultimately, narratological techniques such as metaphor-laden storytelling can help educators to express the principles of critical theory in a simple manner without diluting its meaning (Brookfield, 2005). Jeppsson, Haglund, Amin, and Strömdahl (2013) examine the value of conceptual metaphors to understanding complex problems in educational discourse throughout lived experiences via narratives. Few subjects are more complex than multi-faceted personalities.

The concept of possible selves is a metaphorical device that permits the examination of human personality in its own context.

The malleability of possible selves provides an effective pathway for disengaging from goals that may no longer be relevant and the ability to renew focus more exclusively on areas of life important for completion of one's life identity and story. (Bolkan, Hooker, & Coehlo, 2015, p. 43)

Setting personal goals "(such as developing possible selves) can optimize a person's ability to cope with many life transitions" (Bolkan et al., 2015, p. 45) over a life span such as death, sickness, and pilgrimage. Women "have choices about whether to change aspects of their identity" (Flannery, 2000, p. 54) which presupposes a nonessentialist perspective to identity development and which sets the etiology of possible selves. In other words, possible selves are a

---

<sup>16</sup> An Aztec deity dismembered for trying to kill her parent

feasible unit of analysis when examining personal identity development (i.e., series of transitions) over a life span through narratives.

### **Personal Stories**

Personal stories become "the map of our experience" (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 139). Their temporal and interactive nature complements the three-dimensional space of contemporary narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Cortazzi, 1993). Autoethnography provides a researcher-participant with a forum in which to explore the intersection of multiple layers of life experiences (i.e., mental illness, spirituality, grief) through introspection while possibly giving voice to the once silent (Boylorn, 2009; Ronai, 1996). Bhattacharya (2007/2015, in press) describes how personal narratives can effectively facilitate a deeper understanding of issues in adult education pertaining to de/colonizing, transnational identities, and vulnerability in higher education. Personal narratives can lead to transformation through meaning constructed through the sharing of those stories (Thomson, 2011). Chang (2013) describes the personal process, methods, and products of autoethnography. She confirms that autoethnographers often start with a reflection on their experiences or interests, can collaborate with others, and organize chunks of data to facilitate analysis (Chang, 2013). Karpiak (2010) has found that researching the personal stories of her adult students "as narratives of discovery" (p. 14) has provided them and her with a particularly keen insight in and emergent patterns of their learning and development over a life course. By writing "themselves into knowing" (Karpiak, 2010, p. 21), adult learners can better understand their experienced life events and their own agency in identity development. Put another way, autoethnographic writing is a form of discovery through an intense reflection upon lived experiences.

This call to reflection corroborates the methodology of using an individual approach that focuses on personal journals and the researcher-participant's grandfather's autobiography as primary sources and then grouping found data into synthesized personal stories of challenge or transition. Chang (2013) notes that autoethnography's purpose extends beyond "personal stories" to "expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences" (p. 108). In a sense, scholarly personal narratives are autobiographical narrative inquiries grounded in theory to better interpret and understand phenomena; their reflective power can highlight the value to social science research, and to adult learning and teaching in particular (Brookfield, 2013; Nash 2004; Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Taylor, 2009). For example, the personal stories of dealing with mental illness reflects a unique perspective on a counter-cultural narrative of mental health care access and status in contemporary American society. Personal narratives can facilitate learning by facilitating the linkage between personal experiences, learning objectives, and identity development theory (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; O'Neill, 2009).

Narratives can logically link critical nodes in conceptual frameworks, thereby promoting understanding and—more importantly—implementation of actions with long-term effects (Culkin, 2013a). In this way, these narratives "become vehicles for social critiques through which readers gain understandings of autoethnographers' social realities and of the social forces contextualizing their experiences" (Chang, 2013, p. 109). As for the writing style, the researcher-participant chose "confessional-emotive" (Chang, 2013, pp. 118-119) for the integrated story because it best enables him to represent personal data in a relational way. In this autoethnographic study, the use of personal narratives and an intersectional story to link key concepts aligns with Reissman's (2002) "analysis of narratives as performance" (Bhattacharya, 2007, p. 174).

### **Deidre's Tale: Airborne School!**

“It’s funny how past events resurface sometimes...” (Culkin, *Journal 4*) I begin an entry for October 27, 1994. One such event happened while I was a student at Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in the summer of 1991. This is a story of transition and persevering through mental strife accompanied by the fear of failure.

My last of five required jumps from airworthy planes occurred on a windy afternoon. The jumpmaster called us to stand up and shuffle toward the open door. We were about 2,000 feet up, but it could have been two feet and I would have been just as scared. I had graduated from West Point about two months before, and this was one of my first experiences with the real Army. As the jumpmaster held out the tether rope for me to grab, I must have momentarily lost focus while he looked away for a split second. The next thing I knew was “the rope was across the front of my neck” (*Journal 4*, October 27, 1994) which, unbeknown to me, would have strangled me as I jumped out. A sergeant held me back to untangle me before someone kicked me out of the plane. At graduation the next day, the school commander awarded the sergeant a medal for his actions and anonymously singled me out in his speech as a student who had not heeded safety instructions. Years later, I talked to a classmate who verified that I had not let him down, but the sting of regret was still present.

I have learned two things from this experience. First, I can persevere in a career over a long period of time. In other words, one bad day does not make a career. Second, humor can facilitate healing and change perspectives. Now, when my wife and I hand something to each other and one fumbles it, we cry, “Airborne School!” with a smile. As I wrote in closing this journal entry, “Life is about—in one aspect—faith and survival” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, October 27, 1994). As I concluded the following year after some reflection and rumination, I realized that

true value comes from above and within. “For the true measure of my aptitude, worth, dedication is inside—in the eyes of God, not my boss. All may not be seen by man, but all will be comprehended by God” (*Journal 4*, March 3, 1995). Over the years, this critical lesson—that I control my attitude and how I respond to failure and perceived regrets—has been reinforced (*Journal 4*, March 27, 1995 & April 22, 1996).

As I matured in my career, my attitude has grown more confident and positive. Rather than be fueled by anger, I decided to be motivated by love. Some may have seen this as a vulnerability, because some classmates have commented: “...needs to let others help him as much as he helps others, this guy is so nice no one will do anything for him (may be taken advantage of), may make decisions too quickly” (*Journal 4*, March 22, 1996). In short, I have chosen to love despite others’ opinions which have sometimes led to rash judgments.

In conclusion, Airborne School trained me to be a better person across several levels and layers. I became qualified to jump out of airplanes with a parachute; but, more importantly, I eventually learned not to worry so much about what others may think of me. They cannot judge me until they have experienced what I have, and I must do likewise. Additionally, I have learned more about my preference to be self-paced. There is “an elemental part of my psyche and character that resists other people’s ‘momentum of crisis’” (*Journal 4*, April 17, 1997). Call it passive-aggressiveness, but I have more peace now than when I was that young lieutenant at Fort Benning.

### **Digging Deeper**

It is up to each adult learner to define himself/herself and his/her educational goals with an open mind, heart, and soul. To develop as self-authored citizens in contemporary society, adult learners need to create their own meaning and "an evolving sense of identity and eventually

the capacity to create an internal sense of self that considers one's social identities (intrapersonal capacities), and an evolving willingness to refrain from judgment when interacting with diverse others" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 868; see also Kegan, 1982). In other words, the researcher-participant had to focus on who he could be in order to determine how he could become that person.

This reflection on the linkage of self-concept to adult learning can be expressed poetically.

If I am a pilgrim,  
why am I known  
to all but myself?  
Can I be certain I will  
become whom my father wishes,  
when I don't know the path?

Perhaps I should listen to my guides;  
silence stings, but it also forces me  
to listen through the mask,  
humbling even the deepest pride.

Write, they say, so  
you will know yourself.  
So I write to understand;  
perhaps to cope  
with grieving my loss,  
with my mental doubts & fears,  
with my spiritual waywardness.

Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?

The concept of possible selves presents another perspective on such experiential learning. Writing personal narratives of potential identities can influence one's thoughts, decisions, and behavior over time. These conceptual foundations inform lived experiences and therefore one's "relationships, teaching, and ways of being" (Sameshima, 2007, p. 11). By introspectively writing about an incident that occurred decades ago, the researcher-participant has learned not to

view himself as a publicly humiliated officer but as a young man who, by openly embracing that experience with narrative aids, has learned to develop into a more self-possessed person.

### **Aron's Tale: Marrying my Best Friend**

I married my soulmate almost twenty years ago. This is a story of transition into married partnership with the inherent challenges that overlap my professional and spiritual lives.

The seed of this love has continued to grow since I first met her at a college football game. “With her I feel selfless love, patience, a desire to nurture, and hope for the future” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, March 20, 1995). As I approached the sacrament of matrimony, I experienced normal levels of anxiety coupled with abnormal levels of self-doubt spurred by my bio-chemical imbalance. I asked for God’s help for stability: “Thank you Lord, thanks for keeping me positive and able to conquer negative and doubting thoughts” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, March 27, 1995). Over the years, my wife has taught me how to mature in love, constructively discard unrequited love, trust that I’m normal, and enjoy life (*Journal 4*, April 26, 1996 & December 28, 1999).

This wisdom of my wife, I have come to realize, springs from God. As early as 1996, I have written about “the possibility that God may perhaps help guide me through her” (*Journal 4*, July 14). This wisdom demonstrates the transcendence of true love. I love my wife most of all on earth because “she loves me just as much as I love her” (*Journal 4*, July 12, 1998) and I have a sense of peace when in her presence (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*, October 25, 1993). Through deployments and other absences, we have found that our love has crystalized through the crucible of adjusted expectations, her “mental duress on my behalf, and loneliness” (Culkin, *Journal 5*, December 29, 2005). In other words, communication—particularly during tough



times—has been a key to our resilience as a couple. I wrote a poem about this topic that includes this stanza:

Unmasked expression is our souls' currency.  
Whether our bodies convey  
priorities otherwise hidden, fears,  
emotions, hopes, anticipations, desires, and agendae;  
the souls' primal expressions provide  
checkboards for feedback and context for  
the unexplainable.... (Culkin, *Journal 5*, December 2005)

In this context, feeling comfortable with my wife has garnered trust, thereby allowing me to open my invisible wounds to her. In this sense, our lines of communication have been therapeutic.

Early in our relationship and before my diagnosis, I wrote her:

Thank you for being my most trusting and best friend. Thanks for all the times you let me cry on your shoulder, voice my concerns and anxieties, and just be with you.... You've been so patient and honest with me.... it has allowed me to love you deeper (and depend on you more), despite my shortcomings. (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*, March 20, 1995)

So, acceptance of my invisible wounds endeared me even more to my future wife.

Indeed, the doubting disease has always lurked around the corners of milestones in my life. The most important things my wife and best friend has taught me are the importance of praying together, listening to her, living in the present with a positive attitude, and not taking her for granted (*Journal 4*, February 27, 1995, March 22, 1996, September 6, 1997, May 2/15, 1998, September 1998, July 10, 1998, & December 29, 2000; *Journal 7*, February 2006). They remain the benchmarks to measure how far I have fallen when I fail her. At the same time, I have learned how she has helped me through my struggles with anxiety. Before we married in 1995, I wrote to her, "In many ways, you're like a prayer answered. I have been praying for years to meet someone my age who cares about me as much as I care about her/him" (*Journal 16*, August

circa 1993). At that time, neither of us understood the implications of an OCD-infused relationship. This sense of a spiritual bond with a friend has become a critical element in our marriage (*Journal 16*, September 15, 1993).

A key lesson I have learned from our marriage is to never take each other for granted. We are different people with different thoughts, personalities, and perspectives. For example, I once assumed she cleaned the bathroom when it was my turn because I had let her down. I couldn't fathom she might have been bored or even pushed away by my compulsive study habits (Culkin, *Journal 7*, February 2006). Yet, we love each other dearly, and we need to remember that by celebrating our differences. While we complement each other, we must not forget to be grateful for each other—every day (Culkin, *Journal 7*, February 2006 & June 2007).

### **Digging Deeper**

Marriage is a major life event in this bildungsroman because of its timing and effect on the relationship. Hogan (1978) describes how socially accepted roles and timelines impact personal life-event expectations:

...the passage of an American boy from adolescence to adulthood occurs optimally in a socially prescribed fashion when he first finishes his formal schooling, next becomes financially independent through employment at a full-time job, and finally forms a family of procreation by marriage. (p. 574)

While his wife was younger than the researcher-participant at the time of the wedding, the timing of the life event benefited both (see Schlossberg, 2011; Smith & Taylor, 2010). For the researcher-participant, his wife has served as the archetypal anchor for his character development as they have *both* coped with his mental illness and the deaths of his parents over the course of the 20-plus-year marriage. The mature friendship that has developed between the researcher and

his wife/care giver has promoted his identity development despite the timing of negative life events, resulting in a healthy approach to self-assessment over time (Neugarten, 1969). At the same time, the trusting relationship developed between the researcher-participant and his spouse has enabled a context for collaborative development and meaning making “which may very well be the fundamental context of personality development” (Kegan, 1982, p. 264). In a sense, the matured relationship between the researcher-participant and his wife, despite some negative selves of the participant, has provided a holding environment in which both have allowed themselves to learn informally about OCD, themselves, and their relationship while developing into unique, self-authored individuals (Kegan, 1994).

### **Vince’s Tale: Adjusting to a New Job and Role**

After years of teaching mid-career officers in the military, I transitioned into a post-retirement job as an online instructor. This reflects trends in my life.

When my wife and I had decided when I would retire from the army, I didn’t realize how much of a mental shift would be required for me to think, act, and talk like a civilian. To spur this transition, I purposefully placed myself in unordinary—for me—circumstances. For example, I traveled to local historic sites and even hiked part of the Appalachian Trail near its midpoint in the vicinity of historic Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia (Culkin, *Journal 13*). In a reflective moment during this trek, I constructed a concept map linking my need to smile more with improved family life, a more positive outlook, and developed holiness (Culkin, *Journal 13*). In this new environment, I was able to ponder the key tenets of happiness. I concluded:

The more I grow in life, the more I realize choices are what define us. The choices we make and stand by outline our morals, consequences, battles, and legacy. It’s not the great works of art, literature, position, or fame; rather, it is our life direction from

sometimes the earliest years.... Life is complex, but the choices are simple. I hope I have honored the war dead—on both sides—today at Antietam with my service. (Culkin, *Journal 13*, January 17, 2013)

During transitions like instructorship or other demanding jobs, I've tended to fear failing and to be negative about my capabilities. This negativity has sometimes made me desire quitting the Army. Regardless of my job, I have consistently questioned my own vocation, family role, and occupation (Culkin, *Journal 4*, February 25, 1994). This is especially when I change jobs. I have observed not liking that transitory aspect of military life early on: "There a[re] times when I don't feel competent enough, forthright enough, or experienced to be promoted or even get 'the tough jobs.' Should I ever get out [of the Army] for these reasons?" (Culkin, *Journal 4*, October 1994).

During transition periods, I have found that I have to learn new vocabulary, new grammar, and different expectations. When a new instructor, I was naïve to think it would be straightforward to teach the same curriculum I had studied as a student only a few years prior. It's the same curriculum. What could be so hard? Besides learning a new culture and terminology of adult education, I had to become trained on the Experiential Learning Model. During this challenging process, exacerbated by my innate apprehension of change and loss of control, I found that journaling and mentorship helped me cope and adapt.

I have found that journaling helps me cope with new environments and to appear conscientious and competent in first impressions during job transitions. This is very apparent in *Journal 10* in which I spend most of the 220 pages recording decisions, new guidance for the curriculum, and meeting notes for my new role as instructor. In an entry for August 11, 2009, I describe myself as "...a professional army officer and husband who has several idiosyncracies"

(*Journal 10*). In the same entry, I list some of my strengths as being: “detailed, spiritual, perceptive, analytical, and strategic thinker.” I then note that my weaknesses link to my mental illness: “stubborn, compulsive, wed to plans, inexperienced, inadequacy.” As early as 1995 (when I was 26), I journaled two lessons learned:

...the importance of keeping your cool when things go to hell, particularly if people’s [sic] lives count upon your decisions. I have found I can get calmer—w/ metabolism also slowing down—to survive hostile environments and crisis situations. Second, staying alert can save your life. Thinking about possible, upcoming problems or situations can prepare you for coping with problem situations [when they occur]. Oh, well, time to continue to be upbeat and not take things personally. (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*, August 12, 1995, underline in original)

In other words, dealing with my internal struggles—even before my diagnosis—taught me a lot how to handle serious external challenges in my professional life experiences.

As an instructor, I have kept a running log of best pedagogical practices. These include recommendations for internet search engines, how to make announcements on learning management systems, student integration techniques, and the use of online blogs and journals to get in-class feedback from students. Two key concepts I try to employ is keeping it simple and focusing on the users’—i.e., the students’—learning needs. Online learning sites should present information in a way “...the user needs, not what the designer wants” (Culkin, *Journal 6*, September 6, 2006). Even as a seasoned officer in Afghanistan, I found that journaling decisions, philosophies, assumptions, and organizational contacts helped me to transition into new roles or positions (Culkin, *Journal 14*). In other words, there’s always room to grow.

So, what is the nature of my transition experiences? They seem to center on my roles and responsibilities. For instance, when transitioning from a staff officer to instructor in 2009, I finally had a job to which I had aspired—but a mental shift was needed. First, I had to realize that my job was now to broaden young mid-career officers' thinking beyond their experience, no matter how diverse it is. I concluded long ago that if “we will to accept new thinking...we will be that much more open-minded, regardless of discipline” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, January 15, 2004). I have consistently reminded myself to be open-minded and be true to myself during job transitions (*Journal 4*, July 19, 1996). “By identifying the decisive points and being able to at least influence the thinking of decision makers, planners can make their mark” (Culkin, *Journal 10*, March 26, 2011). By more effectively transitioning, I have learned to have more empathy.

I have especially grown in empathy for my students. I have realized that getting them involved on their own terms is critical. What they have to share is just as important—if not more so—than your agenda. In *Journal 2*, I remind myself to curb my temper and impatience in pedagogy (December 16, 2003). This empathy then allows me to share what I know with confidence that the students will actively engage with that knowledge. Tools such as collaborative learning techniques, shared databases, and video casting can exploit the unique characteristics of information technology for achieving educational outcomes in online programs.

By capturing and sharing lessons learned, I have become a better facilitator for adult learning. I'm still learning, and tools such as a running instructional log help me to learn how to develop these skills. As a result of this continuous process, I regularly try to employ innovative integration and pedagogical techniques. For example, I invited recently graduated students to talk to my next cohort to spell out expectations, time commitments, and prioritization. The new

students certainly found the graduates to have more credibility than I. “In the long run, we gain only the knowledge we desire. Education is a willful choice” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, April 27, 2004). Much of this learning has been informal but nonetheless effective.

An example of this informal learning during transition occurred during the midpoint of my military career. I debated leaving a job I did not love to pursue opportunities I dreamed existed. They didn't. I went through the head hunter process in an environment in which being almost 30 was old. By persevering in this process, I learned I could stay in a job I did not love but retire from it as early as I could to pursue something I loved. The fear of failure and doubting my ability to cope with it was constant. In a card I wrote to my wife early in our marriage, I tried to hide from the ever-present fear of failure: “Thinking about careers. Maybe getting out after company command to pursue a more satisfying career (where fear of past and future failure isn't so acute), like education admin. or teaching, may be in line...” (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*, April 24, 1995). Put another way, even thinking about transitions—whether they occur or not—can be stressful.

There has been perhaps no more serious life transition for me recently than retiring in February 2013 from the military service after 25 years in uniform. Becoming a civilian has entailed both physical and cognitive transformations that, two years later, are still taking place. Journal entries indicate my plans to coordinate my retirement ceremony, a civilian dress wardrobe, my section hike on the Appalachian Trail, a new civilian job, and continued medical care through the Veteran's Health Administration and insurance (Culkin, *Journal 12*).

### **Digging Deeper**

Possible selves provide adult learners with a means to protect their self-concepts while persevering during transitions to new social environments (Cross & Markus, 1991; Emerald &

Carpenter, 2014). This linkage of self-concept to successfully—and not necessarily painlessly—coping with life transitions (which are life events involving discrete changes over time) is critical to identity development over a life course (George, 1993; Schlossberg, 2011). By narratively arranging and reflecting upon these episodes of change, the researcher-participant can make sense of them and become motivated for future change (Hallqvist & Hyden, 2013). In this sense, personal stories provide an effective means whereby one may learn and actively develop one's identity through change over time (Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Tisdell, 2003).

In Vince's Tale, work transitions have entailed the researcher-participant informally learning how to cope not only with current challenges but also to cage his mindset for future transitions. Journaling about some of these transitions has enabled him to see patterns—e.g., he prefers stability over transition and is impatient with new environments—that inform his decision making during future transitions.

### **(H)erb's Tale: A Professional with Mental Illness**

My name is Erb—the H is silent. I have been mentally ill with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) since I was at least a teenager, but I did not know it until I was married. This is a story of pervasive challenge over a long period of time. The disorder overlaps all facets of my life and, because there is no cure, will be with me for the rest of my life. This story outlines the nature and context of the illness, its effect on my life and the need to seek help, diagnosis and relief, ongoing treatment, and reflections and how it has changed my life.

#### **Nature and Context**

For as long as I can remember, I've had uncommanded thoughts that have caused me great concern and anxiety. These thoughts have included violent impulses, sexual obsessions, or scrupulosity (religious in nature). For example, as early as May 17, 1998, I prayed for relief from



“selfishness, crazy thoughts, compulsive prayers” (*Journal 4*). The thoughts have been mostly repetitive and tied to base emotions. The stronger a thought was linked to an emotion, the harder it seemed to dispel it. This “cycling” became so rampant that it affected all facets of my life, eventually harming our marriage.

“You’re such an ass,” my wife will often direct her frustrations at me when I cycle. I really cannot argue with her because she’s right. I don’t want to think these thoughts or feel this way.

The insidious nature of OCD is that because it can invade any aspect of my life at any time, I cannot run away from it. Because of this, I began to wonder if my disorder was a character flaw, a fundamentally evil part of my true identity. As recent as May 19, 2010, I journaled that “I often fear what I could become, but I should focus more on who I am” (Culkin, *Journal 5*). Over the past decade, some of my symptoms have at times intensified. “As I age, I have become less tolerant of routine change and that—with changes in jobs and weekend routines—I need to be aware of this tendency” (Culkin, *Journal 6*, March 23, 2007). For example, when I travel in new places, especially on work trips without my supportive wife, I can be “moody with colleagues, revealing an underlying impatience with them and situations that do not flow as I intend” (Culkin, *Journal 13*, July 23, 2014). It was only later that my wife made me realize that I worry about thinking about things that sociopaths have no second thoughts in actually carrying out. In this sense, mental illness has provided me a unique and keen insight into my nature and character.

The biochemical origin of the mental disorder has cognitive and physical manifestations. In my case, neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, fail to smoothly bridge the gap between synapses, resulting in obsessive thoughts and ruminations, particularly of any topic I would

rather not consider. This is what makes the disorder insidious and disruptive. How would you like to perseverate on the same distasteful idea until you question your own reality? I concoct compulsions like briefing my wife and writing lists to relieve the resultant anxiety—but they are merely temporary. I know I'm deluding myself. I say so in this poem about the biochemical source of the disorder and its ramifications.

Synapse: What if?

Move! Cross the bridge,  
over the synapse.....come back!  
My neurons.....stick.  
Not enough serotonin, perhaps.

Move on! Cross the bridge,  
away from obsessions!  
My compulsions...hold me back.  
Not enough certainty in my world.

Release my mind from  
Captivity! I'm dejected  
as I question my goodness  
when I think, "What if I  
jumped off this cliff,  
hurt my wife,  
judged a minority,  
am a pervert?  
What if?! What if!  
What if it crossed the bridge?

### **Effect on my Life and Need for Help**

OCD has deeply affected my relationships in both my personal and professional lives. I have responded to my obsessive thoughts with compulsions (i.e., rituals) that have disrespected my wife: e.g., requiring her to stand still while I daily briefed her the inane details of my work experiences from an insanely long list with equally small handwriting. OCD has further negatively affected my married relationship, resulting in prideful, narcissistic behavior and motivations. My wife once challenged me to justify why she should remain married to me. She

made me realize that my pride is an obstacle to my development as a better person. This pride “...often incurs anger when I at least perceive I have let her down: didn’t follow through on a choir [sic, chore], was late in picking her up, or didn’t do what I said I would. This leads—with an egocentric hyper-sensitivity—to heightened frustration really with myself. The problem is that I have developed a habit of choosing to blame or take out my anger on my loved one...” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, November 23, 2003). I would even be unaware of how I treat her as an inconvenience, taking “my time with her for granted” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, January 14, 2007; *Journal 5*, June 5, 2010). Didn’t I learn to appreciate her more when I was deployed? Have I not learned to listen to her feelings? I am grateful that she has learned to be open with me and not facilitate my compulsions all the time. I conclude *Journal 2* with these words: “Sometimes, tough love is the most edifying” (January 14, 2007). Indeed, for me, love is the glue that integrates faith (spiritual), material (physical), and intellectual development over the lifespan. In public, I have often been hypersensitive to “what others think of me”—real or perceived (Culkin, *Journal 5*, June 3, 2010; *Journal 6*, August 17, 2005).

Over the decades, I have realized that I have often distrusted my caregiver and loved one. I called her names when she accidentally knocked me, spilling my water. I became frustrated because I felt I couldn’t express my issues or concerns because my exposure-response therapy advises that I remove myself rather than confront the issue (Culkin, *Journal 2*, November 9, 2004). My journal reveals that I was often unaware of my criticisms of my wife (Culkin, *Journal 2*, January 2, 2005). In a sense, I have feared giving up power, especially around vulnerable people (*Journal 4*, April 5, 1995). As an example, I even wanted to control the rate at which my young wife got to know every detail of my life by drafting a certificate after four years of marriage in which I declared I had told her everything there is to know about me: “For Lifetime

Achievement in Getting to know her husband, David Thomas, (with nothing to hide) after nearly four married years..." (Culkin, *Journal 1*, March 6, 1999).

OCD had an impact on my professional life too. The disorder disqualified me from aviation status, although it actually made me a better pilot by making me more detail-oriented. Checklists were my friends. I felt I had to brief my wife on everything I did at work, was a slave to a detailed schedule, and had a deep-seeded fear of regrets. I forgot that while I have frequently gotten frustrated at others, I must remember that "human relationships are more important than task completion" (Culkin, *Journal 5*, June 15, 2010). My self-pride has often made me fear failing in front of others and has allowed me to see myself as a victim (Culkin, *Journals 3 & 4*). These feelings were most prevalent during transition times of my life (Culkin, *Journal 4*).

### **Diagnosis and Relief**

Life with mental illness is like living with a mask of self-deception. When a psychologist finally diagnosed me by 2001, it was a relief to realize "I am not alone" in my struggles with obsessions and compulsions. "Many sufferers continue to live in cloaked realities, admitting neither to themselves nor society their honest thoughts" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, March 25, 2004). Finally, I could confront a monster that had lain hidden in the shadows of my life. I started to read about the disease. Baer's *The Imp of the Mind* (2001) reminds me that "unwanted, perverse, intrusive thoughts" don't reflect my true character (Culkin, *Journal 2*, June 14, 2004). This study also reminds me of the stigma still attached to seeking mental guidance.

A psychiatrist first suggested to me in July 1995 that my uncommanded thoughts may indicate a mental disorder. He reminded me that my Airborne School incident—from four years prior—did not need to equate with my entire career (Culkin, *Journal 4*, July 18). I had to realize that it's a part of me. As I wrote on October 3, 1995, realizing that "good people can have bad

thoughts” was a singular revelation made possible by my wife (*Journal 4*). This means that I am not judged based upon my thoughts but rather the resultant actions. This realization, matched later with counseling, gave me the confidence I needed to manage my illness for the rest of my life.

### **Treatment—Lifelong and Continuous**

My wife has also shown me how I can gain self-confidence as a competent professional, despite the challenges. “For me, addictive thinking—or exposure to it during my adolescence—in my personal and professional life has resulted in a lack of confidence in my own capabilities” (Culkin, *Journal 6*, August 14, 2005). For me, part of the healing process has involved convincing myself that I am not a bad person or should be regretful for my illness which exploits self-deception (Culkin, *Journal 6*).

A big part of the healing has involved humor. My wife and I label the disease with a pet name and find solace in popular films such as *What About Bob* and *As Good as it Gets*<sup>17</sup> that address anxiety disorders in a normalizing way. “Both humor and open-mindedness are critical to a flexible and positive outlook on life” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, November 5, 2003).

The journey continues as my wife and I learn to better adapt to change and mask our challenges to the outside world. Besides a daily regimen for medications, I have found that poetry can solidify and help me integrate lessons learned in daily actions: “Some self-talk when I get flustered about meetings, people who don’t listen, and unfair egotism: Let it roll off your back,/Or you’ll get a panic attack./So pick your fights./There’s no need to be uptight” (Culkin,

---

<sup>17</sup> *What About Bob* (1991) and *As Good as it Gets* (1997) were comedies addressing the struggles of people who suffer from anxiety disorders.

*Journal 2*, February 9, 2004). So, over time, I have learned to cope better with a disorder that will accompany me to death.

### **How It Has Changed my Life**

Mental illness has not defined my life, but I have defined my life largely by how I have responded to it. I have reflected that I can own the disease by realizing that I'm not perfect. That's not an excuse, but it does mean that I'm not an inherently bad person either. My wife and I occasionally have hit road bumps, such as the military-contracted counselor who placed us into the marital problems category in her notes and our medical records when we were only seeking continued care—a check-up of sorts—to ensure my medication dosages were calibrated. So, sometimes our efforts to improve our relationship as a family may be hard for others to classify, but we have gotten stronger nonetheless. Over time, I have realized that I need to work on listening skills due to a “tendency of mine to jump to conclusions and/or misperceive before all the facts are in” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, September 8, 2003). In short, living with mental illness has made me a better person, the person God meant me to be.

I can understand this disease and combat it face on to develop my true self. In *OCD Treatment Through Storytelling*, Weg (2011) affirms the power of stories to help the healing/coping process. That said, writing about the disease and thinking about writing can facilitate a constructive response (Culkin, *Journal 14*). I developed Family Ground Rules in an attempt to glean lessons learned from various sources. One stands out for its honesty: “Recognize that it's not always about you” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, November 10, 2003). During this diagnosis period, I survived by learning about my disease. I studied critical thinking in a methodical manner commensurate with my proclivity to routine, detail, and rumination. I concluded that while life itself is fundamentally simple, it's the choices we make and are

accountability for them that matters: "...those choices all have secondary and perhaps higher-order effects which may impact not only me but others as well. It is therefore important to think about the collateral consequences before making particularly significant decisions. They're 'significant' for a reason" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, December 1, 2003). So, I concluded that "Critical thinking is the key to actively conducting rational thought, becoming more self-aware, and eventually becoming less egocentric" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, December 1, 2003).

To glean these lessons learned for future use, I have found that journaling is an effective and therapeutic tool. Journaling can enhance development for empathy, gaining a sense of control, and critical thinking: "Maintain a journal to improve thinking, sustain contact with your emotions, earn empathy for others..., and enhance my soul" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, August 2 & 31, 2003). Put another way, writing helps enhance and clarify our thoughts so that we can better cope in our responses to life events. "In recent years, coupled with treatment for [my mental disorder], I have discovered the value of questioning in that it is a process that molds thought. What power!" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, September 30, 2013). In 1989, before my diagnosis, I realized the importance of seeking professional help:

No one should ever be ashamed of seeking/needing help. It is just as important that we as human beings not ignore the desperate cries of those who deserve attention.

We all deserve others to listen to us. It is obviously a two-way street. (underlines in original, Culkin, *Journal 2*, April 29)

By 2005, I had reached a degree of acceptance: "I accept that I still have [a mental disorder] and that the obsessions and compulsions I have are very real..." (Culkin, *Journal 6*, October 8).

Despite the vagaries of military life during economic downturns, I grew. I noticed some benefits of having found professional help:

I have grown spiritually closer to myself and my best friend [my wife] the past few years. My treatment has proceeded despite geographic separation, a miscarriage, PCS,<sup>18</sup> and moving. I take great comfort that my wife actually likes me more and that I can openly talk to her about my illness—esp. in front of our counselor. (Culkin, *Journal 6*, October 8, 2005)

A great revelation of mine has been that living with mental illness is up to me. In a 2004 journal entry, I observed, “The moral is solve problems you can and drop those you can’t.... I’m in control of who I am becoming” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, September 6 & 15). The take away logo from my lifelong sentence with mental illness is actually positive and necessarily ties in with my spiritual journey: “It’s OK to let go of your anxieties—past and present—to God. In Him there is hope...” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, October 15 & November 29, 1996). In this context can I learn the value of humility through Christ’s “suffering on our behalf” (Culkin, *Journal 5*, February 28, 2010). In other words, we all suffer, but how we suffer and respond is our choice.

## **Conclusion**

We all have our crosses to bear, and my mental illness (whom I jovially call Herb) reminds me of the strong, good people in my life—including my wife—who handle their own unique challenges. Therefore, we cannot judge them (Culkin, *Journal 2*). I ultimately realized that “God will help us, often despite ourselves, if we want it—truly, not desirously” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, January 13, 2006). My heaviest cross has been the fear of regrets. By living with and responding to mental illness, I have learned to deal more effectively with my past. In True

---

<sup>18</sup> PCS means permanent change of station. For military families, this means they must move to change jobs about every three years.



Course (*Journal 1*, 1999), I illustrate the self-dialogue I use to boost my confidence, that all is not lost:

We may see distance markers,  
Welcoming a stay or acceleration,  
But the road will not change.  
We will be the better for it.  
That is Hope....  
For at the terminus of our journey,  
We will look back at the  
Potholes of regrets and see  
Where we picked up and moved on,  
Realizing the God-path was  
Our chosen destiny via the slalom.

This emotional shaking of the fist at regret is a recurring theme in my journals, as I suspect it is in many life journeys.

### **Digging Deeper**

Coping with mental illness of family members—particularly for spouse care givers and siblings—presents opportunities for both learning and development (Lanthier & Campbell, 2011; Penzel, 2000). The learning and development stem largely from living under perhaps the largest and darkest shadow, OCD. If OCD were described as a shadow, it may be imaged as lurking along the pilgrim path:

The shadows—because that is what I can only describe them as—seemed to run from tree to tree and from rock to rock. They didn't seem to care that I could see them, but they knew I was observing them. As I observed them, I couldn't see defined faces, but their forms seemed to respond to my anxiety. This reminded me of Jung (1957/1958) who suggested that an adult must choose to confront his/her own shadows in order to see

him/herself and develop into his/her true self.<sup>19</sup> I don't know. Maybe I was seeing things, but I felt like I was seeing into my past, present, and future selves.

All adults have demons to face, whether wanted to or not, and the demons come in all shapes and sizes. For some people, it's greed. For others it's lust, anger, pride, or laziness. Sometimes it's the trifecta. These demons can create problems when ignored or uncredited for their ability to influence life decisions.

By observing multiple views of the same topic, one can gain a fuller perspective on this demon phenomenon and could apply it to the life course. Each adult learner has to respond to evil in his own way by being honest with fears, doubts, and regrets. In this story, (H)erb describes how the researcher-participant has doubts and uncommanded thoughts all the time. It scares him to think he could carry them out or have a demon in him. That is why he continually asks, "What if?" and "Is this God's way?"

Narrative identity can develop over time and potentially have an impact on mental health, particularly when reflecting upon the emotion-laden, personal stories of challenge and transition (Adler et al., 2015; Dirkx, 2006). "Theories of narrative identity suggest that adults make sense of their lives by constructing and telling stories about their experiences" (Adler et al., 2015, p. 476). In other words, adults can learn deeply about their identities; when they story their experiences about mental illness, they may gain insights into their shadows.

---

<sup>19</sup> This linkage of unmasking to identity development in spiritual and psychological contexts is a key theme in my personal narrative, illustrated by the shadowed narrator/pilgrim, and facilitated by autoethnographic practice (Poulos, 2012).

## Colleen's Tale: Losing My Parents

I became an orphan on May 1, 2013, the day my remaining parent died. This story relates my transition into orphanhood.

My parents died within eight months of each other. Mom died on September 6, 2012, and Dad made my brother and me orphans on May 1, 2013. None of us were particularly close in terms of geography or endearment, but we siblings learned to appreciate our relationship more as a result of this emotionally fragile period.

Mom was a good person with a somewhat abrasive personality. The down side of living with her was the emotional drama and mental prison in which I felt I served an interminable sentence. I even drafted an action plan in *Journal 2* in which I wrote, "When my mother begins to criticize my family and/or me or when [my wife] tells me I'm cycling [i.e., obsessively ruminating on the same negative thoughts], I will physically remove myself from her presence. This will abate pent-up anger." I even mark one aspect of my start of manhood when I stood up to my mother's rudeness to defend my then-girlfriend and future wife. My mother had made me choose between her and my new life: "...when I marry, ... [my wife] will be my family. That's the most important thing" (Culkin, *Journal 4*, November 8, 1994). From this friction, I learned to buffer myself and my family from her while maintaining a relationship. My purpose was to have no regrets if she died at any moment.

The up side was that you normally knew where you stood with Mom, and she lived and died consistently—her way. Looking at my notes from August 27, 2012, about a week before she died, brings back memories of that tumultuous time (Culkin, *Journal 13*). "Drive up there this weekend.... Find Mom's papers.... Dispose of food.... house key in mailbox...." (Culkin, *Journal 13*, August 27, 2012). The notes from just prior to after her death describe matter-of-

factly the last issues I wanted to address while grieving: settling bills, coordinating burial arrangements, settling travel claims (Culkin, *Journal 14*, September, 2012). I eventually learned to treat her in a way that I would have no regrets if she died that day. By calling her once a week on a scheduled basis, I chose to maintain contact with her while maintaining a healthy distance for my family (Culkin, *Journal 11*). I now miss being able to call her. As a young man, I saw her bright gem of character: “I’d like to further show this tremendous human being [Mom] sincere thanks and awe for being herself, for a job [raising 2 boys as a single parent] well-done” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, 1994). In the obituary I wrote for her, I describe her as an innovator in typography and one who had led a full life “on her own terms in a consistent manner” (Culkin, *Journal 14*, September 8, 2012). One thing I wish I could say one more time to my parents is thank you.

Dad was a good soul with an endearing demeanor. Even dogs, around whom he felt uncomfortable, loved to pay attention to him. He attracted a variety of creatures, largely with his demure and humorous—if not understated—approach to life. He took care of himself and swam regularly. Just before I transitioned from the military and just after Mom’s death, I planned to call him on what would be his last birthday, January 27, 2013 (Culkin, *Journal 12*). Little did we know then that he had fewer than four months to live. When he did pass, certain family members made it difficult to execute the estate and trust (Culkin, *Journal 12*). By early 2014, I was working with the legal system to process Dad’s estate to fulfill my promise to him that I would expedite the process (Culkin, *Journal 15*). There were several other legal and ethical challenges I had to confront while trying to grieve for my dear parent. During this period, it felt that I had this weight on my chest, making it hard to breathe while I still had to fulfill these legal obligations that only I could execute. The death of my parents within eight months of each other during my

transition from military life to a civilian job certainly taught me the value of perseverance and patience.

Indeed, dealing with the complex legalities concurrently with the emotional experiences of grieving brought my brother and me closer. We had to reforge a bond that we, as closely knit partners in youth growing up in a difficult household, had developed decades prior. We decided that my older brother would take the lead role in settling our mother's estate, and I would captain the team for dad's estate. We may not always have agreed—e.g., when certain funds would be dispensed—but our co-sensed need to be there for each other superseded any self-centered desire to worry about our shares, property, or liabilities.

By living through the deaths of my parents, I learned a little more about how I cope with adversity. As a planner, I can rely upon my organizational skills to develop mind maps and other visualizations to sketch a way ahead. I developed such sketches for each parent to help organize my own efforts, share the vision with my brother, monitor progress in dissolving the estates, and to anticipate future requirements (Culkin, *Journal 14*). I also learned to give thanks to my parents, especially my mother, by selflessly serving others (Culkin, October 1, 1989). Reflecting upon their lives now that the shock of their deaths has waned allows me to feel closer to them in daily activities they once enjoyed. When I swim, I think of Dad teaching me how to swim well in the ocean; when I cook, I can almost feel Mom's passions prepare the food when cooking a nice gourmet meal for my wife. It's in these moments now that I feel a connection with my parents in a unique way—that somehow my life experiences are linked to theirs. That's why I found the following note from my Dad commemorating my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday poignant: "Welcome to another decade in your wonderful life experience. May the next ten years be one of continued success,

prosperity, peace, and love” (*Journal 16*, August 10, 2009). Reflecting upon dark times can proffer opportunities for growth.

One thing I learned from my parents was to do things on my own terms. My writings from as far as 20 years ago reflect this during periods of transition and doubt: “If I leave the service, I feel obligated to do it on my own terms to suffice the cultural obligation of not being a ‘coward’” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, February 25, 1994). A letter I wrote to my dying uncle in 1996 expresses sentiments I still hope I can express to my parents: “Indeed, I have learned a great deal from you: the wisdom of patience, profit in hard-work, priorities from dedication to the family, and the importance of listening to your loved ones.” My parents died on their own terms and were great gifts to my brother and me.

This experience of orphanhood later led me to reflect upon death from the opposite perspective: as a parent losing a child. This is a poem I wrote after my wife and I had a miscarriage (Culkin, July 13, 2005):

I have lost someone I did not know.  
Whereabouts, Heaven knows. But  
    life’s coaster continues to  
crest the peaks and sink in the valleys.

The dim, grayish vista to the right of the track  
seems deep, precipitous—I wonder how far.  
Not that I will, but that I won’t is certain.  
However, can I continue? When  
will I ascend? Will it get worse?  
What are my limits? I am at the edge.

I have lost someone I didn’t know,  
and he/she allowed me to ask  
these questions at his/her expense.  
That life bartered for my inquiry—  
learning and wonderment.

Can I continue?  
Will I ascend?

Will it get worse?  
What are my limits?

The questions help clarify,  
as long as we remain on the track,  
in spite of ourselves. We keep our  
attitude by looking forward to the  
destination—seen or not.

These are questions posed by  
those whom we do not know  
to all of us,  
learning and wondering who we are.<sup>20</sup>

### **Digging Deeper**

Deaths of loved ones present opportunities for both learning and development, particularly among siblings (Lanthier & Campbell, 2011) and other immediate family members. This story addressed the death of the researcher-participant's parents, but he also has experienced death from the parental perspective described. Living through the deaths of one's parents within a short period of time tended to increase the stress. Stressful life "events [such as the diagnosis of chronic illness or death of a parent], both positive and negative, have the potential to define an individual, shape the future, and influence behavioral strategies chosen to cope with the event" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1788). By the researcher-participant having to choose coping strategies in response to the loss of his parents, he developed skills useful for his life span.

Additionally, the researcher-participant has created possible self images to envision how he would cope. "Examples of health-related possible selves include future images of oneself avoiding disease by staying active, eating more vegetables, or losing excess weight" (Bolkan et

---

<sup>20</sup> Since this experience of losing a child and not having any children since, my wife and I are more aware that our lives and meaning have become our legacy.

al., 2015, p. 44). By extension, the researcher-participant's possible selves have consisted of images of himself coping with his mental illness with active measures, integrating his parents' legacies into his daily life, and achieving a greater sense of peace through spiritual awareness (see also Barner & Barner, 2011).

This personal story of loss and grief addresses the cultural and emotional aspects of adult education. Culturally, the researcher-participant must realize that he is now, beyond his control, a member of a new social group—i.e., orphans—that has particular values and issues. Some of these values and issues consist of isolation, challenges in sharing emotional responses, and questioning one's worth. These issues also address emotional aspects such as sadness, self-doubt, and relief. In this context, this personal story highlights Tisdell's (2003) contention that adult education must be both culturally relevant and spiritually transformative.

### **Unger's Tale: Major Happy**

This is a story of my becoming a confident and innovative adult educator despite challenges inherent to institutional culture. As an army officer without a combat patch during wartime, showing up to teach at a staff college begged the question of my credibility. I think I was the first to ask, "What will students think of my bare shoulder?" My team leader assured me that I had a lot to offer because my joint and planning expertise were duly needed by students who had mostly performed duties at the tactical level as operators. I had doubts that I needed to overcome. In the end, my students seemed to support me more than I had faith in myself. I created MAJ Happy as an archetypal guide, so my mid-career students could more easily relate to the curriculum via a narrative told by someone like them.

MAJ Happy recently graduated from the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC) and has received orders to serve as an assistant operations officer in a division G-3



shop. She hopes this position will allow her to become familiar with the division, establish her reputation as a go-getter, and set her up to get a coveted key-duty (KD) assignment in one of the subordinate battalions.

When she called her boss, Colonel Kidder, to introduce herself, he identified three areas of focus for her new job: learn the boss, understand the command environment, and prepare for the division's deployment to the Georgia-Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey (GAAT) theater of operations later this year as a "multinational force land component for a small contingency operation" (FM 3-94, 2014, p. 6-1).

Let's look at each focus area and examine how each will impact MAJ Happy's happiness. To glean the inter-related meanings, pictographs illustrate a fundamental aspect of each focus area.

### **Learn/Study the Boss**

"You must make it a priority to study how the commander thinks, receives information, and processes it. Only then can you anticipate what he will expect of you and the rest of the staff," advises Colonel Kidder. Furthermore, it's critical to study not only how the boss learns but how (and how well) the organization learns as well.

### **Understand the Command Environment**

To know how to influence an environment and its key players, one must first understand the dynamics of it. For staff officers, this means that there must be a balance between the process used for analysis and the products developed within a mandated timeline. Oftentimes, higher guidance and directives dictate what a staff must do, cannot do, or some combination thereof.

## **Prepare for Division Deployment**

In this environment, MAJ Happy must apply skills learned during the mid-career course in critical / creative thinking to solve complex problems for the commander. Up until now, many field grade officers have only worked in a uni-service environment with little or no experience in working with other military branches or civilian agencies. When an army (G or general) staff transitions into a joint (J) staff for operations, a mental shift at the organizational level is required. Evolving doctrine (e.g., FM 3-94, UJTL, JP 5-0) describes the general concepts involved in the transitions and employment of these headquarters. Reminders such as family preparation and maintaining a life quality balance (i.e., among physical, spiritual, and intellectual) are important.

## **Conclusion**

MAJ Happy is a metaphor that represents the typical mid-career student officer who must return to the field and apply the critical and creative thinking skills and knowledge to help his/her commander. This is a sacred task, and mine is no less sacred: to impart my skills and knowledge to the next generation so that they grow and develop in their own right. By innovatively employing the curricular concepts, the students can construct their own meaning based upon a reflection of their learning experiences from their careers and the course.

## **Digging Deeper**

Unger's Tale is a story of identity development as an adult educator as well as the efficacy of narrative pedagogy. As an instructor without combat experience teaching subordinate officers who had credited time in combat operations, the researcher-participant found himself lacking the confidence to do his educational tasks well—i.e., self-efficacy. The process of removing masks and candidly appraising one's current status as an educator, setting goals to

improve within available means, and then reappraising performance is notably valued in adult learning and development (Artistico et al., 2011; Rogers, 1961). In this environment, the researcher-participant used narrative pedagogy as a tool to uniquely convey meaning and to invite his students to participate in key learning points grounded in both his and their experiences.

Narrative pedagogy, or storytelling, is an interpretivist-phenomenological approach to the facilitation of adult teaching and learning through the collaborative and reflective activities of creating story lines, sharing understanding, and discussing stories of lived experiences (Andrews et al., 2001; Davidson, 2004; Vandermause & Townsend, 2010; Walsh, 2011). In literature and practice, it is a new realm of teaching and learning, particularly in health care studies, that “helps students challenge their assumptions and think through and interpret situations they encounter from multiple perspectives” (Ironside, 2006, p. 478) in time-constrained environments involving complex decision making (Davidson, 2004). In this story, it is the researcher-participant’s empathic response to content-driven conventional pedagogy that did not adequately convey learning outcomes to mid-career students seeking to understand complex topics such as planning and logistics. Empathy plays a large role in narrative learning. “If we accept, as narrative psychologists argue, that personal identity is an unfolding story, then we begin to understand the centrality of stories in our meaning-making and in our emotional connection with other people” (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 98). In other words, adult educators must understand that learners connect their lived experiences with curricular content through narratives.

By restorying the pedagogical experience in his situated context, the researcher-participant can examine and reflect upon the tensions he has experienced—e.g., understanding bosses, new work environments, and the balance of process and product—to make sense of them

in practice (Andrews et al., 2001; Clandinin, 2013). As a result of interpreting and restorying these experiences, the researcher-participant has become more capable of augmenting the self-efficacy of himself as an instructor and of his students as practitioners.

### **Laura's Tale: Toxic Climate—The Presentation Hijacker**

One professional challenge that I faced still haunts me. A senior officer took over a presentation I was giving and then accused me of screwing it up. I still wonder how it all happened and how I could have prevented it. The experience also links to an overall toxic command climate. More importantly, I compulsively ponder the negative thoughts and feelings I perceived aimed at me and if they will ever recede.

The senior officer hijacked my presentation. He had been going through chemotherapy and had even received a previous brief of mine very positively. Whether his cancer had anything to do with his behavior, I will never know. When I briefed him and a senior official during the fall in the late 2000's, he interrupted my brief and discussed a sidebar issue for 10-15 minutes. He then became irritated and blamed me for the slow brief, actually signaling me to hurry up. I responded by skipping some slides and, when directly asked, offered my opinion on a matter. That's when I learned not to express opinions and just do what I'm told. I later tried to offer this matter to God, with little success over the years: "I have to think all these series of events is due to somehow a character flaw in me which causes me to question authority, provide my opinion, and just rub some people the wrong way. I just don't feel like I can win. All I can do is present this all to God and ask for his help, for I do not know what to do" (Culkin, *Journal 8*, November 26, 2007). Rarely have I worked in an environment in which the difference between expectations and my capacity was so great (Culkin, *Journal 8*).

My immediate boss was toxic and unsupportive. It was the first time that I worked in an atmosphere of distrust and antagonism aimed at me. As the only army officer in the office, I felt singled out by the air force colonel director. I had other encounters with senior officers who accused me of being “insubordinate” (Culkin, *Journal 8*, August 30, 2007) or not supportive of their needs. From my perspective, I saw instances in which I felt ethically bound to inform my leaders on doctrine, planning experience, staff integration, and matters of equitable distribution of labor (Culkin, *Journal 8*). They often took this defensively, as a threat to their authority and competence. In another occasion, I found myself so overworked with additional duties and projects—not shared by officemates—that I could have made some administrative mistakes—i.e., mislabeled files, etc. (Culkin, *Journal 8*, November 19, 2007). I found planning, my primary competency, very frustrating in such an environment with “several people telling me what” (Culkin, *Journal 9*, May 27, 2008) to do. Perhaps it is little wonder I asked my immediate boss to officiate my promotion ceremony to avoid his reprisals.

Self-dialogue can be a powerful medicine for getting over past, unseen wounds. I must tell the younger version of myself that I can let go and let God heal my heart and mind. Perhaps a notation inside *Journal 2* says it best: “If I had to repeat today, what would I do differently” (Culkin, 2003, inside front cover)? In other words, let it go; there’s nothing you can do now or then to control the situation. I have found along the way to remember that humility is a key attribute for a planner, that it’s “not about you but the decision maker” you work for (Culkin, *Journal 2*, September 5, 2005).

Perhaps it goes deeper to a core of love. Rather than letting external situations control my attitude and happiness, I have often “tried to convince myself I don’t love myself—when, in fact, I know that’s not true” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, 1994). At other times, I covered my anger with a

mask of military professionalism. In one instance, I was mad at someone else getting credit for my hard work: “I felt sorry for myself and was mad because the commander kept giving [other person] the glory for a lot of the work I and my team had done. Such is life” (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*). I would question my resolution as a commander, as a man, as a husband. I would lament no one would come support me, and I would not publicly complain about it (Culkin & Family, *Journal 16*). I would use the journal and then my wife as a means to re-affirm my self-concept—often to little avail. As a result, I have discovered that these trials have served God’s purpose of purifying my heart with the fire of humility and patience—things my personality lacks. Thank you for healing, God!

Toward the end of my tour, I composed a poem to describe the many experiences that challenged my pride. These excerpted stanzas from the poem “My Mistress” attempt to illustrate a confused anguish, a search for healing, and the drive to move on with life (Culkin, *Journal 10*, June 2011):

Her words nick my inflated pride  
and self-confidence. ‘Never brief me again!’  
She says through her lackey,  
despite blockading my  
presentation with chatter & impatience.

How can I overcome those  
who wear the rank and prestige of their masters?  
Who can tell them, ‘No, you are wrong, and  
we are on the same team?’ ....

I could run away with her,  
and live in darkness,  
isolating myself from my wife and family.

How do I heal from this wounding?  
I say, live in the light of present joys,  
And the ruminations of the past will return to the darkness.

This summarizes the guidance I would today offer my younger self: pick up and move on with the present gifts of life.

### **Digging Deeper**

Autoethnographically storying challenging life events can help promote the healing process by placing them within personal perspectives (McKenzie, 2015; Poulos, 2009). Ellis (2002) observes, "Now I am even more convinced that writing personal narrative and telling stories hold the possibility of healing us personally and collectively" (p. 401). By re-storying an experience of adversity in his own terms, the researcher-participant can reflect upon how confronting a challenging life event has aided in developing his identity and emancipatory voice since that event (Poulos, 2009). In this way, reflecting upon episodic life events can translate into a continuum of development over a life span, not only for the author but for the broader community of learners.

Concurrently, the researcher-participant has realized that traumatic memories encapsulated in the mind of someone with obsessive tendencies regenerates the pain. Re-storying a painful experience *is* painful, and the inability to expunge it over time without erasing the emotional accessories only aggravates that pain. Perhaps, however, it is the act of exposing that pain through narrative that can grant hope for relief (Pourreau, 2014).

### **Kevin's Tale: Pop-pop's Memoir**

This story represents a transition in my life in which I learned more about my own history when I inherited my grandfather's autobiography after my mother's death. By reviewing his autobiography, I cannot help but to see similarities between his writing experiences and my own.

My mother's father died in 1979 when I was nine, but I feel like he has been with me my entire life. It's more than having his first name. For me, Pop-pop, as my brother and I called him,

epitomized our ancestry and heritage. Pop-pop was a self-educated man who spent 65 years in the building business. Along the way, he flew alongside Charles Lindbergh in the Spirit of St. Louis; built the United Nations; built the Julliard School; and worked on projects for BG Leslie Groves, the supervisor of the atomic bomb project. He was also a Jew in a Christian culture, earning his name by his integrity and merit rather than by pedigree.

Pop-pop's parents died early in his life, and he found work in construction to help support his family. A turning point in his life came when he unexpectedly became the "youngest Superintendent of Construction on a multi-million dollar job" in 1910 at age 21 (Aronberg (Appendix A), 1967, p. 29). His education was informal, mostly learning on the job and from voracious reading. He relates some poignant stories of his early blunders. For example, he once admitted to his boss that he had to re-set the keys and cylinders for all doors on the newly finished the Post Office & Court House building in Washington, D.C. The boss replied, "'Well, Davey, this is only one of many mistakes you will make in your future years in this business, but I must admit it's a beauty for a starter!'" (Aronberg (Appendix A), 1967, p. 39). I admire Pop-pop for his ability to balance humor and seriousness in his approach to life.

My grandfather's resourcefulness, self-reliance, and humor fostered his resilience. He's a good role model for me whose demon has involved "getting over past regret [real and imagined] by conquering fear of failure" (Culkin, *Journal 4*, March 29, 1994). In one vignette, he admits how he takes his reputation a bit seriously at times—a trait I've inherited. "So, the salesman's gift to me, and the delivery of these pads before anything else, naturally made me look like a stuffed shirt...instead of the dedicated person, 3 previous camp jobs and 40 years in construction had made me" (Aronberg (Appendix A), 1967, p. 218). Despite the serious moments, he was a consummate prankster and found joy in life.



Despite the trials and challenges that Pop-pop encountered throughout a life that spanned the two world wars, the atomic age, a cold war, emergence of computer technology, and the venturing of man on the moon; he retained his focus on his work and family. “The successful handling of a large construction operation depends entirely on the cooperation and coordinated efforts of the 40 or more sub-contractor specialists on the job” (Aronberg (Appendix A), 1967, p. 203). A key lesson I learned from reading and reflecting upon my grandfather’s autobiography was the similarities with my own autobiographical writing. Both entail a lifelong process of reflection that result in several rewritings and evolutions. I think he would agree with my journal entry in 1992: “Whatever the technique employed, writing is a good activity of which to stay abreast; it organizes our thoughts...and emotions...insights...” (Culkin, *Journal 4*, July 14).

### **My Grandfather**

More recently, I have reflected on a relationship with Pop-pop that continues to grow and mature. I remember very little of him since he died when I was nine in 1979, but the few photos I have of him remind me of the old-person smell, the warmth of his retirement apartment, and the slick plastic cover on his living room ottoman. While my memories of him are primarily sensory, they still influence me today. I still treat all business socials as business—and not social—events according to his pithy wisdom. I recall with pride the numerous public buildings he constructed over a sixty-five year career. Many of these structures still serve the greater good—e.g., Missouri State Capitol, the United Nations Secretariat, and the Julliard School. I furthermore believe that his legacy resides in me. This inheritance includes values, morality, and a Catholic faith nestled among Ashkenazi Jewish roots. I have a responsibility to translate this legacy into future good for others. Now that I am just short of 50, I can reflect on those times he has walked along side

me and know he will be with me for the rest of the journey. Pop-pop will always be my grandfather, and I will always be his grandson.

### Pop-pop's Tribute

Pop-pop, you will always be my grandfather.  
I was 9 when you died—scant memories:  
old-person aromas, war apartment  
soothed emergent rheumatism, and  
that white, plastic-encased ottoman  
on which bro' and I sat.

Your memories still influence me.  
I follow your maxim that  
all business socials are  
business—not social. What  
wisdom you acquired being born  
when horses outnumbered persons  
in Des Moines and witnessing  
world wars and lunar landings?!

You constructed quiet monuments—  
bold testaments to the republic,  
diplomacy, and education. These  
values-laden structures live  
in me, responsible to promote  
The Star of David and The Crucifix  
as prophet and witness.

Short of 50, I reflect how  
you've walked with me in  
events of transition and challenge.  
I know you'll be with me  
the rest of the journey.

Pop-pop, you have been always my grandfather;  
I will always be your grandson.

### **Digging Deeper**

Autoethnographic methodology has demonstrated a particular capacity to capture foundational, challenging life events in families through restorying lived experiences (Goodall,

2006; Pelias, 2013; Poulos, 2009, 2012). Smith-Sullivan (2008) describes this narrative call as a way to create meaning in one's life: "Because humans are born into a storied world, they naturally learn to make sense of it through their own as well as others' narratives" (p. 1). In this sense, by reading and reflecting upon his grandfather's autobiography, the researcher-participant can project his own life experiences on his elder's life story and co-create meaning for his own life course.

Furthermore, autoethnographic examination of possible selves—i.e., via archetypal narrators in this personal narrative—can provide insight into the use of masks to represent possible selves during identity development. Barreto and Frazier (2012) explain this linkage: "Another important feature of possible selves is that they portray both continuity and change over time" (p. 1787). This infers that narrative inquiry with its focus on the evolution of meaning over time can appropriately chronicle one's personal development through one's life events over a life span. The dynamic nature of possible selves, enabling one to change them like masks as one accomplishes goals or experience certain life events, fosters self-directed learning and development over a life course. "This dynamic nature exemplifies how possible selves are consistent with the self-directed nature of development and theories of intentional self-development" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1787). In other words, learning more about his grandfather's life story has enabled the researcher-participant to learn more about his own possible self-concepts and how, over time, they have come together in the ever-changing mosaic that is his identity.

### **Ingrid's Tale: A Journey Toward Carmel**

My spiritual journey encompasses both challenge and continuous transition. The following citation sums my journey thus far pretty well: "God is what we really need. Family

gets us closer there.... God is the answer to the question: I'm thirsty but don't know what it is" (Culkin, *Journal 4*, August 3, 1997).

For me, being spiritual is a metaphor for my relationship with God. It is the journey of life itself. That is why autoethnography ties well into my personal transformation/self-actualization. In the poem *Treasure (Journal 1, 1999)*, I describe what I view as the relationship between lived experience and spirituality:

As we gain experience,  
Knowledge yields pleasure and pain.  
Autumns lead to winter, offering  
Self-guidance from introspection.  
The finger is on something we don't  
Know what to name.  
Finally, metanoia, change of heart  
May occur, when the eyes open,  
And we see the objective of  
Our journey: that beautiful  
Wife, son, and daughter who  
Journeyed with us, the  
Family in God.

In other words, growing spiritually is my life journey, and I recognized that when I was 30. Five years later, I concluded that,

I can best enjoy life by maintaining balance and priorities, and becoming the best person with God-given gifts I can. Because it's an imperfect world and God is both ultimate

Creator and Judge, I try to let Him do those roles. (Culkin, *Journal 2*, February 16, 2004)

Giving control back to God continues to be tough for my pride but necessary for my spiritual development. An example of giving up control involved learning how to walk with a hip impingement. The physical therapy rejuvenated my step and body. It was a transformative experience, and it is a story of transition because I learned how to walk in a new gait without pain for the first time in over a decade. By changing my walking paradigm, I could open my

mind to other learning opportunities that might take me out of my comfort zone: e.g., picking up Latin with online resources (Culkin, *Journal 12*). For me, the physical conversion helped me in my spiritual journey because I opened my mind to new mentors.

One spiritual master whom I have followed since I was a teenager is Thomas Merton. He was a Cistercian monk who has touched me several times during my life. In my journals I have saved his prayer for guidance and have reflected on his *No Man is an Island* concerning detachment (*Journal 4*, July 19, 2000). His teaching has molded my personal mission statement: “Be a God-centered (holy) person who values and serves others; prioritizes in accordance with spiritual, mental, and physical facets of daily life; and finds grounding in my family” (Culkin, *Journal 5*, October 19, 2005). This theme of equating growth in holiness with discerning personal identity resonates in my life during the past decade. After a recent retreat at his home of Gethsemani Abbey, I wrote that “I am not complacent, but I must continue to work at holiness” and concluded that I must pray regularly, be more patient with myself, and let God control my life (*Journal 13*, July 2014). This pilgrimage of life is not an easy one, and I must constantly remind myself of its value as a journey.

Spiritual awareness can be effective in the healing process. This awareness is linked to our capacity to change in a deep sense. “It is by changing our perception through education and self-awareness that we can conceivably change our behavior” (Culkin, *Journal 6*, August 17, 2005). A conclusion I have reached over time is that the search for meaning is associated with constructive habits of thought that can help propel a person out of self-delusion, anger, and spiritual emptiness.

The pilgrimage to Carmel has taught me that God—not our own strength—is the true power behind human transformation that occurs only in the present (Culkin, *Journal 6*). We are

not enough by ourselves. In recognition of this and in an attempt to learn more about my faith, I inquired about the Third Order Carmelites before I deployed in 2011 (Culkin, *Journal 11*). I committed myself to their regimen of daily prayer and meditation, and it provided me some comfort during the deployment. Carmelite spirituality appeals to me because it offers a unique balance of prayer and action grounded in faith and trust in God. The following entry from *Journal 15* (January 2014) reminds me to be more patient with myself and trust more in God:

Reading St. Therese, I realize that I mustn't expect anything from this life but rather do everything for God. In this way, I won't set my expectations high or be angered when things don't "go my way." Therese talks about charity as a motivator for selfless service and a source of happiness. An example of this is a mitzvah—"a good deed that is done without expecting anything in return." (St. Therese, *Story of Soul* (Study ed.), 2005, p. 182)

Put another way, let go and let God.

Another Carmelite mentor has been Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection. Reflecting on his work, I note that he sounds like St. Therese because he "reminds us to live simply and with as much love as we can muster. How powerful? Isn't LOVE, after all, what makes us human" (Culkin, *Journal 15*, January 21, 2014)? I have found in the catholic faith a universal element of human nature—love transcends the human experience. "That the Vatican canonized Fr. Andrew Dae-gun in 1984 displays yet another way in which common bonds of human experience bridge religious, national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries" (Culkin, *Journal 6*, October 22, 2005). So, Brother Lawrence and St. Andrew Dae-gun symbolize how love can and must bridge our myriad histories, cultures, and languages.

One Carmelite who epitomizes my eclectic heritage and spiritual journey is St. Edith Stein. Like her and St. Teresa of Avila, my grandfather was Jewish. Like my grandfather, she converted to Catholicism as an adult. Not only has St. Edith influenced my life through her saintliness, but she has modeled for me the integrity of scholarship. In fact, my decision to pursue a doctorate degree partially stems from her balanced approach to scholarly life: skills, quality of life decisions, and academic achievement (Culkin, *Journal 11*). It comforts me to have a contemporary model of holiness and self-discernment in this age of multi-tasking, consumerism, and fleeting values.

I find prayer to be necessary to ground myself. Prayer helps us grow despite our weaknesses. We gain strength by realizing we have a dark side and by choosing the virtuous during temptation. “What strength of virtue we’d have, then, to willingly and openly face that dark weakness and still choose to live virtuously and with integrity” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, March 20, 2004). This thread of strength earned by confronting weakness resonates in my journal prayers: “Lord, please make me slow to anger, fueled by love. Let me do Your will, not my own; but, when I do choose my own [will], to learn from my mistakes” (*Journal 4*, June 5, 2000). Prayer helps me develop into a better person through reflection on my experiences and God’s grace. A prayer I wrote in 2004 addresses this: “I especially need to check my emotions and desires—manifestations of my selfishness. My I focus this week on: rehabilitation, not punishment; patience, not judgment; service, not egocentrism; understand others’ perspectives; desist from judging others or yourself. Amen” (Culkin, *Journal 2*, August 11, 2004). In another entry dated November 24, 2012, I made a note to get my scapular blessed so that I could enhance my consciousness of God’s presence in my daily life (Culkin, *Journal 11*). In other words, prayer

has helped me gain insight into my spiritual life, as documented over at least the past twenty years.

Prayer, then, fills the gaps left when rationale and perseverance fall short (Culkin, *Journal 2*). This has become most salient in my prayerful realization that I control my fate and nurture faith through my ethical decisions in partnership with God. God

provides us a choice in all things. By His/Her grace, we may choose goodness, even in the face of adversity. No one else, therefore, can tell us we're doing a bad job or dissuade us from doing what we believe is right. (*Journal 4*, September 14, 1995)

In this sense, prayer helps me combat my inherent "self-centeredness" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, September 27, 2004) and the hypocrisy it can cause.

In addition to connecting with God, prayer has helped my stay linked to my loved ones through artistic expression. When separated from my wife during deployments, I have found spiritual solace in writing poetry. In missing my wife—my soul mate—while spending a year away in Korea, I wrote this stanza:

I fear the physical isolation  
Might fade our soulful connection,  
But I misjudge its power and legacy.  
For the spirit transcends time and  
Space, mind and matter. Indeed,  
This love is not our own: but a gift. (Culkin, *Journal 2*, October 2, 2005)

As I have matured, I sometimes have felt that the truth resides closer than we realize.

Happiness is already in us, if we are willing to see:

I believe in my fellow man,  
Who sometimes wrongs,  
Yet who always feels  
Pain, stress, and sorrow.

I believe we should never,



Never underestimate one another,  
Even overestimate.  
Take fellow human beings  
As your own,  
For you know not what  
Tomorrow brings.

Believe in kind Justice,  
The kind that simultaneously  
Flows from a caring heart,  
And a sincere mind—over  
Which God must be Master.

Believe in yourself, for  
I believe that if you  
Do that and trust in God,  
All can and will be yours. (Culkin, *Journal 4*, “Believe,” June 6, 1994)

Perhaps this journal entry from May 15, 1996, would be a good epitaph describing my spiritual journey: “Lord, let me learn from my experiences, become more confident in myself, and serve others in life through You. Amen” (*Journal 4*).

### **Digging Deeper**

The person seeking spiritual development has been likened to a pilgrim traveling up Mount Carmel during a period—a dark night—of life events in which he or she must detach from things of this world in order to attain the virtues and awareness of another (Saint John of the Cross, 1987; Poulos, 2012). In some aspects, this experience parallels that of a shadow—i.e., fear, hubris—that all humans possess but would rather repress (Poulos, 2012). While not contrary, it is somewhat ironic that one should travel through darkness to cope with the darkness of one's own character. In this context, this autoethnography documents the researcher-participant's personal dark night (facing his darkness) to ascend the mountain and thereby attain greater resolution in three disruptive life events: grieving his parents, coping with incurable

mental illness, and seeking spiritual awareness. Confronting personal darkness is a key aspect of faith development.

Faith, a bridge between a person and his Creator (Dubay, 1989), grounds one on the path particularly during times of darkness. This bridge spans the infinite distance between creation and Creator. The distance can therefore not be measured, indicating a new form of knowledge—not contained or defined in discrete terms. This knowledge is by nature dark in that it is “beyond any ordinary human mode” (Dubay, 1989, p. 63) of understanding. In this sense, dark images can represent either periods of doubt and uncertainty but also indicate a yearning for spiritual development. At the same time, faith is the gravity that keeps the pilgrim on the path of spiritual development. The pilgrimage, then, is not introspective but a relational activity between the pilgrim and God within the context of self.

For years I've been falsely humble—  
Abstaining from enjoying life & grace  
Because I believe I'm not good enough.

I would sin & thereby pierce  
Christ's crucifix, but I failed to  
See that by not sharing the joy  
From God's love received with  
those needing it the most,  
I failed to fill in those holes—  
Even with absolution through  
Regular confession.

I am called to be a little Christ  
To others, even those I may not like or  
Who don't like me. That's hard!  
Faith helps me to persevere, and  
Hope provides me the joyful strength to  
Continue to serve others with love  
Rather than self-righteous anger.  
In this way, St. Teresa, be my guide  
On the path of charity up Mount Carmel.

I can reach the summit by being pure of heart

And by being really present to God & others.  
By spiritual centering, I can also  
Care for physical & intellectual well-being.  
May I continue to balance my daily life  
Physically, mentally, & spiritually by  
Improving my relationship with  
God through prayer, helping those brothers &  
Sisters in need with compassion, and  
Becoming my truest, holy self through humility.  
Lord, have mercy on me.

Faith development is a uniquely human activity that, in many ways, parallels life cycle development (Fowler, 1981). The primary materials analyzed in this research approximately span psychosocial (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1976) Early Adult Transition (ages 17-22) through the Mid-life Transition (ages 40-45) during which the researcher-participant experienced much of what Fowler (1981) describes as Individuative-Reflective Faith (Stage 4) and Conjunctive Faith (Stage 5). During these stages of faith development, the researcher-pilgrim questioned long-held assumptions as he encountered the world as an unattached adult and then re-storied perspectives to see multiple facets of complex issues (Fowler, 1981). OCD only served to complicate the developmental process. For instance, repeating Hail Mary and Our Father prayers compulsively until perfectly uttered—whatever that meant at a particular moment—retarded his ability to pursue new forms of prayer in his twenties and thirties. Now that he, in his mid-forties, has become a Lay Carmelite and has learned about contemplative prayer methods such as *lectio divina*, the researcher-participant can experience a broader, refreshing world of prayer and faith development. Making decisions to pursue more advanced forms of prayer despite compulsive tendencies to embrace stability and routine has been a key to developing his faith further.

## **Nara's Tale: Journey as an Artist**

My artistic journey encompasses both challenge and continuous transition. While my mother was a professional artist and my grandfather had drawing prowess, I didn't discern my talents for drawing until I was in college.

His name, for purposes of this story, was Chang. I wanted to impress him since I thought we could be friends, maybe more (Culkin, reflections, July 21, 1990). I didn't know and was confused. Anyway, I found out then that when I care about what someone thinks about me, I tend to imitate him/her. Chang had picked up drawing from photographs; I then did too. Since 1991 or so, as a college senior, I have drawn landscapes and people in situ and from photographs (Culkin, *Journal 1*). I find it harder to draw from memory. I also started to write poems, attracted by the efficiency in conveying the base emotions and in scratching at the universal truths of human existence. I wrote this poem *Leavings* circa 1990 while a cadet thinking about the transience of young love:

She put on clothes  
Left at the last twilight,  
And whispered a sweet breeze  
Of past glory;

And presented  
A leaf as a token  
Of her good byes, broken  
Only by the rustle of the  
Leaves at her feet. (Culkin, ca. 1990)

Over time, my preferences have evolved. I began to focus on detailed sketches of people, highlighting the features of the eyes. I realized that the eye is the key to depicting a person in a realistic context. I drew pretty good renditions of female athletes from *National Geographic*, Robert Duvall, Dr. Martin Luther King, Andrew Wyeth, cartoons, and even a cock-eyed owl (Culkin, *Journal 1*, 1991-1994; Culkin, *Journal 13*). For example, my pastel drawing of "Seoul

from DH [Dragon Hill Lodge]” documents my presence in a major city around the world at a particular time and exhibits a bit of my emotional response to that experience—i.e., smog, overwhelming activity in the streets below (Culkin, *Journal 13*, June 5, 2006). I have also copied the masters—Picasso, Manet, Whistler, Chagall, Yoshida—in an attempt to improve my skills (*Journal 13*). As I have matured in my identity and professional development, my mind opened to other artistic opportunities.

A major area of growth for me has been the intersection of different modalities of art. I find that using two or more art forms can be a powerful way to convey intangible meaning from experience. For example, illustrating poems that I have written can effectively convey experience, emotion, and thought in a holistic—practically spiritual—manner. Haiku complements illustrations of nature. This haiku accompanies the back of my drawing of the Hawaiian Royal Mausoleum in Honolulu (Culkin, *Journal 13*, December 23, 2013):

Ali’i rest in peace  
behind sturdy doors, while the  
egret guards outside.

I have written poetry to cope with extreme circumstances. While deployed to Afghanistan in 2011, I wrote the following poem entitled “Kabul Mountains” to describe the tensions, changes, and challenges I faced working in a challenging staff job (Culkin, *Journal 14*, November 7, 2011):<sup>21</sup>

I see you, in the background far away,  
Hovering behind clouds with your rocky  
Blanket—displayed if the Sun agrees.  
Hoarfrost-capped spires rise to the north,  
But they shrink to lonesome foothills when in

---

<sup>21</sup> This poem was also published in the spring 2016 edition of *Veterans’ Voices*, 64(1), p. 59. ISSN: 0504-0779. *Veterans’ Voices* magazine is not copyrighted, but it is credited here per the publication’s request.

Southern embrace. Why stand still—  
Rising, falling...up and down, up and down?

I shift position and see another  
Side of you; this time, the shadows of men  
Long gone mingle with those oblivious  
To their legacy—moving up and down,  
Up and down, up and down...up and down.

I am here with you, buffeted by the  
Elements—teased with the notion that a  
Sultry storm finds solace up your steep slopes,  
And I am a witness to tempests down  
Here knowing I, too, can withstand the changes to come.

I have also found solace in writing poetry. In “Children Outside the Walls” (Culkin, *Journal 14*, November 18, 2011), I describe the irony of feeling like a prisoner behind walls intended to protect me from Afghan people.

There is an irony about walls and  
What is on either side of them. Walking  
Along my camp wall—thirty-feet in height,  
I hear the distinct resonance of kids  
Playing, without expectations, but with  
An unmistakable joy. They could be  
The wall talking to me, but I think not.

Poetry also has helped me cope with authority through humor and expression, especially when I disagree with its mandates. In “Waiting to Staff” (Culkin, *Journal 14*, January 27, 2013), I convince myself to wait for my boss long after our appointment’s scheduled start:

It is an imprecise science,  
That of serving masters,  
But it must be done.  
Should it not? Of course!

In this context, the process of poetic writing infused with humor has helped me to regain perspective when I become hyper-emotional and to counter my tendency toward self-righteousness.

I also carried this integrated art into my grieving for my parents. On December 30, 2013, I wrote this stanza in a poem entitled, “My Parents’ Deaths: A Haiku Journey in Grief & Resilience” (*Journal 13*)—

Move on—summer  
Deaths eight months apart  
and after now; memories  
slowly replace grief.

Being an orphan—  
a new feeling for me, but  
others model strength.

In this poem, I found meaning at the nexus of my emotional response to death and the realization that my social-legal status (i.e., orphan, personal representative, trustee) had changed. Writing creatively about life events, then, can document personal responses and capture meaning for further reflection.

In the future, I would like to continue mixing art forms as a relaxing hobby and as an effective means to represent research findings in qualitative studies. In this sense, using the creative spirit inherited from my mother and grandfather is a testament to them and a nod to my legacy.

### **Digging Deeper**

Arts-based inquiry provides a researcher the space in which to examine social-cultural phenomena and self-concepts from multiple vantage points at various levels of rich meaning (Michelson, 2013; Sameshima, 2007). Adult learning and development involve continuous questioning to inform the decisions made along the life journey. Bhattacharya (2013) finds that representing data through poetry allows the researcher-participant to dig "beyond what appears on the surface, working between the lines to hint at data-enriched silences..." (p. 610). This layered, shadowed imagery resonates with Cahnmann (2003) who contends that poetic inquiry

allows a researcher to discover in a multi-dimensional space, placing a unique, holistic perspective on lived experiences over a life span. Arts-based inquiry can offer a venue for self-expression to those who do not feel empowered to speak.

Poetry, in particular, can facilitate learning in emotionally complex situations (Bhattacharya, 2013; Boylorn, 2009; Watson-Gegeo, 2005). For example, the researcher-participant wrote the following poem, *Lost*, when his friend had committed suicide some years ago (Culkin, April 1, 2003):

The loss of my friend  
is unlike losing my way,  
being down, or curbing celebration.  
It is all of these, emphasizing the gray.

He is gone now, leaving an  
ache that ebbs with the emotions—  
panging the heart with a sting  
that leaves the throat dry and mind in confusion.

My friend was a beacon—  
bright love to those whom  
he touched. Now, we are called to  
grab the light, shine forth so  
that others may not be lost.

This poem represents a medium that is accessible not only to reading audiences but also to individual sufferers as well. By acknowledging the pain, the researcher-participant could not only identify it but also apply his friend's memory as a catalyst for helping others.



## Chapter 3 - Context of the Plot

The stories presented in Chapter 2 - Personal Stories and Possible Selves address the research purpose by illustrating the researcher-participant's identity development over time. The individual stories form a fragmented narrative, replete with snap shots of memories and emotions, rather than a clean story line. But they attempt to show how an adult can make meaning from and develop through lived experiences of mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over a substantial period of time. This chapter describes the context of this fragmented narrative by reiterating research purpose and questions, describing the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed, examining the narrative process, and considering relevant cultures of silence and invisibility.

### Context

The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore how a male in the general population describes how life events have influenced his identity development over a period of 23 years, spanning three decades. The researcher-participant asks two primary research questions: 1) How does the individual describe his adult development in terms of life events or "individual and cultural episodes" (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) related to mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over time? and 2) How does the individual describe his possible selves in constructing a new sense of identity? Addressing these questions contributes to the literature of adult and continuing education by providing a glimpse into stories of lived experiences over time in the light of adult development. In short, this research helps fill in a gap of adult education literature at the nexus of these three cultures. The personal narrative responds to these research questions.

\*

\*

\*

\*

Even as I, as the researcher-participant, write this story, I want—and am actively convincing myself that I need—to write within a structure, to cover all aspects of the research. Compulsively, I write the following outline for my story, before I even know the contents:

#### I. Theoretical Framework of Adult Development

- A. Life Events Perspective
- B. Identity Development
- C. Self-concept
- D. Possible Selves
- E. Narrative Learning and Self-authorship
- F. Operational Definitions
- G. Significance of the Research

#### II. Methodological Framework of Narrative Inquiry

- A. Autoethnography as a Method and Product
- B. Personal Narratives and Metaphors
- C. Ethics of Personal Space
- D. Cultures of Silence, Invisibility, Shadows, and Masks

#### III. Cultural Domains

- A. A Culture of Mental Illness
- B. A Culture of Spiritual Development
- C. A Culture of Death and Grief

As with most compulsions, the relief enjoyed in performing them is only temporary. A part of me whom my wife and I humorously call Herb soon urges me to question my methods. He is the shadow of my personality I would rather forget (Jung, 1957/1958; Poulos, 2012). Am I following my co-major professor's instruction to write "...your personal narratives without the restriction of...key themes, or any structure whatsoever" (Bhattacharya, personal e-mail, March 1, 2016)? What, no structure until later!? Structure has been my protective mask in the face of uncertainty. While my compulsions are quite mild, my obsessions have occasionally overwhelmed my life.

So, why am I writing my personal narrative? Perhaps I have gravitated toward narrative learning and therapy throughout my life course. As a child, my book-designer mother was aggrieved every time I tore apart, crayoned in, or folded the pages in any of my reading primers. As I grew, I was pulled by the power of narratives to thrust me into alternative universes in which adventure could replace the pain, loneliness, alienation, and sadness of daily life. Just after my parents' divorce, for instance, I discovered J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It was the first story I read from beginning to end, envisioning a personal interaction with the plot line and its characters. I even composed a small ditty to accompany one of the minor characters as he trundled through the woods. By 1989, the date of my earliest journal entries, I was a 19 year-old away from home for the first time and lonely at West Point. I turned to what I knew and started to journal my thoughts and fears. I sporadically made entries at first, but I continued to turn back to journals as I transitioned from place to place in the transient life of an army officer. When my parents died within eight months of each other in by May 2013, I found myself not only orphaned but questioning the meaning of my life journey. Journaling and recording questions and poems without answers or endings helped me to express my angst as well as discover an inner curiosity as to who I was and could be. In short, what would be my legacy?

As the challenges and transitions naturally intensified during my professional and personal development over the years, so too have my journal entries. In this sense, the journals have captured an impression, an imprint of sorts, of my lived experiences at multiple places and times. In another sense, the act of thinking and writing has forced me to engage my weaknesses,

regrets, and fears; and this has had great therapeutic value.<sup>22</sup> This series of snapshots of my personal journey has helped paint a picture of my adult development that, in turn, addresses the research questions of this project.

At the same time, I am very aware that many readers may not be receptive to the exposure of my faults and scabs, claiming this research is nothing more than vain navel-gazing. I admit that I would not have written this introspection if I were still on active duty in the military for fear of retribution, misperceptions by the chain of command, fear of the perceived judgment of peers, or even loss of security clearance. There may also be readers who just will not understand the premise that exposing weakness leads to healing and is a very human—if not courageous—act of informal learning. Furthermore, some neophyte psychologists may decide that OCD is a common class of control-seeking, idiosyncratic personal traits that many high-performing individuals possess, thereby diluting the actual destructive force of diagnosed cases. Indeed, many of the afflicted choose not to seek (or just delay) professional help due to the denial, shame, and fear generated by this cultural stigma (Penzel, 2000). The stereotype of stigma grounded in ignorance still abounds: that mental illness is merely a deniable weakness and character flaw of which to be ashamed and that it ultimately translates into incompetence. The testament that follows attempts to counter this social narrative of misperception. But first, a discussion about the research design and frameworks will help place the personal narrative in context.

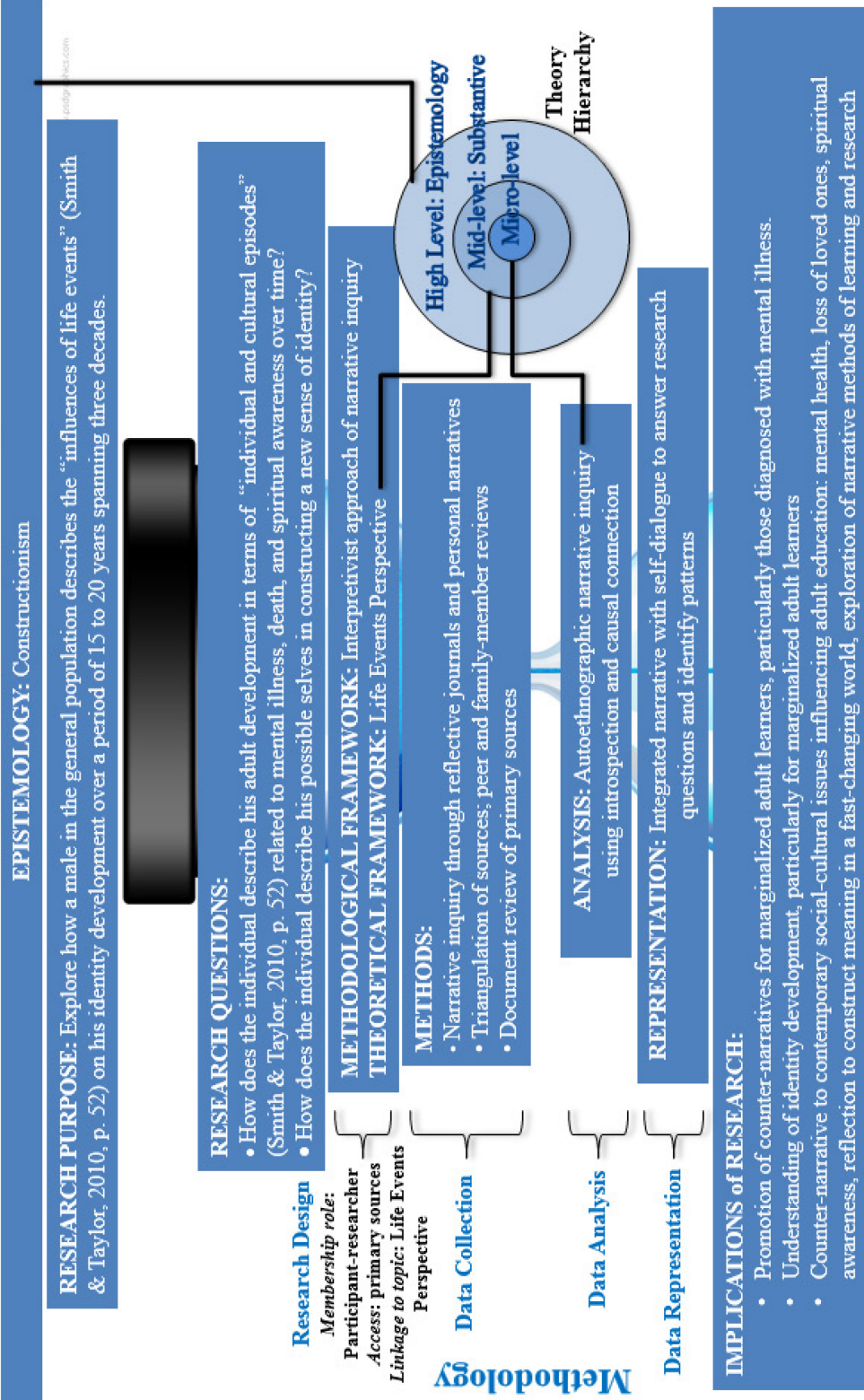
---

<sup>22</sup> Writing about my specific obsessions and compulsions has been traumatic at times, but it has also made me realize that they will not harm me. The deliberate exposure to obsessions and denial of compulsions to temporarily abate them is the essence of exposure and response prevention therapy (Penzel, 2000).

## **Research Design and Alignment**

The alignment of the research design for this autoethnography is based upon a constructivist epistemology to address the research questions. Figure 3.1 Research Conceptual Linkages on the following page illustrates this foundation of meaning construction in adult learners in terms of the research questions, methodology, analysis, and the application of findings. Interpretivist approaches to research directly support the constructivist epistemology of meaning making by seeking perspectives of social-cultural-historical contexts to better understand the life course (Crotty, 1998/2004). In this sense, the entry point to the subject matter in the context of Adult and Continuing Education is the Life Events Perspective to better understand adult development over a life span.

# Research Conceptual Linkages



*Image Source:* <http://craizakmsonline.com/unicaresonline/how-long-after-an-alleged-offense-can-the-state-file-criminal-charges/attachment/hourzhas/>  
*Concept Source:* Bhattacharya, 2007, p. 10

Figure 3.1. The epistemology of this research aligns to the research methodology through the research questions.

The research alignment concept in Figure 3.1 attempts to link epistemology to the research methodology to theory. This figure illustrates the entire research project in a single context. It is important to paint this picture to show how the research purpose and questions previously described fit into the theoretical and methodological contexts. Detail is in the middle while the larger puzzle pieces are labeled on the left. Note that the hour-glass-shaped model is broadest at the top (i.e., epistemology = constructionism) and at the bottom (i.e., implications that apply to the researcher-participant and others). The tools in the middle allow data collection, analysis, and representation in order to discern key implications that address the research questions.

\*

\*

\*

\*

This research explores my learning experiences over 23 years spanning three decades. As a researcher who is a former student and is now a civilian member of the faculty at a government organization, I used my issued computer, e-mail, and files when authorized to conduct this research. These criteria support the effort to respond to the research questions and are driven by key aspects of the life course perspective—particularly reflection, life events, self-concept, and possible selves, and knowledge construction through narratives (George, 1993; Taylor, 2008).

### **Rationale for Qualitative Study**

Qualitative analysis is an approach to inquiry wherein the researcher seeks deep insights into sociocultural phenomena in order to set the context for critical discussions about them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In this study, qualitative analysis best enabled the researcher-participant to answer the research questions concerning the nature of his identity development over time. First, a qualitative approach supports the constructivist epistemological basis to the questions that focus on the nature of individual experiences in online narrative learning. Second,

qualitative analysis permits an in-depth study of key factors of this lived experience without needing to seek tenuous connections with numerical evidence. Finally, a qualitative study focuses more on individual experiences and reflections rather than on generalizing findings on a sample population that may or may not inform the academy or the public about this phenomenon. In particular, autoethnography helped accomplish these goals.

The research framework used is the interpretivist approach of autoethnography because its epistemological purpose is to understand the essence of human social-cultural experiences or phenomena through personal narratives. In autobiographical narrative inquiry, the researcher-participant actively seeks "to set a research puzzle, to justify the study, and to position herself in the study" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 86). With autoethnography, the researcher-participant specifically positions himself within a particular social context (Bhattacharya, 2007, in print)—e.g., the mentally ill, grievors. Crotty (1998) explains that interpretivism seeks to understand the social context and interpret human reality surrounding a phenomenon. This deep exploration of complex phenomena incurs an intense commitment by the researcher over time.

Qualitative inquiry is iterative in that one repeatedly seeks a deeper understanding of social phenomena, often while harnessing the compelling power of personal stories to describe lived experiences and to facilitate learning over the life course (Peshkin, 1993). In a world of increasing complexity and fluidity, qualitative methods provide tools which researchers may employ to understand social phenomena such as identity development at a deeper level. Qualitative methods enable researchers to describe the intertwined plurality of truths and perspectives related to particular phenomena. Flick (2009) lists key elements of qualitative research as, "...the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers' reflections on their research as part of the



process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches and methods” (p. 14). This implies that various qualitative research methods are used in this study to describe in detail the little-explored life events of a male in the general US population over a span of three decades. Qualitative tools such as autoethnography provide a useful framework to study the social-cultural phenomenon of identity development over time to reach for self-authorship.

Narrative inquiry, rather than being solely rooted in a specific philosophical stance (i.e., postmodernism or phenomenology), emerges from the interactive and relational inquiry informed by Deweyian concepts of lived experiences (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 2008). This research process is based on a constructivist epistemology and focuses on meaning making from the researcher’s perspective as a participant. Richardson (2010) illustrates through creative writing how qualitative inquiry can show rather than explicitly describe key concepts regarding social expectations. In this spirit, autoethnography is a methodology because it naturally links reflexive narrative activities and self-dialogue to identity development—i.e., positive change—from experiences lived over time (Chang, 2013; Giddens, 1991; Pourreau, 2014).

Narrative inquiry, and autoethnography by implication, can involve an interaction between the researcher and the material, leading to a performance of identity based upon artifacts situated within the unique stories of lived experiences (Riessman, 2002; Saldana, 2003). Narrative analysis that incorporates both structure or form and ethnographic or relational factors can lead to deeper understanding of participants’ lived experiences (Carbon, 2003). Narrative approaches to research are, by nature, experiential in that they center on particular life events that help to understand the past and will influence personal relationships and self-concepts (Bold, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By focusing on personal experiences over

an extended period of time, autoethnographic practice can facilitate a thick, multi-layered narrative that illustrates a credible, self-reflexive interpretation of cultural experiences through subjective perspectives (Anonymous, 2015; Preston, 2011; Tracy, 2010). The emphasis on reflection and dialogue nests with the substantive framework of the Life Events Perspective informed by Kegan's (1994) concept of self-authorship from his Cognitive Development Theory that directly supports the research purpose and design. Tying these research models and methods together, the researcher employs a series of steps to sort the data for analysis and representation.

### **Epistemic Alignment**

The theoretical and methodological framework of this research is grounded on its epistemic alignment. This alignment is rooted in constructivist epistemology, seeking to create meaning from experiences. Narrative inquiry provides an effective means to do that in the context of the life events perspective of adult development. Clark (2001) notes that "Our lives need to make sense, to have their various elements be in a reasonable relationship with one another" (p. 87). Personal narratives help adults attain coherence. Furthermore, psychosocial scholars like Levinson (1986) highlight the value of studying the life course as a holistic approach to researching and understanding adult development. Personal narratives told through the archetypal characters, representing several possible selves of the researcher-participant, examine key transitions or "eras" (Levinson, 1986, p. 5) during his transition to early adulthood.

\* \* \* \*

I struggled at first to find a research space adequate for my qualitative approach. The space needed to be flexible enough for narrative inquiry to take its course, but bounded to frame and represent implications and themes from the analysis. A qualitative approach is inherently flexible because it is interdisciplinary and must accommodate multiple epistemological

perspectives ‘and accompanying methodologies’ (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 26). For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have provided the research space (i.e., the sandbox, if you will) and narrative inquiry offers a philosophical—think pragmatic—foundation to understand lived experiences pertaining to identity and self-concept over time (Clandinin, 2013; Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012). Clark and Rossiter (2008) explain that story telling is how we clarify our own identities within the context of our realities: “Understanding identity as a narrative construction is another way of conceptualizing personal change” (p. 62). In other words, humans tend to figure out the complex things in life through storytelling.

In this qualitative approach, the research questions have driven the methodology. I had to go to other fields to find justification for my research. For example, Levinson (1986) is a psychologist who described how those in their forties tend to develop by individually reflecting upon the self-concept during what he labelled a “Midlife Transition” (p. 5). In other words, adult learners need to take a break along their life journeys to center themselves so that they can discern meaning. Functional adults cannot be of much use to others or society if they do not know their own value.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Levinson (1986) observes that such individual development during the Midlife Transition and Entry Life Structure for Middle Adulthood periods is essential to “become more compassionate, more reflective and judicious, less tyrannized by inner conflicts and external demands, and more genuinely loving of ourselves and others. Without it, our lives become increasingly trivial or stagnant” (p. 5; see also Fig. 1). This suggests a linkage from individual reflection during one’s relative midlife and middle adulthood (which I am doing in this research) to the discernment of meaning and deliberate selection of love over anger in my life choices.

## Significance and Implications of Research

This research addresses a key need in contemporary adult education: understanding the development of an adult's identity over time centered on life events pertaining to often invisible wounds (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Smith & Taylor, 2010).<sup>24</sup> The particular life events concern coping with mental illness, seeking spiritual awareness and peace, and grieving at the deaths of loved ones. In this study, the participant-researcher's own experiences in these three areas lead to questions of possible selves and how past representations of self may influence his future identities (Cross & Markus, 1991). Indeed, adult education provides a social forum in which responsible citizens can debate about knowledge and power, thereby enabling the development of new social identities over the life course (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; D'Amico, 2004). Narrative research, in particular, can lead to "personal and social change" (Chase, 2013, p. 55).

This research attempts to analyze the narrative data through narrative methods in order to help assemble puzzle pieces of personal life events over time as well as to discern counter narratives to social inequities pertaining to mental illness and identity development. The experiences of identity and voice are linked in adult development, and their narrative expression provides insight into the nature of adult learning (Demuth & Keller, 2011; Hayes, 2000). Understanding how wounds that we feel but that others cannot readily see may affect adult development could provide insight into cultures of silence and invisibility. In doing so, perhaps

---

<sup>24</sup> Chickering and Reisser (1993) explicitly link adult education to identity development: "In the global society of the twenty-first century, where change is the only certainty, not socialization but identity formation becomes the central and continuing task of education" (p. 208). In this context, adult educators may find a need to understand the invisible wounds of their individual students to achieve learning objectives more effectively.

those afflicted can gain a stronger internal voice and thereby more definitively drive their own development over their lifespans.

### **Subjectivity and Roles**

Researchers, particularly those conducting narrative inquiry, should systematically embrace and assess their own subjectivity and position in narratives as soon as practical (Clandinin, 2013; Peshkin, 1988). Subjectivity refers to the relationship among the researcher, the collective voices of participants, social-cultural contexts, the layered material of a study, and perspectives of activism (Reinertsen, 2015; Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016). Its premise is that any interaction among these elements influences the others. "By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20). This systematic self-monitoring in a protected educational environment can lead a researcher to "enhanced awareness" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20) that can nurture the self-expression of muted voice, "subjectivity, connected knowing and relationships" (English, 2008, p. 112). Charmaz (2012) concedes that subjectivity is integrally linked to personal experiences, "...we are part of our constructed theory and this theory reflects the vantage points inherent in our varied experience, whether or not we are aware of them" (p. 149). In other words, who the researcher-participant is and what he perceives his identity to be will inevitably inform how he constructs meaning from the research.

\* \* \* \* \*

As a white male who retired from the US military and is a professed Lay Carmelite, I approach this research with certain subjectivities. To express this clearly and concisely, I choose poetic prose and parable journal entries because my poetic voice can dig keenly into my

perceptions, data, and analysis. Cahnmann (2003) explains how poetic skills can enhance a researcher's ability to express a diverse array of perspectives to a broad audience,

Just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying what might not otherwise be expressed. (p. 31; see also Faulkner, 2016)

Put another way, the personal narrative itself describes my role as researcher-participant in this project.

### **Theoretical Framework Regarding Adult Development**

#### **Life Events Perspective: Adult Development over a Lifespan**

The life events perspective of adult development allows adult educators to better understand the individual and cultural events (including spiritual and emotional) that “trigger the need for learning” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 145) throughout one's life (see also Smith & Taylor, 2010). Researchers have tended to perceive life events in either mechanistic or organism terms (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). The sequence of life events can significantly impact a young man's life course (Hogan, 1978; Levinson et al., 1976). Anzaldua (2015) uses a tool she terms autohistoria to reflect on her life events: "Forced to rework your story, you invent new notions of yourself and reality—increasingly multidimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in more complex ways" (pp. 142-143). In this study, with its overlapping layers of meaning over time, multiple possible selves, and no clear sequence of events, the organismic approach best facilitates a response to the research questions. Researchers such as Erikson (1959/1980) and Levinson et al. (1976) who exemplify the organismic approach "describe a sequence of psychosocial stages occurring over the life cycle" (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979, p. 5;

see also Levinson, 1986).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis on integrated meaning rather than just causality suggests the appropriateness of narrative methods of inquiry over ones investigating cause-effect. In essence, researchers from the Life Events Perspective ask about the value of identity in terms of daily purpose, individual performance, and expected social roles in context throughout an adult's lifespan and structure (Kroger & McLean, 2011; Levinson, 1986).

Human beings have the capacity to express their unique conceptual selves through (especially third-person perspectives) creative personal stories to link life experiences in a social context in order to make meaning of self-concept and life events over time (Fowler, 1981; James, 1934; Libby & Eibach, 2011; McAdams, 2012). In contemporary society, there is a linkage among autobiographical practice, narrative, and the development of self-identity through introspection over a life course (Giddens, 1991). Personality traits and social roles can impact work performance and choices over a lifetime (George, Helson, & John, 2011). Transitional life events that challenge one's self-concept—e.g., coping with the diagnosis of a mental illness or the deaths of one's parents—can prompt one to question deeply held perspectives and to seek meaning in the shadowed recesses of life experiences. In this sense, the researcher-participant travels among these fragmented experiences through narrative inquiry, piecing them together in new ways to construct meaning and to invite readers to co-construct epistemic understanding within their own contexts (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Boylorn, 2013; Chaudhry, 1997). How individuals remember past life events influences how they tell their life stories (Pathman,

---

<sup>25</sup> Erikson's (1959/1980) model describes how human egos develop psychosocially in eight stages/phases by how humans respond to crises unique to those stages (see also Smith & Taylor, 2010). In fact, a person must respond to these crises in order to progress and ultimately "form a *functioning whole*" (italics in original, Erikson, 1959/1980, p. 53; see also Smith & Taylor, 2010).

Doydum, & Bauer, 2013), suggesting significant implications for identity development over a life span. In this project's context, the theoretical framework or model of adult development that particularly addresses the social-cultural influences of life experiences on identity is the Life Events Perspective (Smith & Taylor, 2010).

The Life Events Perspective is the substantive theoretical framework for this study because it ties the research to the field of adult education and to adult development in particular (Smith & Taylor, 2010). Adult education nurtures and discerns the construction of personal and social meaning over a course of lived experiences that serve as “the adult learner’s living textbook” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7). In short, an awareness of significant life events can create meaning and develop a self-concept (Lindeman, 1926). Another emergent theme in literature relates to the linkage of informal learning, adult development, and self-authorship.

Constructivist-developmental theories can clarify the linkage between autoethnography and constructed knowledge, leading to “greater self-agency” (Bridwell, 2012, p. 141) and authorship in adult learners (Barber et al., 2013; Cranton, 1994/2006; Kegan, 1994; Smith & Taylor, 2010).

Life events help mark adult development over long periods of time (George, 1993; Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). Adults develop from the positive or negative consequences of life events based on time and relationships—i.e., “impact of social expectations” (George, 1993, p. 276). Life events are defined within a context of adult development because they help mark the direction of development in terms of timing and sequence (George, 1993). Using this construct, Wolfe, Song, Greenberg, and Mailick (2014) conclude that the course of serious mental illness is often unpredictable and thereby can disrupt the life course and individual development not only of the afflicted person but that of his family. This is because the Life Events Perspective assumes that life events can affect not only individuals but also those with whom they intimately relate.



The life course perspective to adult development, entailing life events as units of measure, has emerged as a valued alternative to traditional life-cycle models because it more readily accommodates diversity and socio-cultural contexts as well as narrative forms of inquiry (Hutchison, 2005). Making sense of life events can influence personal culture and therefore the development of self-concept. Lovegreen and Settersten (1998) suggest that several factors, among others, make it a challenge for adults to learn given socially-driven life courses: career expectations, gender roles, accommodation to younger students, financial resource constraints. Adult learners tend to prefer choosing the direction of their learning, particularly when educators take a student-centered approach to andragogical practice (Rogers & Russell, 2002).

Individuals develop their own culture or "set of beliefs about the self, the world, and others" (Gutierrez & Park, 2015, p. 92) when constructing worldviews from a continual analysis of life events. Adults can and do change their worldviews in response to both positive and negative life events over time (Gutierrez & Park, 2015). Ryff and Dunn (1985) found a nonsignificant correlation between "life stresses and personality development" (p. 123) but found some linkage between the timing of life events and personal identity development described in other research (Ryff & Dunn, 1985; see also George, 1993; Neugarten, 1969). A person makes her own meaning and discerns value over a life course by expressing her life experiences in his/her unique narrative way (James, 1920, 1934). In this context, the construction of worldviews can influence identity development over a life span. Thus, the timing of life events informs personal stories and self-concept over one's life course (Neugarten, 1969; Ryff & Dunn, 1985).

To develop as self-authored citizens in contemporary society, adult learners need to create their own meaning and "an evolving sense of identity and eventually the capacity to create an internal sense of self that considers one's social identities (intrapersonal capacities), and an

evolving willingness to refrain from judgment when interacting with diverse others" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 868; see also Kegan, 1982). "These complex forms of meaning making that support intercultural maturity are components of self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, values, identity, and social relations" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 868). In other words, self-authorship is a sense of actualized personhood that develops from a keen self-reliance and responsibility in one's experiences and in the meanings one creates from them. Kegan's fourth order of consciousness in his theoretical framework addresses self-authorship "where individuals begin to carry out such mental tasks based upon internal criteria rather than external approval or formulae" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 869; see also Baxter Magolda, 2008; Kegan, 1994; Meszaros, 2007). As such, self-authorship has three primary elements of development: "the epistemological or cognitive dimension (i.e., how one makes meaning of knowledge); the intrapersonal dimension (i.e., how one views one's identity); and the interpersonal dimension (i.e., how one constructs one's relationships with others)" (Barber et al., 2013, pp. 869-870).

A key task of adult educators is to clarify the epistemological complexities of the life course and, in the process of interactive dialogue, encourage learners to participate more conscientiously and thus effectively in society (Brookfield, 2002; Freire, 1970/2011). This facilitative role of educators reflects Dewey's (2008) learner-centric contention that education is primarily an act of communication based upon a reflection of lived experiences over a life course and how they may apply to learners' futures. Adult educators can join learners at their own milestone of the developmental journey toward self-authorship—i.e., "internal self-definition" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xxi)—by validating learners' capacity to know, situating learning in the learners' experiences, and mutually constructing meaning. In this context, self-authored individuals "consider multiple perspectives, reflect on their own values and motivations, and

utilize goals and perspectives that are internally grounded and evaluated as a foundation for meaning making" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 870; see also Meszaros, 2007). In short, adult learners must take charge of their own education in order to achieve their own goals of meaning construction.

Such an increased reliance upon internal criteria cannot only lead to critical thinking but perhaps to identity development by how individuals perceive experiences, knowledge construction, and cultural assumptions (Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2008; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Meszaros, 2007; Mezirow, 1981, 1997). In this sense, "...learning and personal experiences that promote critical thinking and effective reasoning are likely those that also promote complex forms of meaning making" (Barber et al., 2013, p. 870). There is value in including the soul, or spiritual awareness, in adult learning environments for more transformative learning through "imaginative engagement" (Dirkx, 2001, p. 16; see also Tisdell, 1999). As a result, deeper learning can lead to complex identity development. Narratives can be a tool of transformative learning that can synergistically combine the benefits of critical reflection (epistemic change) and mindfulness (intuitive change) to promote personal development (Barner & Barner, 2011). Thus, autoethnography is a tool of narrative mindfulness so that the researcher-participant can constructively learn—i.e., make meaning at this point in his life.

Collay and Cooper (2008) suggest that adult learning integrated with self-authorship has a significant role to play in adult individual and social development because the learners are encouraged to construct meaning from their own experiences. The primary ways such learning occurs are by adults finding their voices and by systematically reflecting (often nurtured by journaling) on personal experiences to develop their identities (Collay & Cooper, 2008). In other

words, the complementary theoretical frameworks of narrative inquiry-learning and self-authorship pave pathways of self-reflection toward identity development.

Carrying this notion of adult development through narrative further, one could argue that increases in self-authorship could contribute to one's "internal voice" (Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2008). Baxter Magolda (2008) suggests that adult learning fosters critical thinking through reflection and a development of self-authorship through the cultivation of internal voices. Baxter Magolda (2007) explicitly links transformative learning to self-authorship: "Moving from these entering characteristics to intended learning outcomes requires transformational learning" (p. 69) in which adults learn new perspectives toward their experiences. She concludes that "self-authorship forms a developmental foundation for advanced learning outcomes" (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 70; see also Meszaros, 2007). Furthermore, the self-authored learner engages "in adult education *to keep learning and growing as a person*" (italics in original, Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 56). In other words, there is a linkage between adult learning and development through self-authorship. In this study, the internal voice is one that epitomizes the expression of one's truest thoughts, emotions, reflections, and beliefs as a result of such learning. Developing one's voice as well as spiritual dimension is inherent to identity development.

Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of personal development and change in adult education, ultimately leading to some form of conversion or intrinsic change (English, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). Adult educators are becoming increasingly aware that culture informs spiritual development and facilitates the construction of meaning in a complex and multicultural learning environment (Tisdell, 2003). "Narrative perspectives on any aspect of development" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 122) help provide a holistic analysis of identity development. In other words, spiritual

development, whether one acknowledges it or not, is an integral facet of one's identity development which means that identity changes over time (Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). Personal stories can help clarify the meaning constructed from the process. English (2005) argues that the two purposes of adult education—spirituality and social change—are interwoven and complementary; and they can enable educators to model continued, constructive social dialogue. Adult learning can also have a spiritual component elicited through narratives. Tisdell (2003) calls for more narrative analysis of spiritual development because narrative perspectives on learning “...tend to make apparent the particular cultural, historical, and gender factors that affect development” (p. 126). Religious scholars have acknowledged the potency of narrative learning: “We have a great deal, it seems, to learn from the story ourselves” (Chittister, 2004, p. 21). There is a utility of awareness in lifelong interactions with one’s spiritual environment. Langer (1997), for example, describes mindful learning in which “we are changing in some way, we are interacting with the environment so that both we and the environment are changed” (p. 137). Put another way, adult learning over a lifespan encompasses spiritual and cognitive aspects that can be enhanced simply by awareness.

Another consequence of adult education is the consideration of emancipatory voice. A goal of adult education is to empower learners in their awareness of oppression by enabling their emancipatory voices (Freire, 1970/2011). Freire (1970/2011) explains that one must actively practice a dialectic "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). These polarized dialogues tend to entail the oppressed and the oppressor, stability and instability, love and anger, and selfishness and selflessness. The autoethnographic practice of reflection on past action may very well lead to transformation through a liberation of emotional and psychological shackles. Furthermore, Freire (1970/2011) corroborates the researcher-participant’s

emancipatory decision to drive his life course through love rather than anger. Ultimately, adult learners choose to “understand the meaning of” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) lived experiences to become more autonomous through reflective practices such as personal narratives. Mezirow (1981) builds his concept of perspective transformation upon Habermas' ideas concerning emancipatory learning. Emancipatory learning involves a self-awareness of personal history (i.e., lived experience) in terms of assumptions concerning roles and expectations (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1981) equates such emancipation with a critical self-awareness

*...of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings.* (italics in original, p. 6)

In this context, emancipatory learning is a distinctive brand of adult learning that is conducive to the introspective-reflective and narrative context of autoethnographic methods (Mezirow, 1981). Such reflectivity on personal experiences helps account for transitions between stages in cognitive development theory (Erikson, 1963; Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1981) clarifies that "perspective transformation" may consist of a "sudden insight" (p. 7) into closely held psycho-cultural assumptions, but it more commonly entails "a series of transitions" (p. 7) toward a new perspective. The purpose of these transitions is to facilitate the deep "self-reflection essential for a transformation" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 8). Hoggan (2015) further expands the application of perspective development to include depth and breadth. As a result of such intimate transformation, a person is likely to form new relationships and roles based on a renewed sense of self-agency with affiliated social commitments—i.e., identity development (Mezirow, 1981).

Life events can motivate how adult learners decide to act to achieve desired or avoid feared possible selves and thereby direct their own course of learning in their unique "developmental, sociocultural, and historic" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1786) contexts. In this sense, stressful "life events, like developmental goals, will be integrated into possible selves" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1787). Possible selves—being the variety of concepts one could hope or fear to be—indicate personal goals set by adults to develop over time (Cantor et al., 1986). Learning about one's possible selves that emanate during different life events can help guide decisions about behavior (Cantor et al., 1986). Differences "in personal time perspective during adulthood replicate across time" (Hultsch & Bortner, 1974, p. 836). Put another way, life events have an impact not only because of what they are but also when they occur. For example, as a young man who was diagnosed with a mental illness that threatened his marriage, the researcher-participant developed a feared possible self of losing his wife because of the disorder. But "the integration of stressful events into the possible-selves repertoire could be adaptive in the form of problem-focused coping" (Barreto & Frazier, 2012, p. 1790). So, he has learned to manage the fear of losing his family and control to the mental illness by developing a possible self as a survivor and resilient husband who has sought professional counseling and now regularly takes medication to control the symptoms. Barreto and Frazier (2012) found that the sense of self-efficacy and integration of possible selves generally increased with more stressful life events experienced.

Barreto and Frazier (2012) "show that individuals whose life events were perceived as more stressful, salient, and life-changing exhibited a greater degree of integration into their possible selves. Possible selves became infused with the life events and represent the embodiment of those events" (p. 1802).

\*

\*

\*

\*

For instance, I have identified a desired possible self of a more holy and spiritually aware person. I have decided to ascend Mount Carmel through formation as a Lay Carmelite because I wanted to learn more about my religious faith—and that of my parents and grandparents—and become grounded amidst the complexities of daily life. Through personal stories derived from my journals, I have realized that when I read Saint Therese Lisieux's (1972/2005) spiritual autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, a few years ago, I made a life-changing choice to be driven by love instead of by the debilitating frustration and impatience of anger. I also identified a feared possible self of losing my loved ones and myself to death. By becoming more spiritually grounded and in control of my mental illness, I have learned to develop a newer possible self who is more resilient and accepting of death, even of those most dear to me. In this way, personal stories set in the context of personal shadows have served as a vehicle for me to learn about my feared and hoped-for possible selves and thus make adjustments to develop into the person I choose to become. In other words, I have developed through the narration of my life events.

\*

\*

\*

\*

Narrative research and inquiry are philosophically grounded in hermeneutics and pragmatism (Clandinin, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) ground narrative research in the interpretive philosophy of hermeneutics: "Because the 'text' of the story forms the data set for what is analyzed in this type of research, the philosophy of hermeneutics, which is the study of written texts, is often cited as informing narrative inquiry" (p. 34). Clandinin (2013) goes further to claim that pragmatism, with its focus on learning from lived experiences, is the philosophical foundation of narrative inquiry. This pragmatic-hermeneutic



foundation, then, provides a base from which narrative inquiry serves as both a form of adult learning and a research methodology.

As a result, life events are situated within a broader landscape in which personal narratives connect with identity development over time amidst shadows (Ellis, 2002; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Poulos, 2012; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Narrative inquiry is also interdisciplinary because it uses available tools to analyze stories. In this research, an auto-biographical approach allows the researcher-participant to analyze personal stories "in terms of the importance and influence of" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 35) several factors to include family, life events, turning points, transitions, relationships, and challenges (see also Denzin, 2014). This linkage of narrative inquiry to the life events perspective in adult development is a foundation of the research framework.

### **Self-narrative Practices as Vehicles for Adult Learning Over a Lifespan**

Human beings naturally tell stories to construct coherent meaning from lived experiences within a space that is temporal, interactive, and situated (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clark, 2001; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Randall (1996) concludes, "By interfacing life and story, then, two otherwise separate realms, we set off a shower of alluring possibilities for understanding the meaning-making mechanisms that are central to being human" (p. 226). In other words, re-storying lived experience is how people learn and create meaning in a fundamental way. This narrative learning process informs the self-concept over life spans in social and personal contexts (Bruner, 1997; Clark, 2001). In a sense, adult learners collect any available puzzle pieces—i.e., lived experiences of various life events over time—and kluge them together in a fashion that synthesizes meaning for their life courses. Narratives not only facilitate learning in a natural manner, but they can facilitate teaching—and thereby understanding—through the interpretation

of story (Gudmundsdottir, 1991). Habermas' (1984) analysis of communication as an activity of learning entails a retrospective of past experience with present life, engendering the potential power of self-dialogue in narrative research over time. Adult educators apply the tenets of developmental models, and "a narrative approach to adult development...holds rich potential for enhancing our understanding of adult learners and the possible roles educators might play in learners' developmental processes" (Rossiter, 1999a, p. 56). In other words, narrative learning has a strong connection to identity development (Clark, 2001).

Narrative inquiry and pedagogy can help adult learners empathize with others, fostering the professional education, learning, and identity of students in fields requiring decisive action (Gazarian, 2010; Hanson, 2013). Adult learners who tell stories about their learning experiences have described the learning process as multifaceted, relational, interactive, experiential, and sometimes transformative (Kear, 2009). Narrative ways of learning over a life course have "very strong links to both adult development and transformational learning" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 213) because narratives focus on discerning meaning from lived experiences and choices over time. In this context, reflection is a key attribute to learning. C. Taylor (1989) emphasizes how reflexivity in adult learning can be an epistemological and ontological experience. Not surprisingly, an emergent theme related to adult education research regards auto-narrative methods in the promotion of transformative learning.

Self-authored adults can use narrative activities such as autoethnography to help integrate identity development, self-esteem, and lived experience over time through a methodology of reflexive self-dialogue to create layered, complex storied meaning in a social context (Attard & Armour, 2005; Barner & Barner, 2011; Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010; Brookfield, 2011; Cranton, 1994/2006; Demuth & Keller, 2011; Ellis, 1991; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011;

Giddens, 1991; Habermas, 1984; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Kegan, 1982; Kroger & McLean, 2011; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; McAdams, 2012; McAdams & Logan, 2006; Merriam & Clark, 2006; Mezirow, 1978, 2003; Orth & Trzesniewski, 2010; Pals, 2006; Pelias, 2013; Poulos, 2009; Randall, 1996; Ronai, 1995, 1996; Ross & Wilson, 2012; Ryan, 2012; Sykes, 2014; C. Taylor, 1989; Watt, 2007; Weg, 2011). Giddens (1991) suggests that, in modern society, there is a linkage between autobiographical practice, narrative, and the realization of self-identity through sociological introspection. More specifically, autoethnography using adult learning theory as a framework has been used as a rigorous means to examine cultural roles, identity development, and meaning creation (Sykes, 2014).

Autoethnography, in this personalized context, can inform an examination of one's journey of identity development. As this research illustrates, postmodernism "regards developmental trajectories of transformation as misguided and believes that narratives of personal transformation must be analyzed as fictional works of art, not empirically accurate descriptions" (Brookfield, 2010, p. 77). Put another way, developmental narratives are individual in nature, but they are not generalizable to a population and may not indicate future behavior. Autoethnography is anti-positivist in that it literally embraces the intimate linkage between the subject and object of research (Schwandt, 2007). Newman (2012) does not explicitly argue against the premise that spirituality in the context of adult education is linked to meaning construction and identity development (English & Tisdell, 2010; Newman, 2012). Newman (2012) claims that, like autoethnographic activities, self-agentic learning occurs through a "combination of reading, discussion, analysis, and writing" (p. 50). Self-narratives still have a role to play in lifelong learning.

Narrative learning allows adult educators to design a multidimensional space in which learners can use stories to develop “cognitive abilities and knowledge in action, supporting processes of meaning construction through risk education contexts” (Gaeta et al., 2014, p. 620; see also Collins & Peerbolte, 2012). Hence, narratives permit learning from personal experience in particular social contexts. For example, digital storytelling strategies have shown promise in teaching health-care professionals and in developing their cognitive decision making skills in complex environments (Gazarian, 2010). Adult learners can gain several benefits from constructing their own meaning through personal journals and other autobiographic learning activities. Dirkx (2001) explains that making meaning through possible selves “reflects a complex and dynamic interaction between the learners’ unconscious inner selves and their conscious selves” (p. 16). Pelias (2013) likens autoethnographic practice to an archeological dig in which the treasure sought consists of personal meaning and clarity: “This digging into the personal is what lets the self unfold, discover itself, and put itself on display. With luck and labor, the archeological effort exposes what was previously hidden and elusive and makes public the unspoken and forbidden” (p. 387). Dirkx (2001) suggests that such an awareness of one’s unconscious identity, in lieu of a significant life event, can lead to assumption questioning and eventually learning.

The close relationship of personal narratives and identity illustrates that how adults craft and tell their stories influences their identity development over time (Clark, 2001; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Autoethnographic practice provides great promise for researchers of adult learning because of its narrative nature. Writing about personal experiences can document the past but also permit re-examination for future application. Colyar (2013) suggests that in “autoethnography, writing is not a separate act, but a process that supports, or perhaps

constitutes, the self and the sociocultural connection” (p. 368). In this sense, autoethnography offers a unique way to construct meaning of personal development over time. "From an appreciation of narrative as central to human meaning making, it follows that we can understand human development and identity itself from the narrative perspective" (Clark & Rossiter, 2006, p. 20) in the unique cultural contexts which we live (McAdams, 2012). That is, the autobiographical story an adult constructs of his life events over the life course becomes his narrative, a coherent whole that is composed of many parts and that can fit together in numerous ways. As a result of this review of the literature, it is evident that there needs to be further discussion of the nexus of life events, self-concept, and autoethnography.

### **The Bildungsroman: Linking Identity Development to Adult Learning**

The researcher illustrates the value of autoethnographic practice for contemporary adult learners by illustrating how it has promoted his identity development over three decades within the literary framework of a bildungsroman. The bildungsroman model is an appropriate venue for this research because it represents coming-of-age experiences from a retrospective and introspective stance. So, the literary tool links the researcher-participant’s autoethnographic research approach to his personal experiences.

A key theme in this life story as bildungsroman is the need for structure in the face of ever present uncertainty. A mental illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), exacerbates this sense of uncertainty to—at times—the point of paralysis and indecision. This continuous cycle of what-if thinking has drained a lot of energy, hope, and faith from the researcher-participant and his wife. And yet, they have struggled together and have steadfastly remained united. It has not been an easy process to cope with the doubting inherent to OCD because it has harmed the marriage and the researcher-participant’s self-concept, leaving a mark on the

relationship. At the same time, the couple collaboratively learning to cope with the disorder has made the relationship more resilient. Furthermore, crafting and sharing the bildung narrative of his developmental experiences has allowed the researcher-participant to not only recall those transformative life events but also has reminded him of his roots in a self-agentic, affective, and emancipatory way (Gillis, 2014; Sameshima, 2007). Much like he gained an epistemic possession of his grandfather's life story when he inherited his autobiography, the researcher-participant's bildungsroman has exposed many of the buried assumptions concerning his development over time. In this context, the bildungsroman in this research is represented by the fragmented narrative of particular life events recorded during periods of development situated at the intersection of identity development and adult learning.

Identity development and adult learning meet at the vague border between the disciplines of developmental psychology and adult education. Both identity development and adult learning occur over time, are uniquely human activities, and incorporate a process of fundamental transformation through “the interpretation of [and response to] life events” (Kroger & McLean, 2011, p. 175; see also Erikson, 1959/1980). Rather than seeking a universal truth through positivist methodology, contemporary scholars have discovered deeper layers of meaning in identity development and adult learning through narrative inquiry and autobiographical research methods (Lim, 2011; McAdams, 2012; Polkinghorne, 1995). Not only has the narrative become an accepted method to organize life experiences in a social-cultural context, but it has also made narrative inquiry—even private journaling in informal settings—relevant to adult development and informal learning (Clark, Merriam, & Sandlin, 2011; Demuth & Keller, 2011). Furthermore, such personal stories can become theories themselves (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) which “constitute the self in that they bring together various experiences and establish coherent connections among

them” (Demuth & Keller, 2011). Thus, in autoethnography, the researcher-participant becomes the thread that interweaves among theory, life events, and their created meanings.

Few areas of adult development illustrate the challenges and opportunities of narrative research more than faith development. In the context of this study, faith development pertains to the spiritual and moral development of individuals in particular social-cultural contexts by searching for meaning over a life course (Day, 2011; Fowler, 1981). Faith development presents a challenge because there exists no standard definition amongst scholars from various disciplines (Day, 2011). Fowler (1981) has developed stages of faith development based upon Levinson et al.’s (1976) concept of ego development and Erikson’s (1959/1980; see also Marcia & Josselson, 2013) vision of identity construction to clarify the concept (Day, 2011). A challenge in describing faith development paradigms is understanding the potential for inconsistent performance across age-stage decalages and by individual circumstances (Day, 2011). Conversely, faith development presents researcher-participants with unique opportunities to emancipate their self-concepts through reflection, to develop moral judgment, and to create more coherent narratives of meaning (Fowler, 1981). For instance, Day (2011) describes the strong connection between development and learning through religious experiences; and Tisdell (2003) explains that adult education researchers need to examine the nexus of “the cultural dimension of spirituality and the spiritual dimension of culture” (p. ix). By better understanding challenges and opportunities in adult development and learning, researchers can consider other venues for identity development.

Rather than rely strictly on phasic-stage models of development, some developmental scholars have focused on life transitions. For example, Schlossberg (2011) investigates how life transitions—e.g., moving, changing jobs, changing marital status, death, diagnosis, etc.—can

affect “one’s roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions” (p. 159; see also Clark et al., 2011). These life events that entail transition and challenge not only lead to identity development but also to learning opportunities (Clark et al., 2011; Kroger & McLean, 2011; Levinson et al., 1976). In other words, an individual can develop his/her self-concept or identity over time by understanding his/her alternating life structure or pattern of calm and adversity (Kroger & McLean, 2011). This developmental process is not teleological, following a sequence of steps; rather, it is an iterative process of growth and meaning that continues throughout one’s life span.

Narratives can assist the researcher-participant in understanding the continuous process of identity development. Developmental life stories such as bildungsromans can help integrate diverse themes, reflect social relationships, situate experiential learning, and document change over time (Demuth & Keller, 2011; McAdams, 2012; Michelson, 2013). In this context, narrative inquiry offers a particular opportunity to better understand the researcher-participant’s story and how its meaning may resonate for the audiences. Furthermore, the Life Events Perspective of adult development complements autoethnographic methodology because both frameworks situate “individuals and...development in cultural and historical contexts” (Hutchison, 2005, p. 143; see also Goodall, 2006). As such, the theoretical framework informs the methodology.

### **Methodological Framework**

This section highlights narrative inquiry, and autoethnography in particular, as a methodology for the research. Based upon the personal narratives, the first section will describe the research design and alignment within the context of autoethnography as a qualitative methodology. This sets the foundation for examining autoethnography as a form of narrative inquiry. The following section addresses adult development over a life span and segues into a section discussing how autoethnography can help adults develop over time.



Qualitative research provides space in which researchers can concurrently construct meaning as participants, often with an ability to explore the diverse perspectives from inside-looking-out and outside-looking-in (Bhattacharya, 2013; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Qualitative inquiry provides the researcher space in which she can carefully describe and thus explore life events at a richer and deeper level (Eyring, 1998). MacLure (2011) notes that to question foundational assumptions in qualitative representation, a researcher must do more than experiment with language (e.g., ethnodrama, autoethnography); rather, she must remember that language and bodies are interrelated and that meaning emanates from an understanding of the two. The narrative symbolizes the inherently unique process by which adults learn and develop over a life span (Clark, 2010; Freeman, 1997). Narrative research, then, entails a hermeneutic approach to studying people in the context of and interpreting meaning from their lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Freeman, 1997). There is little consensus among educational researchers as to the need for “standards of evidence” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 25) in qualitative inquiry, but the turn towards the narrative—despite recent quota-driven legislation such as *No Child Left Behind*—has maintained momentum perhaps because of its unrestrictive approach toward understanding lived experiences at a deeper level (see also Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lyons, 2007).

In this narrative context, analysis entails a necessary collaboration between the researcher and participant(s) because examining stories of change, identity, or coping may reveal insights into particular societies or individuals over time (Clandinin, 2013; Riessman, 2002). Riessman (2002) takes a social constructionist point of view of narrative analysis. "Personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce the past as it was" (Riessman, 2002, p. 705).

This description alludes to a basic assumption in narrative analysis: "The meanings of life events are not fixed or constant; rather, they evolve, influenced by subsequent life events" (Riessman, 2002, p. 705). While some may shy away from an introspective way of knowing, the preponderant body of feminist academia believe that narrative inquiry can inform theory by asserting diversity, relationships, and the co-construction of knowledge by subjects-objects (Helle, 1991). Narrative inquiry, and autobiographical practice in particular, can allow the researcher-participant to construct a research space that offers a holistic perspective on the complex and layered experiences of life (Cardinal, 2010). Riessman (2002) concludes that personal narratives—"the stories we tell to ourselves, to each other, and to researchers—offer a unique window into these formations and reformations..." (p. 705). Put another way, adults can learn by creating and retelling stories. Narrative learning is qualitative inquiry and interpretive analysis at their most human level.

### **Why Narrative Inquiry?**

This section describes the rationale for using narrative inquiry in terms of the roles of personal narratives and of autoethnography. Both devices require of the researcher-participant a degree of humility, courage, and open-mindedness because she must be ready to confront all life events head on. Narrative inquiry is grounded in the assumption that personal stories can help adult learners interpret lived experiences and thus lead to a deeper understanding of life events (Clandinin, 2013; Ricoeur, 1976; Squire, 2013). Narrative inquiry is both a methodology and an object of research because the metaphorical, richly descriptive nature of stories facilitates discovery of themes and patterns as well as new perspectives of the data interpreted (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Richards, 2009). The recent turn toward narrative research is documented and entails a particular interactive relationship between researchers and the objects of study (Huber,

Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The interpretive aspects of discerning meaning from lived experiences translates into adult development and drives the value of narrative inquiry in adult education (Lyons, 2007). Additionally, Huber et al. (2013) note the use of intersectional narratives to explore rich, layered social relationships and psychological phenomena. Pelias (2013) believes that autoethnographic practice requires an openness to reflection, awareness, and thus some personal risk; it requires humility and commitment rather than "narcissism, or navel-gazing" (p. 387). Narrative inquiry, and autoethnography in particular, increasingly offers social science researchers with the opportunity to experience therapeutic effects within a wide spectrum of social-cultural contexts including shadows, death, and serious illness (Smith-Sullivan, 2008).

Narrative grounds identity development and transformative learning through its linkage of experience to adult learning (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). By reflectively storying their lives, adult learners can create their own meaning and identity in terms of life events, empathy, and active listening (McAdams & Logan, 2006; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Mezirow (2003) describes transformative learning based on communication and concludes that qualitative research methodology is appropriate when trying to understand such communicative learning. This conclusion corroborates the use of rhetorical narrative analysis methods to identify the underlying structures of communicated meaning—i.e., logical flow of transcripts, personal narratives, and intersectional narratives. Both personal narratives and autoethnographic writing serve to promote the analytical process of narrative inquiry in this project.

### **What is Autoethnography?**

Autoethnography is a narrative mode of qualitative inquiry that stories lived experiences into vividly imaged meaning. It is intentionally not positivist because it seeks to interpret

multiple truths situated in unique environments in order to evoke meaning through open, non-hierarchical dialogue (Bochner, 2013). It is not autobiography—although it is autobiographical in its portrayal of specific life events—because the researcher-as-participant seeks truth in particularly vulnerable, shadowed spaces to better understand social-cultural phenomena while evoking a visceral response in readers. It encompasses stories that "do the work of analysis and theorizing" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 436) to construct meaning (Barbosa & Amaral, 2010; Boylorn, 2013). In other words, autoethnography allows a researcher to be the participant who, by narratively communicating his lived experiences, reminds audience members they are not alone.

Autoethnography provides muted sufferers with a unique and powerful opportunity to come out of the shadows, take off masks of social acceptability, and express their true selves in a constructive manner. There "is little research that discusses... [anxiety disorders] from a personal point of view" or from a care giver's perspective (Congdon, 2014, p. 5). There are different faces of suffering in mental illness, and writing about the intrinsic identity struggles can lead to greater clarity:

By writing multiple selves into my story...the lines between cultural insider and outsider are blurred. My "self" in this text, then, takes on a postmodern and posthumanist character...as opposed to a kind of singular, coherent, or true identity. (Brooks, 2011, p. 251)

In other words, the concept of possible selves can play a major role in discerning identity development through autoethnographic inquiry.

Autoethnography as method can also help unveil psychological masks that cover shadows. "People who have experienced certain forms of mental illness...try to put on a show

when faced with social situations; they try to hide behavior that would be deemed inappropriate by society" (C.F. Brooks, 2011, p. 254). In this sense, they are motivated to avoid social stigma and wear masks to cover up the behavior. But autoethnographic practice can help adults learn about their disorders in order to cope with and perhaps fight them. Brookfield (2011), in his own description of his struggles with clinical depression, implies that other mental illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, present opportunities for significant adult education research.

In the tumultuous and anxiety-filled world of sufferers, narrative inquiry may help set the context for a story of pilgrimage—i.e., personal development over a life span—in time and space.<sup>26</sup> In one aspect, the researcher-participant is a pilgrim moving against gravity. In another aspect, the pilgrim advances forward in distance, only to be held back by psychological baggage, regret, or even mental illness. In this respect, the pilgrim's path is unpredictable and inherently difficult, leading to any possible outcome in terms of personal development (Culkin, 2013b). While there may be a risk in the exclusivity of writing (Derrida, 1979), this narrative inquiry seeks to craft a counter-narrative that embraces inclusion by questioning socially prevalent traits. As a result, narrative theory and its emphasis on social performance can enhance higher education by allowing teachers to scaffold and set the social-cultural parameters within which empowered adult learners can create their own meaning (A. Jones, 2011). In this sense, personal narratives provide a venue to examine past meaning structures while concurrently creating new ones.

The personal narrative is set within an academic context. A discussion of autoethnography, self-narrative reflections, and gaps in current literature interweave with

---

<sup>26</sup> For example, Carmelites, a religious order of lay people, followed a narrative and realized early in their existence that they could develop their own identity in their own ways through narratives (Ackerman, 1995).

personal life events. As a result, the theoretical and methodological frameworks are discussed along with the methods of collection, analysis, and representation of the data—all within the personal stories. Goodall (2008) observes that narratives “*are* our way of knowing” (italics in original, p. 15) because of their power to change one’s life and those of others. Additionally, autoethnography offers the space to re-story lived experiences to present meaning from a collaboration of sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Clandinin, 2013). Ethnographic writing represents culture, and ethnographic stories can simultaneously address the meaning and personally situated context of the researcher’s voice (Goodall, 2010). This suggests, by extension, that autoethnography can help situate a researcher-participant in his cultural contexts to develop a unique voice. In this context, this narrative inquiry provides a research space in which the researcher-participant can learn about himself and share that rich meaning with others. Rather than generalizing the research findings to a larger population, the goal of this project is the transfer of “understanding and knowledge...applied in similar contexts and settings” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). It is up to the reader to determine how transferable this narrative research will become.

Let’s tell a story and ask, *What if?* ....

### **Autoethnographic Narrative as Inquiry**

Adult learners can use introspective processes such as autoethnography to “generate interpretive materials from self and others useful for understanding the lived experience of emotions” (Ellis, 1991, p. 23; see also Dirx, 2006). In this research, narrative inquiry through autoethnography is an interpretivist approach that serves as the methodological framework. Autoethnography is both a methodology and a result and thus functions well as a tool for implementing the methodology. It is a narrative methodology which focuses on both the subject

and object while following the urge to explore constructed meaning in a unique culture (Chang, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Pelias, 2013; Poulos, 2009; Schwandt, 2007). It enjoins the natural tendency to story our lives in order to derive meaning from them. This introspective process results in a narrative that attempts to tell a story of lived experience, self-dialogue, and reflexive learning. Autoethnography may be characterized by four qualities: 1) a first-person perspective; 2) a narrative that concentrates on a “single case extended over time” (Ellis, 2004, p. 30); 3) data represented by a prosaic narrative with a complete plot, highlights of personal and often emotional episodes experienced by the researcher-participant; and 4) the interactive relationship between the writer and readers. By storying one’s experiences, a person seeks to integrate autobiographical writing or introspective journaling with ethnography—i.e., examination of the world “beyond one’s own” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16) linked to theory (see also Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011; Poulos, 2009). Ellis (2004) further describes autoethnography as the following:

...research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing. (p. xix)

In other words, autoethnography seeks to understand through storied experience the development of oneself over time within the context of a particular socio-cultural environment. If autoethnography is a narrative method for adult development, if self-authorship is a result of development (Baxter Magolda, 2008), and if transformative learning is a form of long-term development, then autoethnography can facilitate adult learning over a lifespan toward self-authorship.

One avenue that researchers in adult education are moving along is narrative theory. Clark & Rossiter (2008) believe a narrative approach to learning can enhance transformative value: "We believe it [i.e., narrative learning] can enrich adult education practice by enabling us to use stories more intentionally and effectively because narrative learning theory helps us understand how this learning works" (p. 69). Narrative learning relies upon reflective activities that can facilitate transformational learning and the self-construction of meaning (Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Clark, 2006; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). People can better evaluate and discover their storied experiences when they are written or presented (Richardson, 2001). "People story their experience and their understanding of themselves, and they live by those stories and in a real sense are those stories" (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 161). Identity development then entails re-storying identities and life events because it "requires a major reconfiguration of the narrative in order to create a new sense of coherence" (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 162). The inherent linkage of narrative theory to the life course and identity development provides an appropriate platform for this study.

Narrative inquiry entails "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) in order to understand experience and relate to it in time and space. Autobiographical writing "is a way to write about the whole context of a life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 101). There is no one way to represent a life autobiographically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this sense, autobiographical narrative inquiry is a possible way to represent possible selves and voices over a life span. Adults learn and understand experiences through narrative over their life spans. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe how narrative inquiry naturally stems from how human beings intuitively learn:



We might say that if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively. For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities. (p. 17)

In this sense, adults learn narratively, piecing lived experiences into narratives to construct meaning for current and future use (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). By referring to these continuities over their life spans, adult learners can plan their lives with the understanding that change is always possible.

Merriam and Clark (2006) examine how narratives link to transformative and, thus, developmental learning. They assume that narrative and adult learning are invariably rooted in constructivist epistemology. Merriam and Clark (2006) explain that Mezirow developed transformative learning theory to "understand how people create meaning from their experience--and his process is cognitive and highly rational" (p. 35). They conclude that narrative relates lived experience to deeper learning and self-constructed meaning in a more personalized context. Merriam and Clark (2006) refer to Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) use of a "bricoleur," coined by Levi-Strauss (1966, p. 17), to describe the "process of narrative identity construction" (Merriam & Clark, 2006, p. 37). As a metaphor, the bricoleur is an individual in a closed system who "is involved in something like an interpretive salvage operation, crafting selves from the vast array of available resources, making do with what he or she has to work with in the circumstances at hand, all the while constrained, but not completely controlled, by the working conditions of the moment" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 153; see also Levi-Strauss, 1966). Put another way, adult learners actively and continually construct their own developmental meaning by storying

the reflections of their lived experiences within their immediate contexts. Autoethnography exemplifies this introspective process of identity development through narration.

Narrative inquiry ties together lived experiences into an integrated meaning, enabling personal stories to lead us into greater understanding of human behavior (Polkinghorne, 1995). In narrative inquiry, a three-dimensional model employing the aspects of situation, interaction, and continuity is often used to incorporate the experiential foundation into the process of answering the research questions (Cardinal, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Using Dewey's ontology of experience as a foundation, narrative research can define its space among three dimensions: social interaction, temporality, and the situational context of lived experiences (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Figure 3.2 Research Space of Narrative Inquiry illustrates how the process of narrative inquiry fits within the epistemic construct of this multidimensional research space. The challenge was to analyze the raw data from a variety of appropriate sources to better understand personal and social experiences through a rigorous methodology.

Figure 3.2 Research Space of Narrative Inquiry

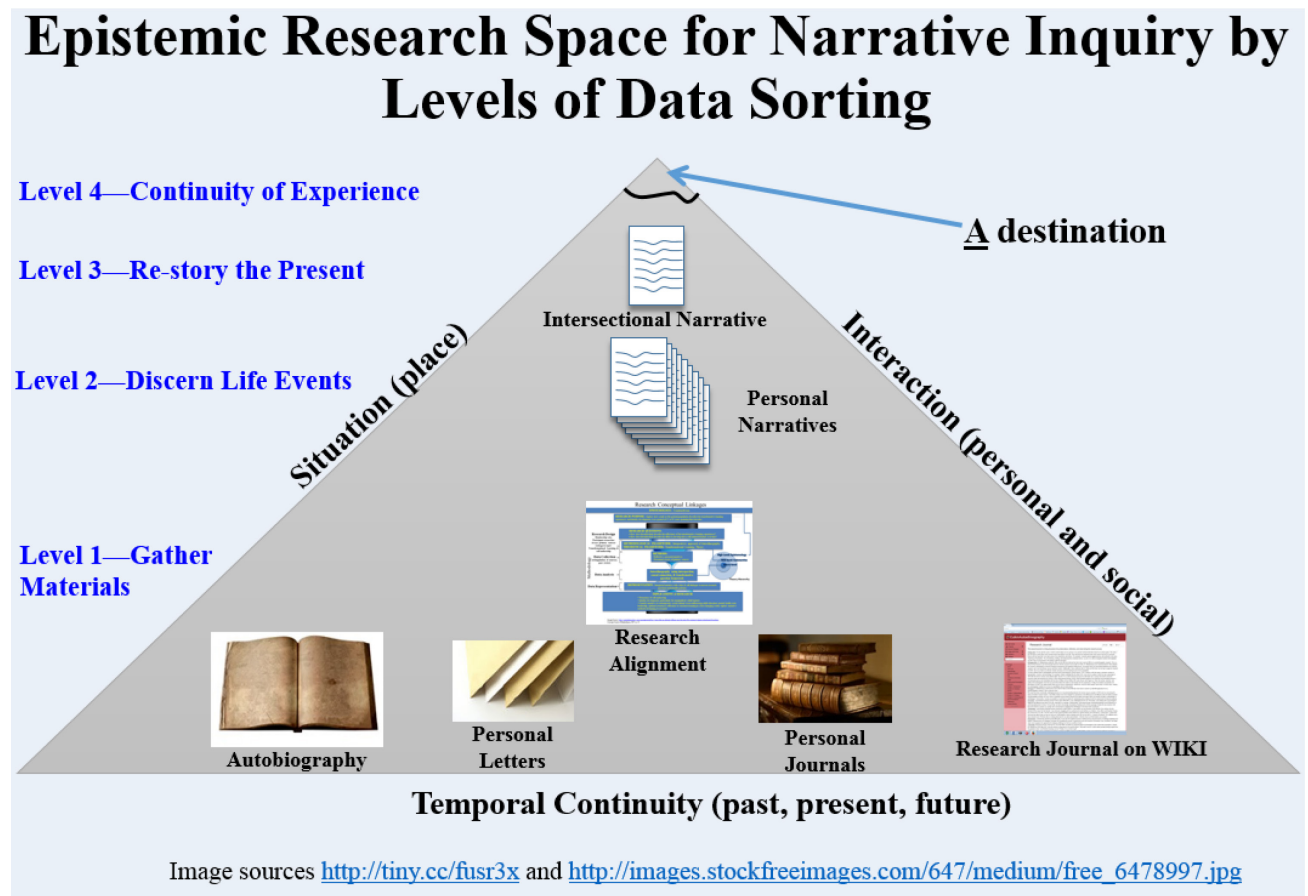


Figure 3.2. Narrative inquiry has a particular space in which the researcher can analyze raw data and ultimately represent its unique representations through a rigorous process. This project consists of four levels of data sorting. The narrative framework of pilgrims telling their tales is a metaphor for a journey to discern meaning, especially through possible selves. In this context, the data organization (i.e., four levels on the left) and representation (i.e., products in the middle) sometimes overlap.

To apply this methodology within the appointed research space, the researcher used four levels of data sorting. The process was not sequential or linear; in fact, each level was iterative, and reframing often occurred between them. Over time, the iterations of data organization helped to tie together the emergent puzzle pieces in the research space. This narrative inquiry incorporates narrative autoethnographic methods ensconced in three specific cultural contexts (in print, Bhattacharya, 2007). These three cultures entail the mentally ill, spiritual pilgrims, and mourners/adult orphans. This multidimensional approach to data sorting lends itself well to

intersectional data representation because it examines several layers of meaning (Boylorn, 2009, 2013). Furthermore, life events adequately serve as analytical units when they help focus on personal stories of interaction, continuity, and situation in the context of these three social cultures (Dewey, 2008; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

The first level of data sorting involved gathering raw data (e.g., personal feelings, recollections, memories, emotions, and opinions on life experiences) from over three decades of journaling. This level of sorting highlighted the purpose and context of narrative inquiry, and autoethnography in particular; the research alignment; and results addressing the research purpose and questions. The journal entries constituted an initial level of narrative analysis through the recollection of selected personal experiences in terms of time, space, and relation to others (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). These experiences constituted components of complexity in a life course (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979; Levinson et al., 1976). The raw data came from a research journal, analytic field notes (Saldana, 2003), personal correspondence, personal journals, and the researcher-participant's grandfather's autobiography.<sup>27</sup> The research journal assisted in maintaining an audit trail of key decisions, errors, and lessons learned throughout the process; and the triangulation of sources enhanced the reliability of the analysis (Culkin, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This analytical process was iterative, allowing the researcher-participant to continuously reframe understanding and context. Furthermore, by scoping a review of the raw data to focus on personal and social aspects of his experiences (Dewey, 2008) over a span of three decades, the researcher-participant was better positioned to learn through narrative inquiry during subsequent levels of data organization.

---

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix A for a complete list of personal sources.

The second level of data sorting involved the discernment of key life events—especially those characterized by transitions and challenges. This process included writing narratives of key personal and social events derived from the primary sources and results in emergent cultural themes of mental illness, grieving, and spiritual development as well as possible selves. These lived experiences lead to learning (Dewey, 2008), highlight possible selves along with tensions and frictions (Clandinin, 2013; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), and add components of complexity (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). This level of data sorting included identifying patterns and threads in these life events through causal analysis (McAdams, 2012; Pals, 2006), including personal responses and coping mechanisms across the personal narratives (Bridwell, 2012). In short, it involved an interpersonal dialogue among past-present-future possible selves.

The third level of data sorting entailed re-storying the present in the form of an intersectional narrative that addressed the research questions and illustrated key implications. This narrative described the patterns and threads among the identified tensions and three cultural contexts (Clandinin, 2013, see p. 192). Denzin's (2014) biographical approach to autoethnography helped the researcher focus analysis on life events such as transitions, turning points, and/or challenges. In this level of data sorting, the researcher-participant crafted an intersectional narrative concerning three overlapping themes that correspond to the cultural context of this research: mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death. To accomplish this intersectional analysis of life events, Mattsson (2014) suggests a 3-step method: 1) identify and describe—preferably in writing—the incident in detail, 2) critically reflect on the description by focusing on power relationships among the key factors, and 3) re-story feasible, "new and emancipating strategies for theory and practice" (p. 13). In this autoethnographic study, the intersectional method can readily apply to the interplay among the three key cultural factors of

mental illness, spiritual development, and grief as depicted in the personal tales. Rather than being connected by a thread of power relations inherent to social change theory, they are instead connected by invisible wounds of life events inherent to these cultures. The emergent concept of the researcher-participant's identity lies at the nexus of these three cultures over time. In this sense, he retells his personal stories with the connective tissue of the analytical insights gained during the autoethnographic process.

The fourth and final level of narrative data sorting consisted of exploring the continuity of experience by describing the way ahead. Dewey (2008) described this phenomenon as a process of lifelong learning through “the reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience” (p. 71). In other words, adults continuously learn from their lived experiences over their life spans. Thus, personal stories beget stories just as life events generate new lived experiences. The triangular symbology infers personal meaning in terms of time (Temporal Continuity), place (Situation), and relational contexts (Interaction). In this context, the levels of data sorting—with their iterations of refined narratives—overlapped with data representation.

### **Autoethnography as a Vehicle for Personal Development in Adults**

The first theme that emerges from the literature concerns autoethnographic practice as a way for adults to grow and develop. Autobiographical narrative methods can foster adult development and learning (i.e., transformation) through the communication and reflection of lived experience in space and time (Ellis, 2004; Lim, 2011; Preston, 2011; Rifa-Valls, 2011; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Such narrative tools can examine self-authorship and personal identity by allowing adult learners to reflect on lived experiences, particularly personal stories of transition and challenge, for the purposes of self-improvement and healing over time (Adler et

al., 2015; Candy, 1991; Ellis, 2004; Poulos, 2009; Pourreau, 2014; Richardson, 2001). This self-directed reflective process, in turn, promotes identity development, deeper learning, self-esteem, and the perception of greater control over the environment (Barber et al., 2013; Kegan, 1994; McAdams, 2012; Mezirow, 1981; Orth & Trzesniewski, 2010; Pourreau, 2014; Richardson, 2001). This sense of control can be therapeutic or destructive based upon the degree of perceived control and liberation (Freire, 1970/2011; Infurna et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2010). Additionally, by presenting complex experiences that overlap other experiences and perceptions, an autoethnographer can facilitate deeper learning and share a “continuous dialectic of experience” (Ronai, 1995, p. 396) with the reader in a layered narrative (Attard & Armour, 2005; Poulos, 2009; Ronai, 1996). This attitude of self-development aligns with the humanist educational philosophy.

Autoethnography is fundamentally a humanist endeavor in which the participant seeks to self-actualize by understanding his individual situation in a deeper social-historical context from a position of vulnerability. Rogers and Russell (2002) suggest that the

...fully functioning person is open to his or her experience—is able to accept the self as is, with failings and positive and negative feelings as well as positive qualities; is able to cope with life; is able to love [and] to receive love. (p. 258)

In other words, a researcher-participant must be prepared to confront his/her own shadows and possible selves to discern meaning from autoethnographic practice. This openness may include, for example, realizing that the choices and environment of one’s adolescence can influence long-term identity development. Socioeconomic conditions may indeed have psychological impacts in human development (Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2010). This openness to acceptance indicates a mature stage of development that distinguishes adults as uniquely capable learners

(Erikson, 1963); it is the essence of self-authorship. In other words, a person's ability to express himself is an indicator of maturity and aligns with a learner-centered process of self-actualization (Rogers & Russell, 2002).

\* \* \* \*

My autoethnographic practice has allowed me, in a similar vein, to examine my learning experiences in personal development through reflection. In this sense, the social phenomenon examined has been the development over time of my identity: self-authorship. The "disorienting dilemma" (Preston, 2011, p. 112; see also Clark, 1991; Mezirow, 1981) that stimulated my interest in journaling was a long-term psychological struggle that insidiously infected all aspects of my life and resulted in the diagnosis of a mental illness about six years into my marriage. By apportioning separate reflection sections after each personal story, Preston (2011) illustrates how the voice of the researcher can explore multiple layers of meaning pertaining to a specific social-cultural phenomenon. As a result of this reflective and informal learning process, I have gained a more refined and multilayered understanding of my identity development that continues to evolve over my life span. Likewise, my attempt at self-reflexive dialogue sections in my integrated story has served a similar function by linking my past experiences to a current, deeper understanding of the surrounding "relationships and emotions" (Preston, 2011, p. 116). By establishing a dialogue among my former, current, and possible selves, I have constructed an organized data framework for transcendental understanding and continued growth.

\* \* \* \*

Autoethnography can similarly illustrate a radical approach to personal development. The narrative praxis of systemic dialogue between current and former selves can foster a liberation from the personal assumptions, obsessions, or false beliefs that can insidiously oppress one's



conscious existence. Freire (1970/2011) explains that one must actively practice a dialectic "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Furthermore, Brookfield (2011) illustrates how autoethnographic practice can enable the researcher-participant to use her "experiential authority" (p. 36) to explore the personal, emancipatory, and academic ramifications of transformative experiences for adult learners. These dialogues seem to entail the oppressed and the oppressor, stability and instability, love and anger, and selfishness and selflessness. The autoethnographic practice of reflection on past action personally experienced may very well lead to transformation through a liberation from emotional and psychological shackles, thereby promoting development through educational experiences.

Clark (2010) suggests a linkage between storytelling and identity development, that creating and sharing stories of lived experiences enables us to construct meaning in unique contexts. In essence, this is the primary process of adult education: learning to become one's possible selves through the narratives one hears, creates, and shares (Clark, 2010; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Clark (2010) specifically relates narratives to adult learning by describing the "link between learning and experience" (p. 5) since experience is the "textbook" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7) of adult education across the life span. Adult education researchers have used autoethnography to explore the identity development process. Tillotson (2012) frames her study of identity development in teacher education around transformative learning theory and the self-authorship model (Baxter Magolda, 2008) while using autoethnography as a methodology. She also organizes her dissertation according to a travel guide to Australia, a land of contrasts and irony, like her.

In summary, autoethnographic practice facilitates the study of adult development over time. Autobiographical—and, by extension, autoethnographic—narrative inquiry is linked to

adult development and learning through its grounding in an interpretivist theoretical framework and is particularly suited to investigate "adult transformation" (Lim, 2011, p. 55) over the life span.

### **Role of Personal Narratives**

Personal narratives play an integral role in this study. Adults make sense of themselves, learn from lived experiences, and develop their identities by listening to, crafting, reflecting upon, and retelling stories (Madan, 2012). This lifelong process of narrative learning and development influences mental health and resilience in particular by facilitating sympathy for others, including the mentally ill (Adler et al., 2015; Balen, Rhodes, & Ward, 2010). Personal narratives inform this adult education research through their practical functions (i.e., what they do), analytical applicability (i.e., how researchers can use them), and linkage to identity development (why use them).

First, personal narratives effectively perform several functions. Narratives link personal experiences to learning that transforms adult learners' sense of meaning in various social and cultural contexts (Bage, 1999; Barbosa & Amaral, 2010).<sup>28</sup> Narratives facilitate reflexive adult learning in dynamic contexts because both are grounded in life experiences and lead to greater awareness (Van der Merwe & Brewis, 2011). For instance, narrative pedagogical methods such as case study analysis have demonstrated effectiveness in fostering the "critical thinking skills" (Collins & Peerbolte, 2012, p. 323) of adult educators such as first-responder managers and trainers through pedagogic adjustments that "prepare students for the world of practice" (Lyons,

---

<sup>28</sup> Narratives are an essential ingredient for crafting identity development even at the national level. Capturing the spirit of George Kennan's Mr. X, Mr. Y (2011) has illustrated that narratives at the national-strategic level of public policy are needed to answer fundamental questions linking cultural values to achievable goals.

2007, p. 621). Corporations have even found that “the fragmented, collective, situated, and performative nature” (Barge, 2004, p. 106) of systemic story telling can help them with identity, change, and roles in situated contexts (Riessman, 2002). Narratives allow individuals to express self-concept in creative and unique ways through the interweaving of rich context, personal experiences, and relationships (Witherell, 1991). "Narratives—in both the writing and the reading—are not responses to society but, rather, social practices within it, practices that impose a particular conception of society and a particular way of constituting the self" (Michelson, 2013, p. 203) in multiple layers of rich meaning (Sameshima, 2007). In other words, personal narratives are activities in which adult learners continuously question their individuality, society, and their role(s) in them. Storytelling can be also be used as therapy, “introducing stories or metaphors as a natural part of the discussion during the course of a session” (Weg, 2011, p. 10) or period of treatment. In this sense, the functionality of personal narratives makes them well-suited for data analysis.

Next, adult education researchers can use personal narratives as analytical tools in sundry ways to attain research purposes such as deeper understanding and emancipated voice (Cooper, 1991; Modesti, 2011; Nash, 2004). Adult education researchers have used personal narratives in a linear representation—e.g., journeys or ceremonies—but have recently discovered a three-dimensional approach by using stories as metaphors for performances of identity and social context, for the assemblage of puzzle pieces, as bildungsroman, and as cartography (Bhattacharya, 2007; Clandinin, 2013; Lander, 2000; Riessman, 2002; Sameshima, 2007). Attard and Armour (2005) present a way to craft a layered narrative that integrates personal reflections of lived experiences in learning environments so that individuals can improve as adult educators. Nash (2004) presents an autobiographical reflection of his life as an educator. By narrating his

own story, he offers a "compelling intellectual and philosophical case for the importance of personal scholarly narrative in academic research and writing" (Nash, 2004, p. vii). Other researchers analyze personal narratives in terms of a "conceptual intersection that is both literally and metaphorically linked to themes located in the discourse of interpersonal relations" (Modesti, 2011, p. ii). Journaling is a level of analysis that help us to find voice, put together loose pieces of our lives into more of a whole, reflect upon our place in culture, and learn about our self-concept (Cooper, 1991). Self-narratives arise in the context of culture and help individuals to learn about themselves and society (Demuth & Keller, 2011). This suggests that the personal journals and correspondence listed in Appendix A are an initial level of analysis and that the personal stories are the next. Through such analysis, personal narratives can inform an understanding of the process of identity development.

Finally, personal narratives open a conduit to the inner workings of identity development over long periods of time and thus can provide insight into adult development. In this context, autobiographical inquiry helps translate personal experiences into meaning and development (Lander, 2000). Writers can use writing as a reflective and developmental process:

In rewriting narratives of identity, nationalism, ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality, and aesthetics, I attempt to show (and not just tell) how transformation happens. My job is not just to interpret or describe realities but to create them through language and action, symbols and images. (Anzaldua, 2015, p. 7)

So, knowledge for Anzaldua (2015) is inherently interdisciplinary, not relegated to one category over another: "A form of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity)" (p. 119). The personal narrative is

also a tool that can challenge established social structures and thereby empower marginalized communities to find their own voices in their own socio-cultural contexts (Aguirre, 2005). Ross and Conway (1986) describe the role of personal histories as a means to understand oneself by viewing oneself over a life span. Dirkx (2006) further suggests that identity development for adult learners is a transformation that emerges from a reflective and creative—and often emotional—process of self and social awareness over a life span.

As a result, analyzing personal stories from the perspectives of the characters over time can provide keen insights into identity development (Lawler, 2012). Encountering personal narratives can also help one to better understand how one can develop his spiritual awareness in unique learning contexts (Hoffman, 2008). The analytical power of personal narrative practices can also help justify the use of autoethnography in this study which assesses life events over a span of three decades.

### **Digging to Understand**

In this project, the personal narratives integrally link to their academic contexts. The personal stories are threads of the researcher-participant's possible selves that interweave among the layered fabrics of his fragmented life narrative, one that has taken some time to compile. The Digging Deeper (in third person) sections help to augment the storied life events by injecting academic context to anchor experience to the literature. The first-person narratives provide insight into the researcher-participant's lived experiences and resultant responses. Put another way, the stories complemented by the context help form connective tissue between the bones (i.e., theoretical framework and methodology) and the hair, skin, and eyes (i.e., identity development over time). This approach to narrative research has precedence.

Interwoven narrative-academic texts help connect the coldness of academic theory to the messy and emotion-laden narratives of personal experience. Lather and Smithies (1997) compile the stories of women diagnosed with HIV, presenting a narrative inquiry that amplifies the muted voices of this marginalized group and that invites us all to confront universal challenges: death and an uncertain future. Lather and Smithies (1997) organize their narrative analysis of coping with a terminal disease by placing intertexts of academic context in between narrative chapters. The resultant effect is that the narratives of the individuals are framed in time, space, and theoretical context without disruptive interruptions. Likewise, interludes among the narrative sections serve to frame the cultural and theoretical context of the narratives without interrupting their meaning. As in Lather and Smithies' (1997) intertexts, the content is implicitly interactive between the researcher-participant and the reader. In this sense, the interwoven text sections can serve as a bridge between the personal realities described and their social-cultural implications for others.

### **Limits and Possibilities of the Study**

There are several limits of this research that will help define the long-term implications and acceptance of the research. The first limit is that the researcher-participant is new to qualitative research and will likely make some mistakes in the application of certain research principles. A second limit contains an ethical dimension. The researcher must maintain a degree of confidentiality as participant and of his family members and friends. This means he did not reveal private information that is unrelated to the study and its purpose or questions. He must also represent enough analysis to demonstrate a deep understanding of identity development over time. Since autoethnographic methodology incorporates personal materials as primary sources, it is difficult—but necessary—to realize this confidentiality-representation balance.

The possibilities of this research are expansive. First, the researcher-participant's open-minded approach to the journal materials offer a richer context for analysis. The researcher-participant created the field notes and inherited the autobiography before he decided to conduct autoethnographic research. As a result, the notes and experiences gleaned necessarily address a broad spectrum of personal experiences that extend beyond the scope of this study as delineated by the research questions. These rich and layered resources contribute to the rigor of the research design and to the depth of the analysis. Ultimately, the possible benefits of this study outweigh the limitations.

### **Cultures of Silence and Invisibility**

This section presents a review of the cultural environments of mental illness, spirituality, and death. Each aspect contributes in multi-layered and intersectional ways to invisible wounds or to silenced voices. Narrative inquiry and, more particularly, personal stories can uniquely exhibit the complex and vague nature of adult learning experiences in a cultural context (Grumet, 1991). Autoethnography provides researchers with a way to inquire into experiences of their own shadows—i.e., fears, doubts, uncertainties—by writing personal stories of disruptive life events that can help them heal and make meaning both "personally and collectively" (Ellis, 2002, p. 401; see also Poulos, 2012). In other words, writing about disturbing life events can help adult learners discern their meaning and, from emergent themes, construct lifelong self-concepts. The researcher first examines the nature of silence and then explores how and why one may wear metaphorical masks to hide from the shadows. The last section ties these concepts to adult development theory.

## **Adult Development Theory Related to Mental Illness, Spirituality, and Death**

The situated context of adult learners plays a critical role in the quality and depth of learning over time (Clark, 1991). This research addresses three cultures (of mental illness, spirituality, and death), masks, and shadows that relate to adult development theory. Considering how life events tinged in these cultures “is important to adult educators, because education provides a context where adults may consider and enact a variety of possible selves” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) in developing new self-concepts. Adult learners, in a sense, create new, emancipated concepts of their identities through adult education (D’Amico, 2004; Smith & Taylor, 2010). Much of the adult education literature addresses the emancipatory value of adult basic education (ABE) for marginalized groups in terms of overlapping factors of gender, race, or sexual orientation, but not in terms of the mentally ill or disabled. This section examines educational literature related to cultures of silence and shadows and then explores how autoethnographic practice can help adult educators respond to them.

There is room to grow in adult education literature regarding cultures of silence and shadows. Despite the emancipatory and transformative aspects of adult and continuing education (Stanage, 1986), adult learners involuntarily residing in these cultural domains can be overwhelmed. Those who suffer a mental illness can be prisoners unto themselves, trapped in a mental prison, unable to use their voices, hidden behind masks of their choosing (Brooks, 2011). Brookfield (2011) believes that clinical depression is an area of significant adult education research. This implies that other mental illnesses, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and bipolar disorder, might offer similar opportunities for researchers. As noted earlier, there is a spiritual component to such potential research. Hoelterhoff and Chung (2013) conclude that, when responding to traumatic life events, the act of "religious coping is not as significant as the



belief that one can rise above it" (p. 288)—i.e., self-efficacy. "These findings support the theory that self-efficacy is the pivotal coping factor that occurs between a death anxiety and mental health outcomes in the agentic model" (Hoelterhoff & Chung, 2013, p. 288). Stein (1987/1993) discusses the relationship between faith and death experienced in her life, that faith sustains one—and, by extension, loved ones—through death. Overall, this suggests that adults who learn to believe in their own capabilities—i.e., enhance self-efficacy—will better be able to cope with traumatic life events such as mental illness, spiritual despair, or the deaths of loved ones. Qualitative inquiry can provide focus when responding to such challenging life events.

Qualitative inquiry commonly interweaves representation and discussion within theoretical frameworks to address complex and meaningful issues in social contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, Watson-Gegeo (2005) uses narrative reflection interspersed with poetic inquiry to understand her experiences with chronic illness. As in other such articles, Watson-Gegeo (2005) is careful to discuss physical disabilities and separate them from invisible illness that may result in psychological stigma (see also D'Amico, 2004). Anzaldua (2015) grasps the depths of grief:

What you most desire is a way up, a way out. You know that you've fallen off a metaphorical bridge and into the depths. You look up toward la luna casting light in the darkness. Its bouncing light filters through the water. You want to heal; you want to be transformed. You begin the slow ascent and as you rise feel as though you're passing through the birth canal, the threshold nepantla. Only when you emerge from the dead with soul intact can you honor the visions you dreamed in the depths. (p. 133)

In this context, there is a visceral connection between grieving, soulful silence, despair, and hope. Bochner (2012) applies this darkness surrounding grief and argues that "we need to alter

medical science's conception of life as an end in itself" (p. 17). In other words, one's perception of death and grief influences how one will likely experience them. This recognition of "...our own aging and eventual death demands a re-construction of our sense of self" (Sinnott, 2009, p. 155) that is related to the construction of meaning and self-concept in the cultural contexts of death and spirituality. Put another way, qualitative inquiry involves the interpretation of meaning so adult learners can re-examine closely held perspectives on shadowed phenomena such as mental illness and death.

Narrative practice such as autoethnography provides an adult education researcher with a way to explore the dark shadows of experience such as grieving while offering a path to create a new life narrative through enhanced mindfulness (Barner & Barner, 2011; Jung, 1957/1958; McKenzie, 2015). Narratives can serve as pedagogical, learning, and epistemological tools to discover deeper layers of rich personal and communal meaning through reflection, particularly for marginalized adults (Johnson-Bailey, 2010). The activity of narration implies a public act of awareness and moral courage that, while making the subject-object vulnerable, can empower the marginalized narrator with a critical voice and an opportunity for continual re-creation (A.K. Brooks, 2000; Freire, 1970/2011). A.K. Brooks (2000) highlights the emancipatory value of narratives—and the courage it takes to make them public—to “describe the experience of subordination” (p. 153) and to give voice to one's silence. Poulos (2012) uses autoethnography to examine the uniquely human phenomenon of shadow, the darker side of ourselves that adults often choose not to confront but can function as the voice for their mental illness (Jung, 1957/1958). These disruptive life events cumulatively impact one's self-concept over a life span.

Autoethnographic methodology reveals an underlying epistemology of meaning construction and identity development through reflection upon the personal narratives of lived

experiences, especially those one would rather keep private (Poulos, 2009, 2012). Rather than being objectivist in nature, ethnography rests on an epistemology that "seeks to embrace, and possibly make storied sense of—or at least move through, into, or with—the mystery that animates human life" (Poulos, 2009, p. 47). Poulos (2009) suggests that one's identities are linked to stories: "We are, as co-narrators, ever in the act of creating new realities, narratively. We are also called, by our very storied being, to be participant-listeners in the stories of those others we encounter" (p. 133). Put in this context, autoethnographic inquiry can empower researchers-participants to develop their own self-concepts, voices, and possible selves through the examination of personal narratives and social relationships.

In this sense, autoethnographic treatment of a commonly misunderstood disorder can provide therapy for the author as well as for undiagnosed readers and their loved ones by "moving the conversation beyond the sole realm of medical or psychiatric establishments" and by considering multiple possible selves (C.F. Brooks, 2011, p. 250; see also Weg, 2011). Autoethnography is an approach to inquiry that is especially attuned to evoking the voices of participants (Boylorn, 2009, 2013; Tracy, 2010). This amplification has significant implications for participants whose voices are muffled or ignored.

Adult development theory does address significant issues concerning spirituality (English & Tisdell, 2010; Tisdell, 1999, 2003). Tisdell (1999) notes several implications of further integrating spiritual development into the dialogue of adult education: 1) search for spirituality is linked to the search for meaning and connectedness, 2) adult learners' spirituality is integral to their educational activities, 3) people develop spiritually by constructing knowledge "through images and symbols" (pp. 93-94), and 4) such meaning is inseparable from "the sociocultural context of the learner" (pp. 93-94). In this sense, adult educators have a responsibility to be

aware of the spiritual contexts in which their learners inquire and develop. Dirkx (2001) also discusses the importance of spirituality for meaning construction in adult learning environments. Spiritual development in adult learners, and adult educators in particular, can facilitate "authentic identity development" (Tisdell, 2002, p. 127) through the ongoing construction of meaning. In other words, spiritual development is closely linked to identity development.

Potentially, researchers-participants can critically reflect on the interaction of key phenomena—e.g., mental illness, grief, and spiritual awareness—by using an intersectional approach that enables them to be more aware of closely held assumptions that can unintentionally perpetuate oppressive behaviors in multiple aspects of lived experiences (Boylorn, 2009; Mattsson, 2014). In this sense, an intersectional narrative can be a powerful way to represent rich, multi-layered data from autoethnographic analysis.

### **Ignore the Mute**

The stigma of mental illness stems from a culture of fear, resulting in many people who—rather than face the perceived humiliation of seeking help—avoid the care they need to develop (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, National Institute of Mental Health, & The Carter Center Mental Health Program, 2012; President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).

\* \* \* \*

I’ll never forget the day I was diagnosed and will always remember the stigma associated with mental illness, my invisible wound.

\* \* \* \*

Stigma related to mental illness involves a culture (i.e., set of values and beliefs) of fear—a fear of "social exclusion," (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, National Institute of Mental Health, & The Carter Center Mental Health Program, 2012, p. 3; see also President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003) humiliation, or even a failure to heal that can impede prevention, therapy, and growth. To combat this insidious disorder that would tenaciously seep into every shadowland of my personality and generate fear, I resorted to journaling and poetry. Boylorn (2009) believes that poetry, just as stories, is a way to create theory and "give voice to the marginalized realities of participants' lives, therefore making poetry personal, political and theoretical" (p. 78). She uses the image of muted voices borrowed from Muted Group Theory to augment an understanding of emancipating voices in social-cultural contexts in which certain stigmatized groups have been silenced (Ardener, 2005; Boylorn, 2009, 2013; Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016). Bhattacharya (2013) also describes poetry as an arts-based methodology "to rigorously use qualitative methods to create a delicate dance between silence, voice, and secrets while representing and disrupting them simultaneously" (p. 615). In the following poem, I write from the sheer emotion of living with the stigma of mental illness and how it can suffocate:

### Stigma

I cannot go...  
won't go out;  
my brain is cracking,  
the vice clamps down

on my personhood.  
Who am I but a  
prisoner—walls  
closing in...

I can't breathe!  
I don't trust my thoughts!  
Am I bad for thinking  
these things?  
What if?

Give me peace  
and heal my wounds  
unseen, forgetting the  
stigma of avoiding help.  
Forgive me....

Poetic inquiry facilitates the analytical penetration of long-term silence, invisibility, and uni-dimensional parochialism. In this sense, it enables a researcher to discover one's voice, identity, and opportunities in a multi-dimensional space, placing a unique, holistic perspective on lived experiences over a life span (Bhattacharya, 2013; Cahnmann, 2003; Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016). Poetry is a powerful medium for understanding cultures of silence and interpreting complex and ambiguous research spaces, particularly as they affect adult learners (Bhattacharya, 2013; Cahnmann, 2003).

### **Wear the Mask**

Rogers (1961) explains that individuals often put on "false fronts" (p. 109) or masks to somehow protect themselves from perceived challenges or threats. Others cannot always see them, despite how frightening it can be to remove them. Anzaldúa (2015) explains that adding to literature of the field means a commitment to making new knowledge: "A commitment to explore untrodden caminos—which means turning over all rocks, even those with worms underneath them. You suspect that your shadow self and its darkness has more to do with creativity than your surface self" (p. 97). In other words, one must have the courage to lift his/her masks and to face the underlying shadows. As a result, adult learners want to set their own goals, but the process can be long and tortuous.

\*

\*

\*

\*

I have responded to the knowledge that I have a mental illness through an increased awareness and a positive self-concept.

### **Gaps in the Literature Present Opportunity**

While autobiographical narrative techniques are well-established in sociological and psychological literature (Ellis et al., 2011; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 2012; Richardson, 2001; Ryan, 2012), there is a gap in adult education literature on autoethnographic practice and its influence on life events, identity development, and transformative learning (Kroger & McLean, 2011). Three themes emerge from current literature in adult education and related social sciences: autoethnography as a vehicle for personal adult development, transformative learning as long-term development toward self-authorship, and self-narrative practices as vehicles for adult-driven learning over a lifespan. These themes, in turn, help define a space that must be addressed. This study can help fill that gap lying at the nexus of autoethnographic practices, identity development, and life event perspectives.

Adults, like children, develop over their life courses through continuous teaching and learning (Erikson, 1963). Erikson's theory of "life-span personality development....covers the entire life span and details expectable psychosocial crises and outcomes at different periods of life" (Marcia & Josselson, 2013, p. 617). Erikson (1959/1980) introduces the concept of identity development of young adults as a psychosocial phenomenon entailing a series of eight crises. His model of ego development was the precursor for the application of identity to human development. Identity development has evolved since Erikson's introduction of the concept. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest that focus of development research should be on certain aspects of self. Among these aspects, two apply to this research because of their emphasis on

emergent themes in autoethnography and the research questions: "sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context" and "self-acceptance and self-esteem" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 181). "Movement along this vector [self-acceptance and self-esteem] is marked by greater self-confidence, faith in one's abilities, feeling useful to others, knowing that one has valuable qualities and is basically a good person" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 200).<sup>29</sup>

Levinson et al. (1976) carry on Erikson's phasic work in ego development, but they highlight the value of a life structure: "In its external aspects it refers to the individual's overall pattern of roles, memberships, interests, condition, and style of living, long-term goals, and the like—the particular ways in which he is plugged into society" (p. 22). In this sense, life structure focuses on patterns that arise among life events that result from the personal choices we make over a life span. The life structure construct enables Levinson et al. (1976) to concentrate on the "*boundary between individual and society*" (italics in original, p. 22) rather than Erikson's focus on the ego, resulting in a more balanced approach to researching adult development (Smith & Taylor, 2010).

In short, autoethnographic learning activities could potentially help adults from diverse backgrounds to achieve Lindeman's (1926) goal of putting "meaning into the whole of life" (p. 5). Recent research in teacher education does indicate a growing acceptance of self-narratives to enhance reflection on lived experience for professional development (Attard & Armour, 2005). Lindeman (1926) views adult education as a necessary means to transform lived experience into social influence. The adult learner's role is to present his "ideas which represent his personality and which constitute his peculiar contribution to life" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 38). Lindeman (1926) concludes that adult learners need "to be educated for self-expression because individuality is the

---

<sup>29</sup> This resonates with my diagnosis, the moment I discovered that my character was not inherently bad in nature after all.



most precious gift we have to bring to the world—and further, because the personal self can never be adequately represented by proxy" (p. 38). This research project explored this learner-experience linkage within the context of the continuous development of the researcher-participant's internal voice as an adult learner.

### **Setting the Plot—The Narrative Process**

In this section, the process of this narrative inquiry is presented in logical chunks with citations and examples. Illustrating this process can help clarify several aspects of the research approach: What informs the personal narratives and the resultant analysis? How does this structure help frame the research for informing adult education? How does this help show that adult education is fundamentally about the development of possible selves (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cross & Markus, 1991; Smith & Taylor, 2010)? As a result of this review of the literature and the writing samples, the reader will have a more defined sense of the narrative process used to analyze the researcher-participant's developmental journey.

### **The Narrative Process in Adult Learning**

Sharing stories—regardless of the communicative means—remains instrumental in adult learning, potentially leading to transformative experiences, construction of deeper meaning, and the development of professional identity (Christiansen, 2011; Clark, 2010; Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Autobiographical narratives provide a useful source for narrative inquiry in education research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The acts of creating personal narratives of lived experiences, sharing them, and listening to others describe the educational process of learning. For example, writing autoethnographically about chronic, invisible illness not only offers an agentic, emancipatory opportunity for a person to tell his story in his own voice but it also can "render the writer vulnerable" (Richards, 2008, p. 1718) when communing with the healthy.

Through this process of narrative inquiry, the narrator develops his identity over time (Richards, 2008). Richards (2008) describes three types of illness autoethnography: testimony, emancipatory discourse, or destabilized narrative. While there is some overlap, this research falls somewhere at the overlapped intersection of testimony (i.e., putting pieces of life experience together in context) and emancipatory discourse (i.e., giving "voice to the voiceless" and allowing "people to say the unsayable" (Richards, 2008, p. 1722)) in unique social contexts (Grumet, 1991).

\* \* \* \*

In other words, this autoethnographic inquiry allows me to say things I have never said publicly about my illness, grief, and spiritual development in order to construct a more coherent version of myself from experiences documented over my life course.

\* \* \* \*

Narratives can link to adult learning in a manner akin to reassembling an incomplete set of puzzle pieces from all eras of one's life course (Merriam & Clark, 2006). In this sense, narrative and informal learning are invariably rooted in constructivist epistemology. Merriam and Clark (2006) explain that adult learning theory can help educators to "understand how people create meaning from their experience—and [t]his process is cognitive and highly rational" (p. 35). They conclude that narrative relates personal experience to deeper learning and self-constructed meaning. Merriam and Clark (2006) refer to Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) use of a "bricoleur," coined by Levi-Strauss (1966, p. 17), to describe the "process of narrative identify construction" (p. 37). As a metaphor, the bricoleur is an individual in a closed system who

...is involved in something like an interpretive salvage operation, crafting selves from the vast array of available resources, making do with what he or she has to work with in the circumstances at hand, all the while constrained, but not completely controlled, by the working conditions of the moment. (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 153; see also Levi-Strauss, 1966)

Put another way, adult learners actively and continually construct their own meaning by storying the reflections of their lived experiences within their immediate social-cultural environments.

Preston (2011) uses autoethnography as a narrative means—a methodology—to examine her transformative learning experiences in professional development—a "social phenomenon" (p. 110)—through reflection. Reflection is a key piece of adult transformative learning (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010). To the extent that auto-ethnography involves reflection upon experience and its underlying assumptions over time, one may say that it is transformative.

Self-concept, and the idea of possible selves in particular, plays a particularly significant role in describing the direction of adult development and well-being over one's life span (Cross & Markus, 1991). Possible selves—being the variety of concepts one could hope or fear to be—indicate personal goals set by adults to develop over time (Cantor et al., 1986). Learning about one's possible selves that emanate during different life events can help guide decisions about behavior throughout one's life span (Cantor et al., 1986). Self-concepts develop over life spans as a cumulative result of one's life events in one's unique socio-cultural contexts (Bruner, 1997). These self-concepts can be expressed narratively, seamlessly interweaving indicators of self-concept along the way (Bruner, 1997). Writing about life events and a "best possible future self" (King, 2001, p. 800) can be therapeutic, clarify goals, and examine undiscovered aspects of self-motivation.

## Collecting the Tools: Data Sources and Methods for Data Collection

In this section, the researcher-participant describes autoethnography as a method, the primary sources, threats to confidentiality and ethics, and self-imposed protocols to mitigate those risks. For this qualitative research, he employed a purposeful sample and used autoethnographic methods for data collection. As an autoethnographer, he was both researcher and participant, purposefully selecting primary sources from his sixteen journals and grandfather's autobiography to best address the research questions (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). The data collection methods included sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991; Ronai, 1996), personal narratives of private materials, research journals, and document reviews. Reflexivity through activities of collection and analysis is a fundamental element of effective qualitative research (Watt, 2007). The researcher-as-participant is uniquely qualified to facilitate self-dialogue, sociological introspection, and access to personal family materials. The broad spectrum of primary materials coupled with peer reviews enhanced the rigor of the research methodology. Table 3.1 outlines the estimated page counts for each data source.

Table 3.1

### *Data Inventory from Study*

<b>Source of data</b>	<b>Estimated number of pages</b>	<b>Page count total</b>
Grandfather's inherited autobiography	341 active* pages	1 x 341 = <b>341 active pages</b>
15 Personal journals and separate pads/pages	Varies per item. See active page counts in Appendix A.	<b>1595 active pages</b>
Personal letters and cards and <i>Journal 16</i>	1-2 pages per letter (2 total)	<b>142 active pages</b>
Research journal reflections logged in WIKI	1-2 pages est. per week 15 weeks	1 x 15 = 15, 2 x 15 = 30 <b>15-30 pages</b>
Virtual communication (e-mail, informal conversation online or via phone)	~ 5-10 pages per researcher	5 x 1 = 5, 10 x 1 = 10 <b>5-10 pages</b>
Peer debriefs and member checks	~ 1-2 pages per session ~ 1-2 meetings	1 x 1 = 1, 2 x 2 = 4 <b>1-4 pages</b>
	<b>Total Pages</b>	<b>2099-2122 pages</b>

*Note.* See operational definition for **Active Page** in Chapter 1.

The researcher followed a 39-week program of research which allowed time to design the study, collect data, and then represent analyzed data. This project (see Appendix B - Research Timeline) started with organizing the primary sources. The researcher adjusted the time line as necessary during the process and regularly kept his committee informed of progress. Theory informs this data collection process.

Chang (2013) confirms that autoethnographers often start with a reflection on their experiences or interests, can collaborate with others, and organize chunks of data to facilitate analysis. Autoethnographers often use poetry, prose, and personal narratives to express their subjectivities (Anonymous, 2015). This corroborates the methodology that focuses on personal journals and the researcher's grandfather's autobiography as primary sources and then grouping found data into synthesized personal stories of challenge or transition. Chang (2013) notes that autoethnography's purpose extends beyond "personal stories" to "expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences" (p. 108). For example, the personal stories of dealing with mental illness reflect a unique perspective on a counter-cultural narrative of mental health care access, perceptions, stigmatized barriers, and status in contemporary American society. In this way, these narratives "become vehicles for social critiques through which readers gain understandings of autoethnographers' social realities and of the social forces contextualizing their experiences" (Chang, 2013, p. 109; see also Anonymous, 2015). The researcher chose a "confessional-emotive" (Chang, 2013, pp. 118-119) style for the integrated story because it best enabled the representation of personal data in a relational way.

\* \* \* \*

For data collection, I applied self-selected criteria for the release personal facts relevant to the analysis and representation. These criteria entailed medical history, issues of emotional

sensitivity, or personal issues that would not contribute to the research. For example, I may discuss mental health issues in general, but I will not reveal prescriptions or issues that living members of my immediate family choose not to reveal. Using techniques to protect confidentiality have precedent in literature and serve to maintain the ethical rigor of the research (Anonymous, 2015). After data analysis and representation, I conducted a peer check of the methodology and analysis to help further protect the confidentiality of family members, friends, and me.

### **Sorting the Data for Narrative Analysis**

Several documents were collected during this research. The documents collected include research journal reflections and event-specific artifacts such as correspondence, drawings, and poems. These “unobtrusive” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 108, 124) data sources facilitate the triangulation of sources by augmenting the complex understanding of the targeted phenomenon through content analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In qualitative research, it is important to collect documents that offer additional context to the study in order to gain a deep understanding of the participant experiences. In this section, relevant document excerpts will be presented to further explain the process of sorting over 2,000 pages of primary materials to prepare for data analysis and representation.

The researcher-participant examined and analyzed his private documents for common themes and patterns. He investigated themes and patterns with the following analytical focus based upon the research questions: significant life events, self-authorship, transition or challenge, and causal connections. Additionally, he maintained a working online research journal on a private WIKI to monitor milestones, record analytical memos, and document key decisions.

These notes also served as data for analysis and organization and provided a transparent audit trail often lacking in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

To organize the data for analysis with rigor, the researcher-participant employed a four-level construct illustrated by Figure 3.2 Research Space of Narrative Inquiry. In the first level, he identified ten salient, found stories of transition and/or challenge (see Chapter 2 - Personal Stories and Possible Selves). Pelias' (2013) passion for literary techniques to discern meaning from lived experience is powerful and resonates with this approach to data organization. Additionally, he corroborates the use of personal stories during data analysis. This literary process helped the discernment of key personality traits such as impatience, self-centeredness, neuroticism, and anxiety with verbatim extracts from the data sources. This level data sorting provides the background and setting scoped to specific milestones in the researcher-participant's life. In the second level of data sorting, the researcher-participant identified causal connections (Pals, 2006) in the representative stories to discern emergent cultural themes related to life events of challenge and transition. These connections included coping mechanisms in response to perceived challenges or tensions, values, motives, and psychological structures of identity related to personal experiences with mental illness, spiritual development, and mourning. In a sense, this level of analysis refined the grammar of the plot. In the third level of data sorting, the researcher-participant discerned patterns across the connections and each story to create a self-dialogue centered on various "nuclear episodes" (McAdams, 2012, p. 251) that represent key milestones in his life to create an intersectional and interactive narrative (Bridwell, 2012). Using Mattsson's (2014) three-step process as a framework allowed the identification of life events, linkage of them to key patterns identified in the first two levels of analysis, and then the integration of them into a re-storied narrative. The researcher-participant also used Cranton's (2006) transformative

question framework to help create these integrated threads-episodes by highlighting instrumental and emancipatory knowledge and not communicative knowledge. Cranton's (1994/2006) reflective questions provide a methodological framework facilitating the linkage of adult learning to autoethnographic stories in order to discern patterns of self-authorship through critical reflection and discourse. In Figure 3.3, the researcher adapted Cranton's simple framework to focus on the research questions. Using this framework coupled with Hoggan's (2015) typology helped the researcher-participant select informal learning experiences related to his identity development from the general array of personal experiences.

Figure 3.3 Cranton's Question Framework Coupled with Hoggan's Typology

<p><b>Content:</b> What are the facts and assumptions concerning my learning experiences in becoming a self-authored learner over time?</p> <p><b>Process:</b> How do I verify the facts? How can I validate the assumptions?</p> <p><b>Premise:</b> Why is this knowledge significant to me? Why should/not I alter my perspective during my lifespan?</p> <p><b>Depth:</b> What evidence exists of a deep impact on an aspect of adult learning?</p> <p><b>Breadth:</b> What evidence exists that a change applies to multiple contexts over time?</p> <p><b>Self-dialogue:</b> What would my current self tell my past self?</p>
---

*Figure 3.3.* Cranton's (1994/2006) question framework helps link the research questions to the methodology. Integrating questions about depth (evidence of deep impact) and breadth (application to multiple contexts) from Hoggan's (2015) typology helps to refine this analytical tool.

The fourth and final level of data sorting forced the researcher-participant to refine his reflections by focusing on the interactive dialogue between his possible selves and his grandfather (aka, Pop-pop). This activity permitted him to craft integrated scenes that address causes and themes in terms of his learning and identity development over 23 years. The first three analytical levels help inform the fourth, Continuity of Experience, which is primarily represented in Chapter 5 - Epilogue.



Table 3.2 on the following pages summarizes the findings of the first two levels of data sorting. Note that descriptions of each personal story in Level 1 refer to the quality of breadth and depth of the life events experienced in accordance with the Cranton-Hoggan framework highlighted in Figure 3.3. Thus, the personal stories represent data of life events collected, organized, and analyzed.

Table 3.2

*Summary of Emergent Themes from All Personal Stories by the First Two Levels of Data Sorting*

<u>Story</u>		<u>Levels of Data Sorting</u>	
<b>Title</b>	<b>1-Gather Materials (primary sources organized narratively)</b>	<b>2-Discern Life Events (plots of each personal story)</b>	
<b>Airborne School</b>	This is a story of transition and persevering through mental strife accompanied by the fear of failure during summer of 1991. This experience had a deep impact on how I perceive my physical competence (depth) and continues to apply to a variety of interactions (breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scared of heights/failure</li> <li>• Regret</li> <li>• Humor enhances resilience</li> <li>• Response to failure</li> <li>• Anger --&gt; love</li> <li>• Hypersensitivity</li> <li>• Self-paced preference</li> </ul>	
<b>Marrying my Best Friend</b>	This is a story of transition into married partnership 20 years ago with the inherent challenges that overlap my professional and spiritual lives. This experience marks a decision to lead a life of love while alienating my family of origin (depth) and resonates in every facet of my life (breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-doubt</li> <li>• Prayer for stability</li> <li>• Communication leads to resilience in relationships</li> <li>• Invest in current relationships</li> <li>• Taking loved ones for granted</li> </ul>	

<u>Story</u>	<u>Levels of Data Sorting</u>	
Title	1-Gather Materials (primary sources organized narratively)	2-Discern Life Events (plots of each personal story)
<b>A Professional with Mental Illness</b>	This is a story of pervasive challenge over a long period of time. The diagnosis was life-changing (depth) and continues to challenge how I face life's complexities (breadth). It also overlaps with most other transformative experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obsessions lead to anxiety</li> <li>• Anxiety leads to destructive compulsions</li> <li>• Questioning my character</li> <li>• Feeding narcissism</li> <li>• Tough love is painful but essential for development</li> <li>• Hypersensitivity</li> <li>• Exposure response</li> <li>• Control over uncertainty</li> <li>• Slave to fear &amp; regrets</li> <li>• Prideful fear of failure</li> <li>• Mask of self-deception</li> <li>• Avoid social stigma</li> <li>• Judgment by actions, not thoughts</li> <li>• Lack of confidence in my goodness</li> <li>• Humor leads to resilience</li> <li>• Art as therapy</li> <li>• Reflection leads to development</li> <li>• Narrative practice as therapy</li> <li>• Critical thinking as cognitive development</li> <li>• Journaling as therapy and as developmental tool for critical thinking</li> <li>• Spiritual openness</li> <li>• My disease is my choice</li> <li>• Self-dialogue</li> </ul>

<u>Story</u>	<u>Levels of Data Sorting</u>	
Title	1-Gather Materials (primary sources organized narratively)	2-Discern Life Events (plots of each personal story)
<b>Adjusting to a New Job and Role</b>	After years of teaching mid-career officers in the military, I transitioned into a post-retirement job as an online instructor. This reflects trends in my life. The prospect of change in livelihood was the first time in my life that I had to compete for a job (depth). The transition from military career to a civilian job consists in a significant cultural adaptation (breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept map to make sense of overwhelming events</li> <li>• Choices define us</li> <li>• Transition fears</li> <li>• Journaling to cope with transition</li> <li>• Journaling to collect best practices</li> <li>• Innovative pedagogy</li> <li>• Journaling best practices</li> <li>• Education is a choice</li> </ul>
<b>Losing my Parents</b>	I became an orphan on 1 May 2013, the day my remaining parent died. This story relates my transition into orphanhood. This change in status directly impacts my sense of self as well as my relationship with my parents and immediate family (depth, breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orphanhood</li> <li>• Appreciate loved ones</li> <li>• Choose family</li> <li>• Avoid regrets</li> <li>• Thank loved ones</li> <li>• Be consistent, on your terms</li> <li>• Value of persistent patience</li> <li>• Reflection to cope with adversity</li> <li>• Do things on my terms</li> </ul>
<b>Major Happy</b>	This is a story my becoming a confident and innovative adult educator despite challenges inherent to institutional culture. Deciding to use narratives in an environment that shuns non-conformity was a significant challenge, but it produced immediate improvements in student learning over time and in numerous cohorts (depth, breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith in self</li> <li>• Innovative pedagogy to foster critical thinking</li> <li>• Maintain balance</li> <li>• Giving to next generation</li> </ul>

<u>Story</u>		<u>Levels of Data Sorting</u>
<u>Title</u>	<u>1-Gather Materials (primary sources organized narratively)</u>	<u>2-Discern Life Events (plots of each personal story)</u>
<b>Toxic Climate: The Presentation Hijacker</b>	One professional challenge that I faced still haunts me. A senior officer took over a presentation I was giving and then accused me of screwing it up. I still wonder how it all happened and how I could have prevented it (breadth, depth). The experience also links to an overall toxic command climate. More importantly, I compulsively ponder the negative thoughts and feelings I perceived aimed at me and if they will ever recede.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of failure</li> <li>• Abrasive with authority</li> <li>• Unbalanced expectations</li> <li>• Prideful self-righteousness</li> <li>• Self-dialogue as therapy</li> <li>• Choosing love as a motivator</li> <li>• Moving on can be difficult</li> </ul>
<b>Pop-pop's Memoir</b>	This story represents a transition in my life in which I learned more about my own history when I inherited my grandfather's autobiography after my mother's death (depth). By reviewing his autobiography, I cannot help but to see similarities between his writing experiences and my own in multiple areas (breadth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jew in Christian culture</li> <li>• Learning from mistakes</li> <li>• Role model for resilience</li> <li>• Focus on work &amp; family</li> <li>• Model for autobiography</li> </ul>

<u>Story</u>	<u>Levels of Data Sorting</u>	
Title	1-Gather Materials (primary sources organized narratively)	2-Discern Life Events (plots of each personal story)
<b>A Journey Toward Carmel</b>	<p>My spiritual journey encompasses both challenge and continuous transition. The following citation sums my journey thus far pretty well: “God is what we really need. Family gets us closer there.... God is the answer to the question: I’m thirsty but don’t know what it is” (Culkin, Journal 4, 3 August 1997). By linking my daily motivation to spiritual groundedness (depth), I can apply this ongoing learning experience in every situation for the rest of my life (breadth).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirst for faith</li> <li>• Spirituality as a metaphor</li> <li>• Giving up control</li> <li>• Physical conversion</li> <li>• Monastic models</li> <li>• Awareness as therapy</li> <li>• True strength in God</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Let go and let God</li> <li>• Jewish life in Catholic context</li> <li>• Search for balance</li> <li>• Prayer fosters growth</li> <li>• Pray for patience</li> <li>• Prayer has led to insights</li> <li>• Solace in poetry</li> <li>• Love is a gift</li> <li>• Don’t take loved ones for granted</li> </ul>
<b>Journey as an Artist</b>	<p>My artistic journey encompasses both challenge and continuous transition. While my mother was a professional artist and my grandfather had drawing prowess, I didn’t discern my talents for drawing until I was in college. This awakening has opened new opportunities for self-expression and the development of my internal voice (depth, breadth).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandfather as model</li> <li>• Sexual identity</li> <li>• Sketching</li> <li>• Artistic opportunity</li> <li>• Poetry as coping mechanism</li> <li>• Poetry as therapy</li> <li>• Poetry as a tool for data representation</li> </ul>

*Note.* The first three levels of sorting inform the fourth (Continuity of Experience) which is represented throughout the narrative. Hoggan’s (2015) typology helps inform Level 1 in terms of identifying transformative learning

experiences by depth and breadth, but there is more than transformative learning activity occurring: i.e., self-authorship, arts-based learning, informal/narrative learning, etc.

From parsing the narratives through the first two levels of data organization, the third level (Re-story the Present) arises. In this research, eighteen themes emerged from all ten personal stories compiled from the primary sources. Table 3.3 lists these emergent themes that, overall, describe layered experiences over time regarding the three cultural domains of the research space. These themes are interwoven in the intersectional story at the final level of sorting. Because the story also situates these themes in context, it constitutes data analysis as well.

Table 3.3

*Compilation of Emergent Themes to Re-story the Present (Level 3 Sorting)*

Themes of development in intersectional narrative <i>across all</i> stories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-centeredness and hypersensitivity to others’ thoughts of me retard my development.</li> <li>• Humor, resourcefulness, and self-reliance enhance my resilience and my relationships.</li> <li>• Art—e.g., poetry, drawing, creative writing—therapeutically facilitates resilience, awareness, and expression through self-dialogue.</li> <li>• Prayerful reflection—and narrative practices such as journals and poetry in particular—on lived experiences promotes my cognitive &amp; spiritual development over my lifespan while fostering my confidence &amp; capacity to adapt during transitions, to heal from past failures, to cope with adversity, to discern meaning, and to gather best practices for future benefit.</li> <li>• I choose my response to the challenges of daily life that defines my self-dialogue, attitude, relationships, and spiritual awareness.</li> <li>• My selection of love over anger as a daily motivator has been a significant decision in my development as a self-authored individual.</li> <li>• My fears have primarily concerned failure, regret, loss of control (i.e., uncertainty), and falling short of expectations.</li> <li>• My fears have fed my mental illness.</li> <li>• Seeking help for mental illness is not only a good idea but also an obligation.</li> <li>• Refusing to take loved ones for granted permits me to invest more in my valued relationships over time—if I choose.</li> <li>• Becoming self-authored for me means consistently living a balanced life—physically, intellectually, &amp; spiritually—on my terms while not obsessing about others’ opinions.</li> </ul>

Themes of development in intersectional narrative *across all* stories

- My grandfather has unwittingly served as a significant model for my identity, humor, creativity, and resilience developed through long-term autobiographical practice.
- Spirituality is a metaphor for my relationship with God, how I interact with others, and my lifelong journey of awareness toward holiness.
- Prayer is the integrated path to improving my relationship with God, my choices, and development as a good person.
- Mystics such as Thomas Merton, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Edith Stein have pointed out a path of awareness, patience, humility, solace, and true development given my Judeo-Christian cultural context.
- Let go and let God; be patiently consistent.
- Personal inquiry and spiritual awareness have permitted me to see beyond self-perception, begin to overcome past regrets, and to develop into a less self-centered person.
- Innovation in pedagogy leads to the development of creative and critical thinking in generations of students.

*Note.* The 18 *cross-cutting* themes emerge from all 10 personal stories to varying degrees and thus are not attributed to any particular personal story.

A graphic analysis of the personal stories, conference papers, and initial integrated story provided a unique perspective. In Figure 3.4, the most frequently occurring words indicated not only a focus on narrative-reflective learning, but they also confirmed an alignment with the research questions. For example, terms that coincided with adult learning include journal, reflective, narrative, journey, spiritual, and context. Similarly, words that indicated a linkage to identity development and self-authorship entailed story, human, development, self, experimenting, authored, construction, continuous, and persons. In short, the word cloud analysis corroborated the epistemic alignment of the research.





sections that explain symbols and dreams and also help readers link their experiences to meaning. This narrative consists of a series of episodes that describe challenges and transition that have high points, low points, and turning points in conjunction with McAdams' (2012) narrative framework. A different archetype, or character representing an aspect of my personality, tells each episodic tale to illustrate the concept of possible selves. After each tale, I dig deeper to reflect on these experiences in a self-dialogue that is reminiscent of St. John of the Cross' "dark night of the soul" (St. John of the Cross & Steuart, 2006, p. 71) from my own Carmelite experiences and of self-reflexive sections in other autoethnographies anchored in adult learning (Congdon, 2014; Poulos, 2009; Preston, 2011). By iteratively moving between the realms of action and reflection, I can describe the key indicators marking my slow development over time.

### **Writing Samples**

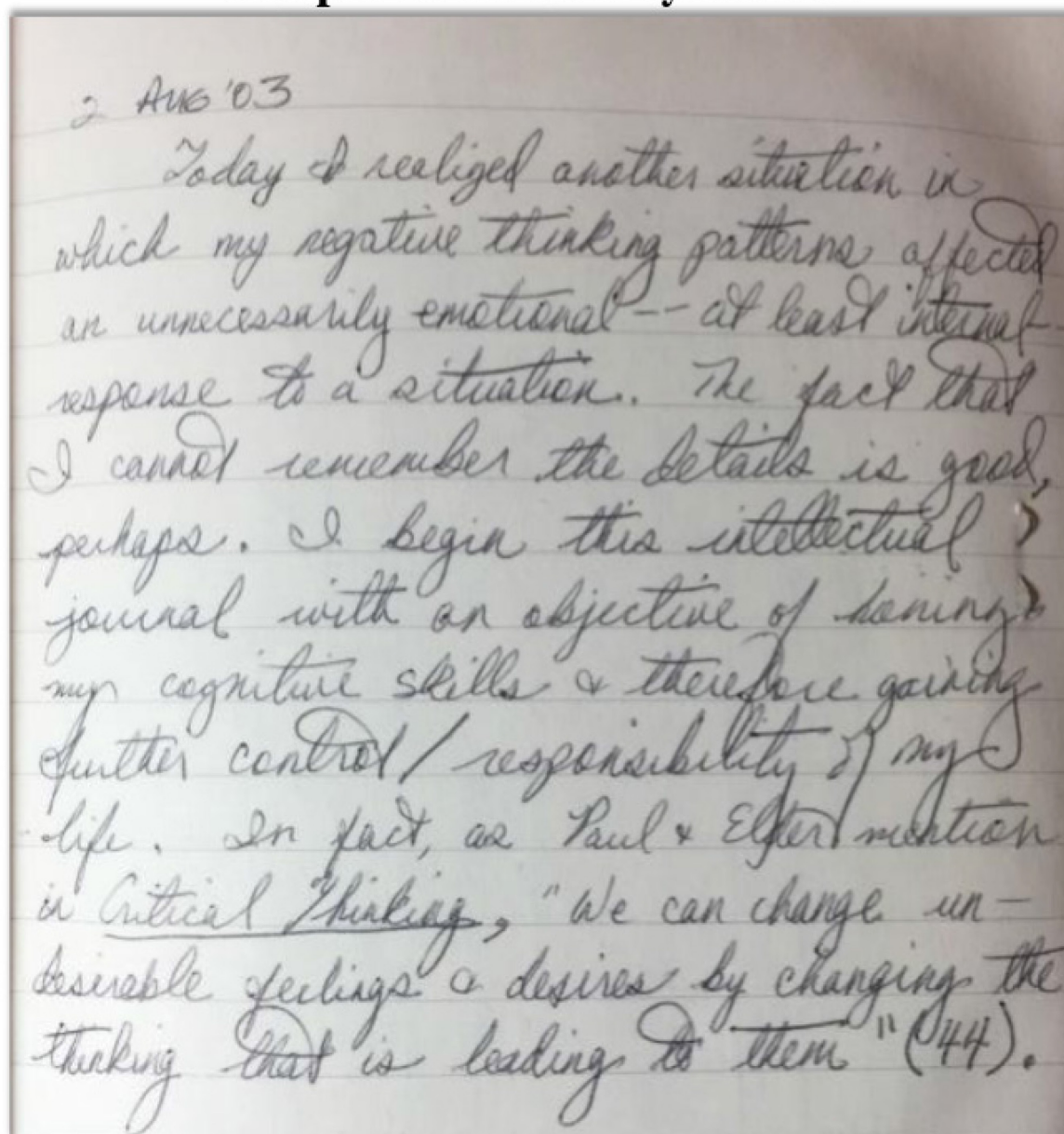
Over the past three decades, journals have accompanied me. I have used them to record my innermost thoughts, scandalous opinions of others, and the fears I attempt to calmly cover up with masks. In this research, I applied levels of data sorting (see Figure 3.2 Research Space of Narrative Inquiry) to examine how they may help me better understand my adult developmental journey.

Little did I know when I was writing individual notes, poems, and entries that I was conducting the first level of data sorting/analysis by gathering the materials. By creating these artifacts as they happened, I was editing my life from my perspective in a particular place, time, and mental state. That is why when I look at certain journal entries, it seems I travel back in time to re-experience feelings, thoughts, and relationships. In this journal sample, I relive some of the “negative thinking patterns” and emotional responses from a 2003 entry. Why I made this entry I

may not remember, but I can use this evidence to help determine the state of my mind and soul at a particular place and time in my personal history. Perhaps I wrote to retain new information, to internalize an applicable principle, or even to help deal with a complex problem....

Figure 3.5 Sample Journal Entry—Setting the 1<sup>st</sup> Level of Data Sorting

### Sample Journal Entry: Level 1



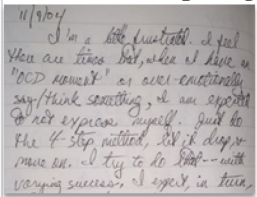
Culkin, Entry, *Journal 2*, August 2, 2003

Figure 3.5. In this journal entry at the first level of data sorting, I discover certain themes in my personality to include negative thinking patterns and hypersensitivity to emotional responses.

After I decided to conduct this autoethnographic study, I realized that I had to discern key life events of challenge or transition that have influenced my developmental journey. In this second level of data sorting, I created ten personal narratives that largely excerpt chunks from my primary sources such as personal journals, correspondence, and my grandfather's autobiography (see Appendix A - List of Primary Research Sources and Active Pages for the entire list). These excerpts from personal narratives build upon enclosed journal entries and highlights particular life events within the cultures of mental illness, spiritual awareness/development, and then death/grieving.

Figure 3.6 Journal Entries Inform Personal Narratives—Reaching 2<sup>nd</sup> Level of Data Sorting

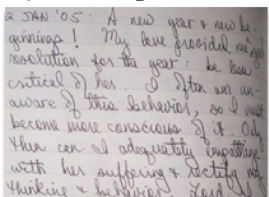
**Writing Sample: Transition from Level 1 (Gather Materials) to Level 2 (Discern Life Events) of Sorting**  
**Culture: Mental Illness**



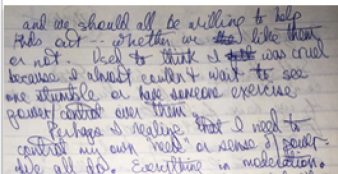
**Excerpt from Journal 2, November 9, 2004: Self-regulation**

**Life Event: Coping with Mental Illness—Awareness of Lack of Control**

Over the decades, I have realized that I showed distrust of my caregiver and love one. I called her names when she accidentally knocked me, spilling my water. I became frustrated because I felt I couldn't express my issues or concerns because my exposure-response therapy advises that I remove myself rather than confront the issue (Culkin, *Journal 2, 2004*). My journal reveals that I was often unaware of my criticisms of my wife (Culkin, *Journal 2*). In a sense, I have feared giving up power, especially around vulnerable people (*Journal 4, 5 April 1995*). As an example, I even wanted to control the rate at which my young wife got to know every detail of my life by drafting a certificate after 4 years of marriage in which I declared I had told her everything there is to know about me: "For Lifetime Achievement in Getting to know her husband, David Thomas, (with nothing to hide) after nearly four married years..." (Culkin, *Journal 1, 6 March 1999*).

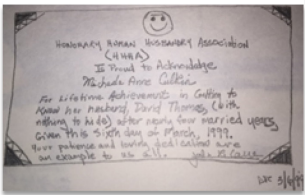


**Excerpt from Journal 2, January 2, 2005: Awareness of Judgment**



**Excerpt from Journal 4, April 5, 1995: Power over the Vulnerable**

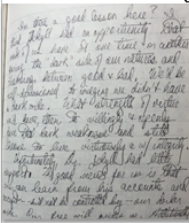
**Excerpt from Draft of "(H)erb's Tale: A Professional with Mental Illness"**



**Excerpt from Journal 1, March 6, 1999: Lifetime Achievement**



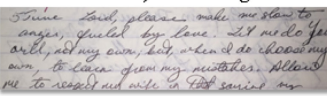
**Writing Sample: Transition from Level 1 (Gather Materials) to Level 2 (Discern Life Events) of Sorting**  
**Culture: Spiritual Awareness and Development**



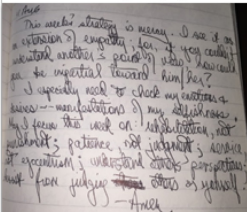
**Excerpt from Journal 2, March 20, 2004:**  
Gain Strength by Facing My Shadows in Analysis of Dr. Jekyll

**Life Event: Grounding Myself Spiritually**

To ground myself, I find prayer to be most necessary. Prayer addresses helps us grow despite our weaknesses. We gain strength by realizing we have a dark side and by choosing the virtuous during temptation. "What strength of virtue we'd have, then, to willingly and openly face that dark weakness and still choose to live virtuously and with integrity" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, 20 March 2004). This thread of strength earned by confronting weakness resonates in my journal prayers: "Lord, please make me slow to anger, fueled by love. Let me do Your will, not my own; but, when I do choose my own [will], to learn from my mistakes" (*Journal 4*, 5 June 2000). Prayer helps me develop into a better person through reflection on my experiences and God's grace. A prayer I wrote in 2004 addresses this: "I especially need to check my emotions and desires—manifestations of my selfishness. My I focus this week on: rehabilitation, not punishment; patience, not judgment; service, not egocentrism; understand others' perspectives; desist from judging others or yourself. Amen" (Culkin, *Journal 2*, 11 August 2004). In another entry dated 24 November 2012, I made a note to get my scapular blessed so that I could enhance my consciousness of God's presence in my daily life (Culkin, *Journal 11*). In other words, prayer has helped me gain insight into my spiritual life, as documented over at least the past twenty years.

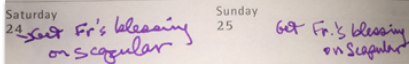


**Excerpt from Journal 4, June 5, 2000:**  
Asking to do God's Will, Not Mine




**Excerpt from Journal 2, August 11, 2004: Stop Judging**

**Excerpt from Draft of "Ingrid's Tale: A Journey Toward Carmel"**



**Excerpt from Journal 11, November 24, 2012:**  
Daily Presence

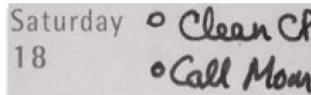
**Writing Sample: Transition from Level 1 (Gather Materials) to Level 2 (Discern Life Events) of Sorting**  
**Culture: Death and Grieving**



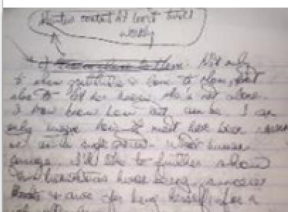
**Excerpt from Journal 14, September, 2012: Final Business**

**Life Event: Grieving the Death of my Mother**

The notes from just prior to after her death describe matter-of-factly the last issues I wanted to address while grieving: settling bills, coordinating burial arrangements, settling travel claims (Culkin, *Journal 14*). I eventually learned to treat her in a way that I would have no regrets if she died that day. By calling her once a week on a scheduled basis, I chose to maintain contact with her while maintaining a healthy distance for my family (Culkin, *Journal 11*). I now miss being able to call her. As a young man, I saw her bright gem of character: "I'd like to further show this tremendous human being [Mom] sincere thanks and awe for being herself, for a job [raising 2 boys as a single parent] well-done" (Culkin, *Journal 4*, 1994). In the obituary I wrote for her, I describe her as an innovator in typography and one who had led a full life "on her own terms in a consistent manner" (Culkin, *Journal 14*, 8 September 2012). One thing I wish I could say one more time to my parents is thank you.

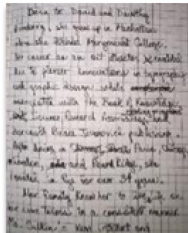


**Excerpt from Journal 11: Setting Boundaries**



**Excerpt from Journal 4, 1994: Sense of Awe**

**Excerpt from Draft of "Colleen's Tale: Losing My Parents"**



**Excerpt from Journal 14, September 8, 2012: Living on own Terms**

Figure 3.6. These excerpts use the previous journal entry to highlight a particular life event within the three cultural facets of this research.

Armed with ten such personal stories derived from over 2,000 pages of primary materials, I could then focus the third level of sorting on re-storying the present. To structure the metaphorical journey, I conducted a narrative analysis of my adult development within Clandinin and Murphy's (2009) multidimensional research space within the unique social-cultural contexts of my life course. While Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) problem-solution approach appears useful in narrative research, its linear application and focus on retelling vice meaning making makes the holistic three-dimensional approach—grounded in Dewey's experiential learning—more appropriate for this research (Boylorn, 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In the Chaucer-inspired pilgrimage narrative, each companion-archetype tells his/her story. By sharing these stories of diverse themes, the archetypes help paint a collaborative mosaic of my identity development throughout my life span. That addresses Research Question #1. By retelling the journal entries from various roles and perspectives (represented by the archetypes whose names help spell mine) I have held at different times between 1989 (age 20) and 2014 (age 45), I illustrate how possible selves have played a role in developing my self-concept over time. That addresses Research Question #2. The concluding dialogue with my grandfather helps intersect many of the emergent themes from these discourses.

Figure 3.7 Draft Samples from Intersectional Narrative—Attaining 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Levels of Sorting

## Writing Sample: Attaining Level 3 (Re-story the Present) of Data Sorting

**Level 2 : Discern Life Event**  
*Personal Narrative*

**Life Event: Grieving the Death of my Mother**

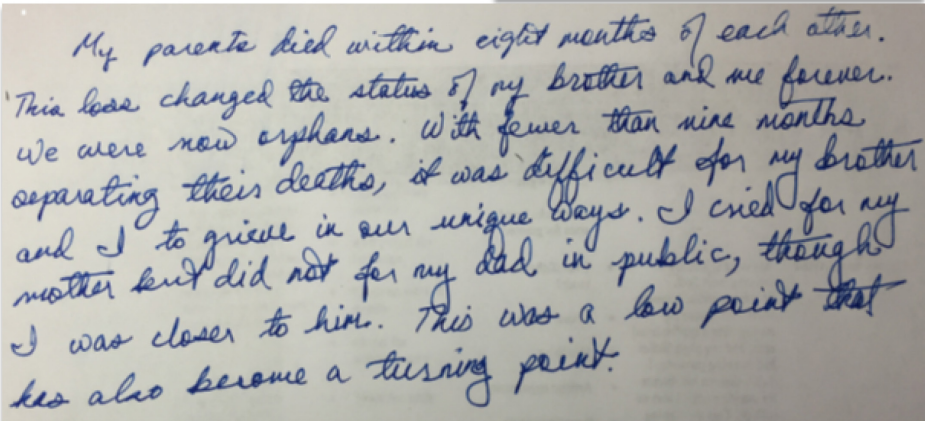
The notes from just prior to after her death describe matter-of-factly the last issues I wanted to address while grieving: settling bills, coordinating burial arrangements, settling travel claims (Culkin, [Journal 14](#)). I eventually learned to treat her in a way that I would have no regrets if she died that day. By calling her once a week on a scheduled basis, I chose to maintain contact with her while maintaining a healthy distance for my family (Culkin, [Journal 11](#)). I now miss being able to call her. As a young man, I saw her bright gem of character: "I'd like to further show this tremendous human being [Mom] sincere thanks and awe for being herself, for a job [raising 2 boys as a single parent] well-done" (Culkin, [Journal 4, 1994](#)). In the obituary I wrote for her, I describe her as an innovator in typography and one who had led a full life "on her own terms in a consistent manner" (Culkin, [Journal 14, 8 September 2012](#)). One thing I wish I could say one more time to my parents is thank you.

**Excerpt from Draft of "Colleen's Tale: Losing My Parents"**

**Using journey as a metaphor is not new to educational studies and can be a powerful tool for interpreting lived experiences (Boylorn, 2009; Tillotson, 2012).**

**Level 3 : Re-story the Present**  
*Intersectional Narrative*

**Initial Excerpt from Chapter 3 (Context)**



My parents died within eight months of each other. This loss changed the status of my brother and me forever. We were now orphans. With fewer than nine months separating their deaths, it was difficult for my brother and I to grieve in our unique ways. I cried for my mother but did not for my dad in public, though I was closer to him. This was a low point that has also become a turning point.

## Writing Sample: Attaining Level 4 (Continuity of Experience) of Sorting

### Level 3 : Re-story the Present *Intersectional Narrative*

My parents died within eight months of each other. This has changed the status of my brother and me forever. We were new orphans. With fewer than nine months separating their deaths, it was difficult for my brother and I to grieve in our unique ways. I cried for my mother but did not for my dad in public, though I was closer to him. This was a low point that has also become a turning point.

Excerpt from Chapter 3

### Level 4 : Continuity of Experience *Integrated Poem / Counter-narrative*

- I'm said my parents are gone. I miss them.
- They don't know how to deal with me.
- They didn't teach me much.
- I should have said thank you one more time.

- I must ~~not~~ <sup>try</sup> get on with <sup>my</sup> life.
- They're my role models.
- Don't take loved ones for granted.
- Pray for them.
- Patience
- They taught me everything - esp. patience & faith.
- Thank you.

Draft poetic description of continuity of experience—stanza on death and grieving.

Figure 3.7. In this hand-written sample from the intersectional narrative, the researcher uses elements from the previous narratives to develop a new, integrated understanding of his self-concept. In the fourth and final level of sorting, the researcher continues to refine his concept of self poetically. Three stanzas (of which the one describing the culture of death/grieving is shown) represent the different cultures examined; the left column describes former identity narratives, and the right column consists of the revised personal narratives—many of which are counter to normative narratives—resulting from the multi-layered/dimensional analysis.

This scene represents a task we all face: creating and telling our own identity through story. Sharing our story with strangers is a challenging and frightful process that occurs over time and comprises much of the essence of adult learning (Clark, 1991, 2010). Only after sharing my story will I realize the fellow pilgrims represent my possible selves and that I have finally realized who I am (i.e., self-concept) by the whole, lifelong narrative process. This personal-social narrative process then supports the third (Re-storying the Present) and fourth (Continuity of Experience) levels of data organization and directly addresses the research questions.



## **Cleaning the Gear for the Continued Journey**

### **Document Protocols**

Several documents were collected during this research to facilitate analysis centered on the research questions. The documents collected included the researcher's grandfather's inherited autobiography, research journal reflections, and life-event-specific artifacts such as personal journals, correspondence, drawings, and poems. These "unobtrusive" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 108, 124) references facilitate the triangulation of sources by augmenting the complex understanding of the targeted phenomenon through content analysis. Put another way, the researcher purposefully selected primary materials based on their potential to facilitate a deeper understanding of his identity development over his life course.

In qualitative research, it is important to collect documents that offer additional context to the study in order to gain a deep understanding of participant experiences. The researcher shares relevant documents that will further explain his experiences. These documents were not published in the dissertation report if they had identifying information that cannot be concealed. However, if there is no danger to revealing identities of the participant's living family members or any other associated people, if appropriate, some documents are shared in the dissertation (Holmes, 2014).

Examples of documents include but are not limited to:

- Photographs (face pictures blurred if present)
- Assignments (names blacked out)
- Group projects (names and other potentially identifying information blocked out)
- Program website

- Correspondences with faculty or peers (identifying information, names, details revealed)
- Participant's journals maintained during his studies and military career and he wants to share voluntarily (e.g., identifying information, names, or details not revealed)

In this study, participant documents were analyzed and explored for common themes and patterns. Themes and patterns were investigated with the following analytical focus:

- Evidence of experiences that connect to identity development
- Degree of reflection upon learning experiences and life events
- Degree of benefit in developing self-concept through possible selves over time
- Support from formal academic culture
- Support from informal academic culture
- Evidence of personal stories of transition
- Evidence of personal stories of challenge

This research project explores the connections between identity development and life events experienced over time within the contexts of mental illness, spiritual development, and grief. If autoethnography is a narrative method for adult development, and if identity development is a form of long-term development, then autoethnography can facilitate identity development over a life course. Autoethnography, then poses a way to examine the research questions, but it does have some limitations.

### **Confidentiality and Ethics**

The protection of the confidentiality of my family and me was a primary concern. By its definition, autoethnography risks the revelation of matters that are private to the researcher-participant. I applied self-selected criteria for the release personal facts relevant to the analysis

and representation. These criteria entailed medical history, issues of emotional sensitivity, or personal issues that did not contribute to the research. For example, I discussed mental health issues related to my developmental learning experiences, but I did not reveal medical prescriptions. After data analysis and representation, I requested my principal investigator to review the methodology and analysis to help protect my confidentiality.

I also protected confidentiality of my intimate others and the data by maintaining positive control of the research information at all times. I was the only researcher and participant, so I could better control access and use of that data. Additionally, I redacted participant names—e.g., family members or friends—on any correspondence provided as evidence such as the co-reviewer forms in Appendix C. By using a diverse array of purposefully selected primary sources coupled with peer and family-member review, I intended to triangulate the data collected to facilitate a rigorous analysis.

Finally, this autoethnographic research merited a family-member review because writing stories about the self inherently includes others with whom we interact (Boylorn, 2013; Ellis, 2004, 2007; Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013). This project concerned private matters affecting not only myself but also family members, none of them minors. Ethics in autoethnographic research is relational rather than institutional, in that it is characterized by specific situations and the researcher-participant's dynamic relationships with other people over time (Ellis, 2007).<sup>30</sup> I compiled comments from my draft storyline about my brother on 21 March 2016 and contacted him to review these items with him in order to be transparent. He also attested his agreement in

---

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Letter for the research exemption approved by the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects. This appendix also documents proprietary reviews (in compliance with federal policies because the researcher-participant is a federal employee) and family-member reviews.

writing. Additionally, my wife reviewed the storyline to preserve our family privacy and balance it with the need to portray genuine emotion, frailty, and transition. She helped me edit out elements of the story that were too private while preserving the vulnerability and space for discerned value essential to Autoethnography (Ellis, 2004). While some institutional review boards do not consider autoethnography as valid (i.e., as defined by federal statutes) research, the researcher-participant must thoughtfully consider the ethical implications when including others—intimate or not, alive or dead—in the published manuscript (Ellis, 2007; Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013). For example, I tried not to speak ill of the dead, discuss over-sexualized thoughts common to morbidity out of context of OCD, or litigious debates regarding my father's estate. Describing these points would not add to the narrative analysis or prevent me from carrying out my responsibility to present a complete story.

While I will try to maintain confidentiality for most living family members, this will likely be impossible for my brother and wife. Any reader can look my name in public records and determine the identities and personal information of my closest relatives. In this context, I requested that my wife and brother read and sign co-reviewer forms to document their agreement with the level of release, accuracy of facts related to my family, and potential legal pitfalls to avoid. My wife has particularly served as an active reviewer of the research which has greatly enhanced its ethical robustness. As such, the family review has been a key component of my ethical approach to this research.

### **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

To ensure sources reveal an adequate breadth and depth, the researcher-participant focused on issues of rigor and ethics. For example, he interrogated the sources as trustworthy repositories of data for this research. Using different types of sources—e.g., journals,

autobiography, and personal correspondence—facilitated triangulation. Even a critic of autoethnography, like MacLure (2011), has noted the value of language in capturing analytical depth and breadth. Eyring (1998) observes that for the autoethnographer, exploring the depths of human experiences is essential to attain a “richness in understanding” (p. 141) them. By using four levels of data sorting based upon primary sources documenting personal experiences over 23 years, the researcher-participant triangulated the sources and methods. Modesti (2011) notes that narrative inquiry inherently arms the researcher-participant with a rigorous methodology that doubles as a process of learning:

In order to execute a study of this nature, I propose the utilization of a blended methods approach to qualitative study – a narrative inquiry written in the vein of a scholarly personal narrative, complemented by analytical autoethnographic perspectives and methods which encourage rigorous examination of the process of teaching and learning, confirmed by the study of life documents, personal memory, artifacts, and other data which assist in the thorough and scholarly exploration of this conceptualization of teaching and learning. (p. 3)

In other words, an autoethnographic approach can provide a flexible way to narratively analyze complex phenomena such as life events in an academically rigorous way.

Additionally, narrative inquiry offers a researcher with a unique opportunity to express trustworthiness throughout the research process. In this sense, trustworthiness indicates the quality of qualitative research and its inherent value to the audiences (Schwandt, 2015). Some linkage between trustworthiness and validity tend to overlap. Ellis (2004), for example, believes that validity in autoethnography is anchored on the readers and the researcher-participant: "...validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the

experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 124). Furthermore, validity is indicated by open-mindedness, allowing readers to communicate and "improve the lives of participants and readers—or even your own" (Ellis, 2004, p. 124). In other words, autoethnography—as opposed to quantitative research—grounds its rigor in the perceptions of the individual reader rather than populations of respondents. By triangulating the various data sources (i.e., primary documents), analytical methods (e.g., peer reviews), and emergent life stories, the researcher established a rigorous approach to the validity of potential interpretations by readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Additionally, this research is trustworthy as quality autoethnography because it meets established criteria (Ellis, 2004; Schwandt, 2015): it is an integrated narrative that represents the single case of my transformative learning experiences over a long period of time, using a literary (i.e., bildungsroman) framework to highlight personal episodes and life events, and inviting readers to respond by reflecting on their own experiences. In this context, the essence of ethical practice in autoethnographic research consists of treating every participant, including the researcher, with a balanced respect for their privacy and for legitimate insights their experiences can provide the reader.

### **Research Sites and Access**

The research has explored the researcher-participant's identity development over a period of time. As a former student who is now a civilian member of the faculty at a Department of Defense institution, the researcher-participant only used his personal laptop, office computer with supervisor approval, e-mail, and files to conduct this research. These criteria support the effort to respond to the research questions and are driven by key aspects of adult learning and development theories—particularly reflection, knowledge construction, narrative reasoning, and relevant experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Taylor, 2008).

## **An Archaeological Dig**

Considered from an ethical perspective, *digging deeper* into these personal stories reveals further opportunities to learn from life events. An ethical reflection upon life events can lead to further insights and richer contexts. For example, the following research journal entry reveals how a conversation with my brother provided me with some perspective on our parents' emotional guardedness:

8 April 2016: .... I used excerpts that mention him to elicit his response and inputs. He had no disagreements with the six items, and he provided much more rich context for the life events related to the deaths of our parents. This layered discussion dug into our parents' emotional distance from each other and other family members, mental and emotional instabilities, and they approached their impending deaths in their unique ways. I certainly collected more data while also affirming his approval. In this way, the family-member review helped to reinforce the methodological rigor and balance the ethical considerations of the data represented. (Culkin, Research journal)

This sibling interaction provided me greater depth of meaning in the archaeological site that is our family meaning and legacy.

In this archaeological metaphor, I envision myself digging away at the family castle somewhere. The ground is hard, but it gives in to my sword and hoe, but my tense shoulders strain under the incessant heat and pressure. The sun is starting to descend into its nest, protected by the horizon undulating with orange, yellow, and green tints.

As I continue to dig and find family artifacts, it seems as if time stops. I pick up the prayer cards from my parents' funerals. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change..." the prayer Mom often cited begins. It soothes me to know that I now recite the same

words to myself when times are tough. It's a connection, albeit trite. I cried profusely at her funeral, but did not shed a tear at Dad's. Why?

My brother and I have discussed how both our parents issues with emotional intimacy have possibly led to our conflicting emotions about their deaths (Brother, personal phone communication, April 18, 2016). It's been over a year and my brother hasn't yet shed a tear.

I dig further. The earth uncovers Mom's recipe cards and financial records. This layer is remarkably organized and matter of fact which is a surprise considering Mom was the quintessential artist, a divergent and brilliant thinker who believed in abstract relationships more than concrete realities. And yet, although living on a shoe-string budget since the divorce, she ensured her sons never went without home-prepared gourmet meals—nothing fancy, but just darn good meals like Chicken Kiev that would make Julia Child envious. The parent we least expected to be organized for death left personal notes strategically placed in particular folders directing us how she wanted her final affairs settled. She had been planning for a long time. I keep digging.

The next layer of soil is denser, as if it does not desire to be probed. I detect some of my father's albums that he meticulously documented and compiled over his adult life as the family historian. The red and green binders, contain the acidic acetate photograph sheets that were once thought to protect but gradually burn away the papered images. I cannot reach the binders. I feel angry and sorry at not being able to possess part of my identity and legacy. The irony is Dad was the organized and reliable parent; yet his estate, modified during the final stages of his illness, had many loose ends that resulted in parsimonious litigation and further pain. I did not cry at his funeral.



I stepped back and thought about our parents. Both were challenged to express themselves emotionally. Perhaps it was their Depression-era generation or psychological issues, or a little of both. Our relationship with our parents was consistent. Being with Mom involved experiencing a woman who passionately attacked life with everything she had; otherwise, she would loiter and, like Sherlock Holmes, wait for a great project that amused her intellectual acumen. When I now do things that brought her joy—e.g., drawing or cooking—I can feel her critical eye looking over my shoulder. Being with Dad meant two-way respect. Honor other people and they will honor you. He was a very sharply dressed banker to whom everyone—colleagues and family members alike—turned to for advice, dry humor, family lore. He just didn't know how to deal with his sons as children, so he did what he did best—treated us as adults. When I now do things that brought him joy—e.g., swimming or eating cheese<sup>31</sup>—I can feel his smooth advice whispered into my ear. I miss them both in their own ways but am grateful they died in their own fashions.

As I dig deeper through the layers of memory, regret, sorrow, pain, grief, anxiety, and joy; I feel in ineffable urge to find more. How do my ancestors inform who I am today? How does my life reflect theirs? I find no answers, just more artifacts that make me think of more questions. This need to inquire enables me to reflect upon past life events—both good and bad—and learn from them. I realize one's self-concept is at the center of this interconnectedness. I sit down at the edge of the pit and create a poem to capture this realization.

A need to learn—a need to heal.  
I learn to dig...to learn to heal.  
To dig is to learn; learning about  
oneself is more than digging.  
Artifacts shed their dirt-encrusted coats; reveal  
windows into our shadowed pasts.

---

<sup>31</sup> Corroborated by brother via e-mail on August 1, 2016.

Reflecting on them sheds light  
on our potential selves.  
I learn to dig...to learn; revelation morphs  
regrets, doubts, and fears into  
hope, confidence, and courage.  
A need to learn—a need to heal.

I finally realize that digging and reflecting upon these artifacts of my life course in a  
seemingly haphazard fashion describes my experience of informal learning.

## Chapter 4 - Summary and Conclusion

My personal story matters because it *is* personal. It is personal not just because it provides a deeper insight into my own life experiences; it also opens a window—a two-way mirror of sorts—for readers through which they can participate in creating their own meanings. This transferability of storied experiences to readers of diverse backgrounds implies a “narrative inheritance” (Boylorn, 2013, p. 116; see also Goodall, 2006). But this transfer of meaning also infers that my story, this autoethnography, is nested in the experiences of others. It is social.

Autoethnography creates interpreted meaning within the life of the researcher-participant as well as in the context of its social-cultural relationships. Autoethnographers use their life events and other personal sources as raw data for analysis "to explain how and why they interpret things the way they do" (Boylorn, 2013, pp. 8-9; see also Goodall, 2006, 2010), using their individual meanings to inform social-cultural phenomena. In other words, we interpret stories of others in the context of our own lived experiences. For example, I cannot describe my experience of attending an OCD discussion group without noting my responses to other members. Did I feel better when another person’s compulsions were more embarrassing than mine? Did they feel superior to me because I was the new guy who brought his caretaker wife? Telling stories is one thing, but sharing the inter-relationships and vulnerable silences among them is quite another.

In this context of overlapping narratives, autoethnography has ethical concerns. Ellis (2007) describes these issues as relational rather than procedural (i.e., as in an institutional review board) because the guidelines are governed by individual conscience rather than federal regulations. Boylorn (2009, 2013) describes her challenges to portray the genuine life events of real people in the rural South without betraying their dignity, confidence, or privacy.

I realize that my story is never my story alone. I am not always able to fully protect the anonymity of the people in my life, nor do I want to. Auto/ethnography acknowledges that truths, memories, and perspectives are subjective. I don't intend for these stories to represent all rural black women. I do, however, suspect there will be moments of recognition and resonance. (Boylorn, 2013, p. 9)

Put another way, the autoethnographer continuously balances the ethical demands of intimate revelation with the opportunities for healing and development for himself and the audiences. I have tried to protect confidentiality of intimate family members and friends by concealing their names, revising certain plot lines, and seeking the permission of living family members. But the truth remains that any reader can hastily conduct an online search that would uncover personal data on my kin and me. A story belongs not only to the teller but also to the players and audiences.

The story of a young man struggling with OCD extends beyond my life course. My hope is that, as Boylorn (2013) notes, its message will strike a chord of recognition, stimulate reflection, and spawn learning in readers who can choose to apply it to their own lives. A tool to foster this interactive role is poetic inquiry. Poetry enables my inspection of interior spaces and shadows within my multi-layered identity in order to create meaning from lived experiences inductively (Bhattacharya, 2013; Boylorn, 2013; Cahnmann, 2003; Faulkner, 2016), similar to the inter-spaces inside a nesting doll. For this reason, I have inserted poems of reflection in many of the narrative episodes to represent not only the multiple layers of meaning but also the shadowed spaces between them.

In this social-cultural context of narrative inquiry, my re-storied life events become a theory to explain and interpret their meaning. Stories are themselves theories (Ellis & Bochner,

2006; Boylorn, 2013) because they outline causes and/or effects, derive subjectified meaning, and provide a setting in which the life events and meanings could resonate for audiences.

Bochner (2013) reiterates that autoethnography is a narrative search for meaning in life experience: “Whereas empiricist social science fuels an appetite for abstraction, facts, and control, autoethnography feeds a hunger for details, meanings, and peace of mind” (p. 53). So, my personal story matters because it is personal and can mean something for others.

### **Constructing Meaning in Identity Development**

Adults develop identities by constructing meaning in concert with others over the course of their lifetimes (Kegan, 1982). Recent findings indicating a correlation between adverse childhood situations and the onset of anxiety disorders (McLaughlin et al., 2010) corroborates the researcher’s personal observations that certain instances of mental anguish over his childhood may have triggered the onset of a disorder to which he was genetically pre-disposed. In this context, environment and genetics have played a role in life events experienced by the researcher-participant; but he retains the choice to construct their meanings.

Adult learners are unique in their awareness of lived experiences and in their ability to interpret them through reflection in order to create meaning (Mezirow, 1978). Autoethnographic practices can promote the perception of control and self-esteem necessary for adults to construct meaning, heal past wounds, and move forward in their personal and professional lives through active reflection and communication. Psychological research suggests that the perception of control, personality traits, childhood, and socioeconomic conditions impact one’s health, choices, adaptability, and thus development over one’s lifetime (Fadjukoff et al., 2010; George et al., 2011; Infurna et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2010). If autoethnographic research can shape an integrated story across disciplines and themes over time (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; McAdams

& Logan, 2006), then perhaps it can offer insight into the bridge between deeper adult learning and development. In a word—transformation.

Narrative construction is mainly postmodernist with some modernist traits in theoretical perspective because it approaches meaning construction from a localized and contextual point of view. Nash (2004) claims that in "narrative truth, there is only interpretation, perspective, point of view, and personal preference" (p. 41). He also exhibits modernist tendencies toward meta-stories in the application of truth criteria to determine the overall usefulness of particular stories: including, plausibility, generalizability, trustworthiness, and personal honesty (Nash, 2004).

The following intersectional story summarizes and responds to the purpose and research questions at the third level of data sorting (see Figure 3.2). The researcher used Mattsson's (2014) 3-step intersectionality method to examine the intersection of the three cultures (death/grief, spirituality, mental illness) within the three-dimensional research space of situation (place), interaction (personal & Social), and temporal continuity (past, present, future). The purpose of the narrative is to pull together the implications of the research within its particular social-cultural context at the third level of data sorting (Restory the Present).

\* \* \* \*

Only after sharing my story of invisible wounds and cultures do I realize the fellow pilgrims represent my possible selves and that I have finally realized who I am by the whole process—by destroying the masks.

\* \* \* \*

The intersectional narrative responds to the purpose and research questions (Level 3 sorting). It applies Mattsson's (2014) 3-step intersectionality method to examine the intersection of the 3 cultures within the 3-D research space of situation (place), interaction (personal &

social), and temporal continuity (past, present, future). This also expounds upon Bhattacharya and Varbelow's (2014) interactive narrative structure of introduction, individual journal entries (personal narratives), and an intersectional dialogue via e-mail and class discussion that pulls together the implications. This creative interweaving of themes can help the researcher-participant describe rich, multi-layered experiences pertaining to identity development while inviting the reader to participate in the storying process (Cutcher, 2015). As a result, the intersectional analysis allows the researcher-participant to re-story the interweaving of theory and personal experience so he can make better sense of the threads of invisible wounds in the context of the cultures of spiritual development, mental illness, and death/grieving. The narrative's conclusion consolidates key implications together with an integrated poem that links to the introductory narrative and shows potential implications for the field (Level 4 data organization).

\* \* \* \*

Only after sharing my narrative do I realize the depth to which the fellow pilgrims-archetypes represent my possible selves and that I have finally realized who I am by the whole process. Key implications (with some two-letter codes annotated) include the following:

- Power in knowing you're not alone
- We make our own meaning
- The path is never ending
- There's more ahead; the summit isn't absolutely the top but what we can attain over our life spans.
- Value of nonformal and informal learning for adults
- Balance of physical (death), mental (MI), & spiritual (SA) development

- Counternarratives to contemporary socio-cultural issues (MI)
- Promotion of self-authorship
- Shadows cover us and others

In this environment of narrative learning, possible selves can continuously change and form an identity.

### **Intersectional Analysis**

The concept of possible selves is the fundamental assumption of intersectionality analysis: "Emerging out of the scholarship of women of color and feminist theory, the starting point in intersectionality is the presumed reality of multiple identities; that is, individuals inhabit multiple social locations that are lived and experienced simultaneously" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 698). Intersectionality does not normally include the mentally ill or those with invisible social stigma. Mattsson (2014) explains intersectionality "...as an analytical ambition to explore gender, sexuality, class, and race as complex, intertwined, and mutual reinforcing categories of oppression and social structures" (p. 9). Autoethnographic approaches to research are "congruent with a study framed by intersectionality" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 703) because both methodological frameworks focus on lived experiences and "the meaning individuals make of them" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 716) through an active dialogue between personal and "social identities" (Ellis, 2004). Life stories help inform the methodology for data analysis and provide a possible framework to represent autoethnographic findings—i.e., integrated story (McAdams, 2012). In other words, narrative representation of analyzed experiences can inform and promote autoethnographic inquiry.

Life stories not only record life events but help define self-concepts in biographical formats (Bamberg, 2011; McAdams, 2012). Bamberg (2011) wonders if reflecting upon life



events and blurring the lines between story, character, and experiences can detract from the potential meaning of events lived. He suggests that describing one's developmental path through the intersection of time, space, and self-concept in the context of various life events more accurately marks one's identity (Bamberg, 2011). "Consequently,...no life story ever is the same-and, more important, lives are open to change" (Bamberg, 2011, p. 18). As a result, the researcher-participant's intent is to enhance the methodological rigor of this narrative inquiry by crafting a personal narrative or life story that explores the intersection of specific documented life events within a psycho-moral context.

In this study, constructing an integrated, intersectional narrative enabled the researcher-participant to view various aspects of his self-concept over time from how he felt and what he thought about key themes: mental illness, spiritual awareness, and grieving. Intersectional analysis also occurs at another level—at the nexus of situation, interaction, and temporal continuity in the multidimensional research space of narrative inquiry (Boylorn, 2009, 2013; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Auto-focused narrative inquiry can clarify as well as obfuscate critical interpretations of identity performance because lived experiences occur in complex and multilayered cultures (Gust, 2005; Ronai, 1996). D. Newman (2009) uses personal narratives to link autoethnographic methods to a transformative journey using critical reflection and soulful awareness. Ronai (1995) provides a rationale for data representation as a layered account to account for emotion, multiplicity, and theory. The layered data of autoethnography reveal not only an open-minded approach to the researcher-participant's experiences but also "affirm the values of multiplicity and connection" (Helle, 1991, p. 49), fostering a deeper understanding through the expression of his own voice—one that resonates with audiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Eyring, 1998).

## Answering the Research Questions

The narrative—as both process and product, analysis and representation—logically responds to the research questions. The first research question concerns a description of adult development in terms of life events within the context of the three cultures—mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death—over a life course. The researcher, as the participant, uses the personal narratives along with poetry to describe this dynamic environment. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) note that narrative analysis is holistic and can help researchers to better understand their own stories.

\* \* \* \* \*

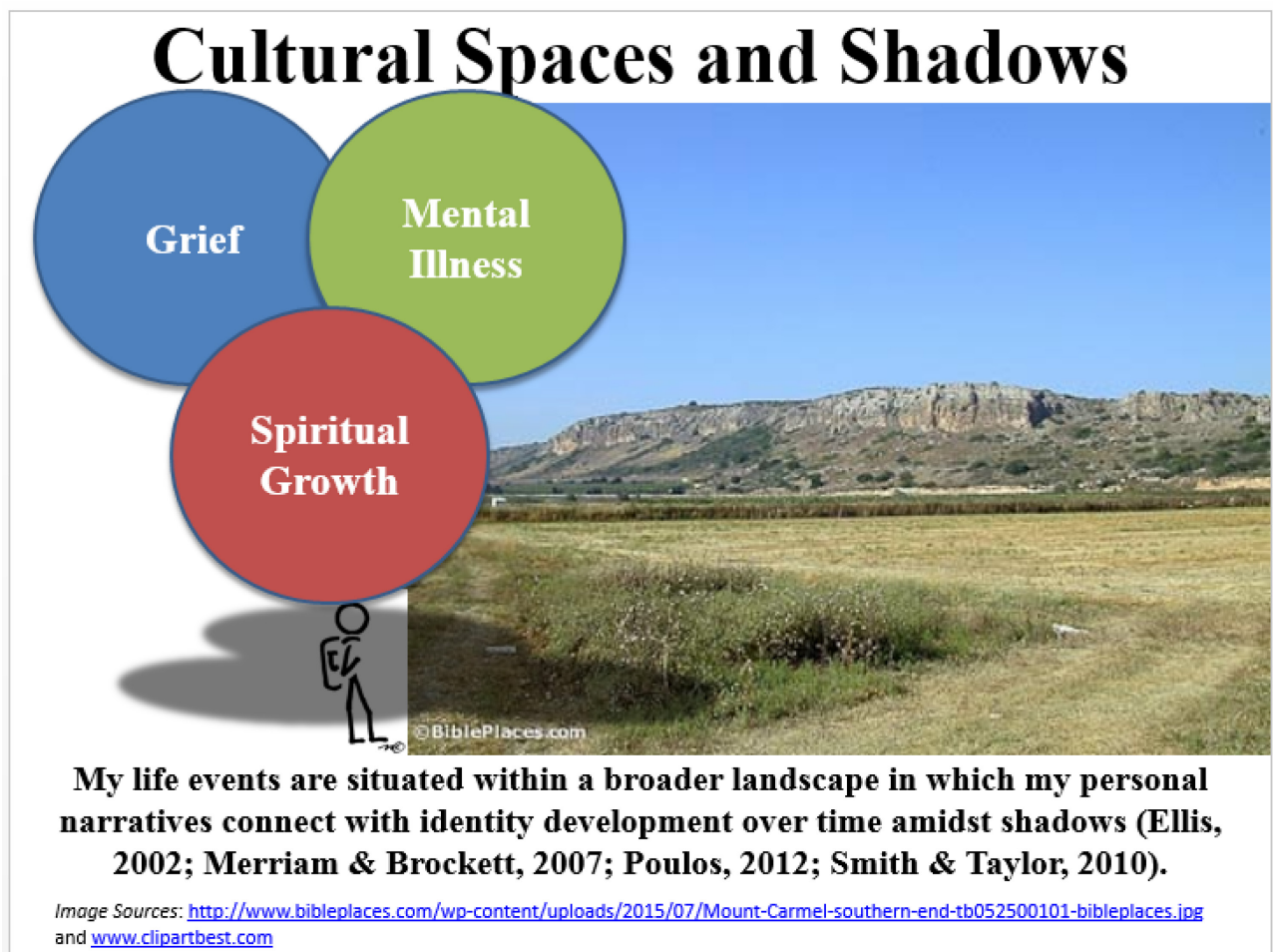
For example, if I were to describe the holistic nature of narrative inquiry to my grandfather, I might write:

*As I continue the pilgrimage of my life, I gradually realize that I am not one-dimensional. I am one person defined by the choices I make along the journey, and those choices are my life events: dealing with an irrational boss, being diagnosed with a mental illness, striving to become spiritually centered, or grieving for my parents. These steps connect in a unique way in terms of timing and sequence to create my personal path. The path and I are shaded by the cultural spaces—predominantly mental illness, spiritual development, and grief. These shadows are not necessarily threatening. They don't hint at my destruction; rather, they put perspective on my ongoing life course. My mental illness, for example, will always shadow my steps; but it also has made me a better husband, officer, and pilgrim because I cherish the rational and grounded things that much more. While my path is singular, I travel with other pilgrims. This knowledge that I am not alone is precious to my self-confidence. In this sense, I can conclude that*

*my life events are situated within a broader landscape in which my personal narratives connect with identity development over time amidst shadows (Ellis, 2002; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Poulos, 2012; Smith & Taylor, 2010).*<sup>32</sup>

In this context, the process of creating the bildungsroman helped to shape my current perceptions of mental illness, spiritual development, and grief. Figure 4.1 describes the context of these cultural spaces and the shadows they cast on my identity development.

Figure 4.1 Cultural Spaces and Shadows



*Figure 4.1.* I organized my data collection and analysis around the literary device of a pilgrim narrative. My personal experiences occur within the context of certain cultures, phenomena that extend beyond my life course. The life events perspective of adult development allows adult

<sup>32</sup> Italics not in original sources; the font style indicates a fictitious journal entry.

educators to better understand the individual and cultural events (including spiritual and emotional) that “trigger the need for learning” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 145) throughout one’s life (see also Smith & Taylor, 2010). Autoethnography provides researchers with a way to inquire into experiences of their own shadows—i.e., fears, doubts, uncertainties—by writing personal stories of disruptive life events that can help us heal and make meaning both “personally and collectively” (Ellis, 2002, p. 401; see also Poulos, 2012). In other words, the life events I have experienced pertaining to these 3 cultures have cast shadows over my pilgrimage. Thus, my personal experiences link to broader cultural constructs within adult and continuing education.

Put another way, my journey has been overshadowed by mental illness, struggles to center myself, and coping with the loss of loved ones. It took me some time to realize that, while I put on masks to hide my pain and fear from others, I was really hiding from myself. Once I began to look at my life events without masks, I began to understand who I have been, who I am, and whom I can become.

To address the second research question concerning possible selves, I presented my personal narratives through the mouths of the ten pilgrim-companions. Each personal narrative describes a key facet of my self-concept. This is another example of how the data analysis (i.e., personal narratives at the second level of sorting) overlaps with representation.

### **Summary**

Over the past several decades, I have developed into a more self-authored person and continue to develop through an ongoing series of high points, low points, and turning points. Reflective journaling—which has included poetry and sketching—has been a primary means whereby I have found a prayerful pathway to personal growth and identity development. As a result, I agree with Robert Stone (1985), cited in the Acknowledgments. Writing my story has enabled me to understand myself better and has helped me make better decisions for my future path.

Another way to represent the implications of this autoethnographic journey is through poetry. This poem, *The Castle*, summarizes the pilgrimage process that I have taken through journaling followed by autoethnographic analysis.

### The Castle

My castle is a sanctum, standing unmolested on Mount Carmel's summit.  
Everything is as I wish it: weathered stones anchor the foundation,  
providing stability to structure and master; the deep moat protects me  
from pesky neighbors, disease, and other fears.  
But that drawbridge has its own thoughts....

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

Shadowed figures rise along the horizon, crossing the meadows  
toward my castle. How can they do that?! Why?!...  
The drawbridge lowers without my bidding—I am exposed!  
Uncertainty is slowly killing me.

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

Herb, my nemesis but another me, mans the drawbridge.  
He laughs at my anger. I am alone and under attack from  
the inside...imprisoned in my own safe house!

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

I retreat into the dungeon of my sub-conscience,  
seeking answers to unknown questions. The strata  
indicate years of rot-growth-misuse. Many memories  
are long forgotten until I find them under the rubble,  
waving back as if I should know them. I know only a  
few, and partially at that. Archaeology was my first love.

*Is this God's way?  
What if this is all there is?*

The shadows approach the impenetrable moat, but  
they know my vulnerabilities—I cannot escape.  
I must pray, with clasped hands, to make them  
go away. It only works a little while;

they chant, “Are you a bad person for thinking bad thoughts?... We’ll return!”

*Is this God’s way?  
What if this is all there is?*

I take the prescription from the physician I agreed to see—  
my marriage counts on it. But  
I cannot tell my neighbors or colleagues—they could judge  
and not understand. Besides, it’s my castle!

*Is this God’s way?  
What if this is all there is?*

My parents’ souls knock on my door every day—  
I didn’t think they knew my castle.  
I miss them and want to say thank you, one last time.  
Their shadows are welcome to stay here.

*Is this God’s way?  
What if this is all there is?*

Therese of Lisieux<sup>33</sup> guides me to choose love over anger;  
that informs my decisions. I mature and watch the  
windswept fields and cloud-laden skies from the castle-  
head at sunset. The shadows are out there; Herb still  
lives here, and some shadows visit now and then.  
That’s OK—I have God at my side. My journey  
is not complete but continues.... Learning is lifelong.<sup>34</sup>

*Is this God’s way?  
What if this is all there is?*

The night arrives, and I bide my time web surfing.  
I will begin my journey in the morning as a  
self-reliant pilgrim, continuing to learn  
about my Spiritual Director.

*God’s way is my way.*

---

<sup>33</sup> She was a Carmelite nun who lived in France and died in 1897. See also [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=105](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=105). When I read her memoir *Story of a Soul* (1972/2005), her daily “little way” (p. x) of humility and contemplation convinced me to choose love over the anger that had motivated my youth. This was a transformative life event in my adult development described in the personal stories.

<sup>34</sup> King, 2010.

*That's all I need.*

I return to the original question: How can an adult make meaning from and develop through lived experiences of mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death? The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to explore how a male in the general population describes how life events have influenced his identity development over a period of 23 years, spanning three decades. The researcher-participant asks two primary questions: 1) How does the individual describe his adult development in terms of “individual and cultural episodes” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 52) related to mental illness, spiritual awareness, and death over time? and 2) How does the individual describe his possible selves in constructing a new sense of identity? Addressing these questions contributes to the literature of adult and continuing education by providing a glimpse into stories of lived experiences over time in the light of adult development. More importantly, this research may provide further insight into numerous issues central to contemporary adult and continuing education: identity development over time to render an internal voice, particularly for marginalized students; counter-narratives to controversial topics such as mental health access, toxic leadership, spiritual awareness, and reflection to construct meaning in a fast-paced world; and narrative-informal methods of learning and inquiry. The researcher-participant illustrates the value of autoethnographic practice for contemporary adult learners by demonstrating how it has promoted his informal learning and self-authorship over three decades.

### **Representing My Self-concept Over Time**

Who am I? Who I am has changed and will continue throughout my life. That pervasive flow of identity development is the essence of my lifelong development through learning. Along the way, I have documented some life events in my journals. These events range from mundane observations from academic reading notes to life-altering, transformative experiences that I will

always treasure—e.g., realizing that I could choose to love rather than be angry at life. Table 3.2 illustrates that these life events encompass both a breadth and, in many cases, a depth of learning experiences that have ineffably influenced my identity development over the past three decades. I have organized this research to describe key implications and the emancipatory counter narratives within the three cultural domains marking my life: living with mental illness, striving to develop spiritually, and coping with the deaths of my parents.

My first counter narrative is that I'm a highly functioning man with a mental illness in a society that prefers to look away from mental disability. It does not hold me back—my wife and I do not let it. It is a family affair in which we have struggled to find balance and buffer from instability...and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. Seeking help was the start, but I continue to receive counseling and medication. I have neutralized any stigma within myself through this lengthy but therapeutic autoethnographic process. But the message that one is a lesser person for seeking behavioral health services remains in society. I pray that my example will help normalize the decision to seek mental health assistance in the US military and society as a whole.

Secondly, I am not spiritually advanced, but I remain on a tortuous path of spiritual development. The process is integral to my identity development, because the soul comprises one's personality. The path sometimes switches back, goes downhill, or fades into a shadowy mist; but it always proceeds to a summit. While there may be numerous summits, God is my guide on this lifelong pilgrimage. In this context of uncertain destinations obfuscated by darkness, I see hope because those very shadows can help guide me along the path. Saint John of the Cross (1951/2000) optimistically describes this union with his loving God:

Oh night that was my guide!  
Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,  
Oh night that joined the lover



To the beloved bride  
Transfiguring them each into the other. (p. 27)

I become my complete self within the life events I have experienced, are experiencing, and will experience over my lifetime. In a sense, my spiritual growth has opened my heart and mind to opportunities for hopefulness in any circumstance—in terms of time or space.

Finally, I now grieve for my deceased parents and friends with a renewed hope. This hope stems from a gratefulness of their gifts of presence during their abbreviated stays on Earth. These individuals have moved on to the shadows—not places of despair or darkness but where they have become closer to who they really are...whom I hope to become. Death puts perspective on life, and I have chosen to love life. The road remains rocky and uncertain; but I am now armed with spiritual hiking poles and boots that will ultimately help me to break my masks of mental illness and grief. The following poem captures the essence of this counter narrative turn toward emancipation within the three cultural domains at the final level of data sorting and analysis. The left column describes my former, socially normative identity narratives, and the right column represents current (counter)narratives from a self-authored perspective. Moreover, the haikus conclude each section by illustrating how my perspective has changed within these cultures while writing this inquiry. The haikus on the left are from the introduction and those on the right are current perspectives as a result of reflective narrative inquiry.

### **Mental Illness**

Is this all there is?	I am not my disorder. I doesn't define me.
I am bad because I have bad thoughts.	I'm a good person who sometimes has bad thoughts.
I'm a prisoner of my own mind.	Everyone has unchecked thoughts.
Everything is uncertain.	I made myself a victim; I hold the keys for emancipation.
	It's OK that life is not certain.

If I seek help, people will talk  
& doubt me.

I'm singularly boring and will never  
find a voice.

Stigma is a metaphor for bad,  
insidious character.

Seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Paranoia + compulsion=crutches.

I cannot pilot a helicopter until  
I am symptom-free after being  
off meds for a year.

Did I tell you there's no cure?

Uncertainty reigns—  
shadows cast on unmarked paths  
keep following me.

I am competent; continue to learn—step forward

My self-concept is multi-faceted, multi-layered.

Screw stigma or what others think—at least tell  
myself that.

I find strength in being aware of my weaknesses.

I must seek help for myself & family, not humility.

I follow required checklists and pay more attention  
to detail, but don't tell the government that.

Not everyone will understand; some will stereotype.

I have obsessions—  
of bad things; God grants grace to  
be a good person

## Spiritual Development

Anger only.

I am a sinner, moving more into the  
shadows.

Say the right prayers in the right way.

Distraction, self-centeredness, pride.

Life is tough.

Prayer is tough, so I don't do it much.

Self-absorption & shallowness.

Action will follow prayer.

I am empty and hollow.

Sin and mental illness mean I'm  
unworthy.

Love always.

So are we all. No one is alone.

Spiritual growth is lifelong; my choice to start.

Centeredness, compassion, humility.

I cannot go all the way alone; I need all the help I  
can get.

God is everywhere, so I pray all the time  
to develop our relationship.

Presence to others & purity of heart.

Growth in prayer is the hardest but most  
important endeavor—ties all together.

Develop relationship with God through prayer,  
with others through compassion, and  
with myself through humility.

Balance these daily: physical, mental, spiritual.

Choosing love means everything.

Holiness is seeking our true selves in our own time  
and space.

I desire to learn—  
spiritual growth here, now  
but dark clouds hover.

Holiness is sand,  
knowing-being what good I  
must do for others.

## Death and Grief

I'm sad my parents are gone.  
I miss them.

I must get on with my life but never forget.

They don't know how to deal with me.

They're my role models.

They didn't teach me much.

I learned everything from them—especially  
perseverance and faith.  
Don't take loved ones for granted.  
Patience.  
Pray for the living and dead.

I was ungrateful to my parents  
at times.

Thank you!  
I'm not alone.

My mother modeled anger as a  
motivator.

I'm responsible for my attitudes.  
Love is the optimal motivator, and  
protects us from the shadows.

I wish I said thank you more  
explicitly.

Life lived testifies to my gratefulness.

Die on your own terms.

Live and die on your own terms.

All paths wash away—  
grief strickens but strengthens too,  
new seeds sprout boldly.

Love is auburn light  
casting shadows from pilgrims  
ascending Carmel.

This poetic representation not only portrays the fourth and final level of data sorting, but it points to the way ahead by analyzing the ongoing journey. Dewey (2008) described adult learning as inherently plastic, a capacity to learn from experience over time.<sup>35</sup> The narrative

---

<sup>35</sup> Dewey (2008) equates the process of lifelong education with growth and development—transformation: "...life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, that means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (Dewey, 2008, p. 48).

research space in this study has fostered Dewey's emphasis on the continuity of inquiry over a lifetime of experiences, resulting in a personal narrative of "growth and change" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71; see also Clandinin & Murphy, 2009).

### **Some Implications for Adult and Continuing Education**

This research suggests several implications for adult and continuing education, particularly in the domains of reflective, narrative, and informal learning.

#### **Adult Learning in a Narrative Context**

Adult learning is integrally linked to development through lived experience. If adult learning is inextricably linked to experience, then the personal stories of one's experiences are integral to personal and professional development. Wlodkowski (2008) describes this relationship narratologically, "We are the history of our lives, and our motivation is inseparable from our learning, which is inseparable from our cultural experience" (p. 3). Put another way, narrating a life story is a transforming learning activity, and life-as-story is a powerful metaphor to better understand it (Randall, 1996). Baxter Magolda (2007) explicitly links transformative learning to self-authorship: "Moving from these entering characteristics to intended learning outcomes requires transformational learning" (p. 69) in which adults learn new perspectives toward their experiences. She concludes that "self-authorship forms a developmental foundation for advanced learning outcomes" (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 70). In other words, there is a linkage between transformative learning and development through self-authorship. Adult development and learning complemented by self-authorship, then, highlight the nexus of the story of our experiences, motivation, and context.

Transformative learning is an adult learning theory that emphasizes deeper learning by reflecting upon entrenched perceptions. Mezirow's (1978) seminal introduction to transformative

learning indicates that one's awareness of perspectives and an ability to change them is a "uniquely adult" (p. 100) attribute. Mezirow "has drawn from developmental and cognitive psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, and philosophy to come to an understanding of how adults learn, transform, and develop; the roots of his theory lie in humanism and critical social theory" (Cranton, 1994, p. 22). Transformative learning broadens one's understanding through the deep relationships among personal experiences, individual motivation, and personal and social context (Brookfield, 2006). Thus, transformative learning has philosophical underpinnings in adult development theory. Recent research has sought to clarify the typology of terms used to describe transformative learning experiences and how they may apply to data analysis (Hoggan, 2015).

The Nerstrom model helps visualize how adult transformative (i.e., developmental) learning centers on life experience. The key components of the model entail experience, assumptions, challenge perspectives, and transformative learning that leads to further experiences (Nerstrom, 2013). Nerstrom (2013) describes how she personally envisions transformative learning in the guise of a willow tree. The roots represent foundational scholars such as Lindeman and Knowles; the trunk suggests the influence of Mezirow; and the subsequent branches and leaves depict the contributions of scholars who continue to develop the field such as Cranton, Taylor, Dirkx, and Tisdell (Nerstrom, 2013).

\* \* \* \*

My own contributions of micro-narratives are individual leaves and minor branches. Based upon my autoethnographic research, I conclude that the willow tree is an apt image of transformative learning, but it is incomplete. There is a particular cacophony of social and spiritual activity that occurs throughout a lifetime and that influences a tree's growth. This

activity includes social context, dialogue, and reflective creation as demonstrated in previous sections. An orchestra, with its numerous actors and instruments, can illustrate these influences with their ever-changing mixture of noises that somehow synthesize into melodies and harmonies that transcend time and space. Hence, a willow growing over a long period of time in the midst of an orchestra aptly portrays an adult learner who has transformed over a life of experience.

\* \* \* \*

Developmental perspectives to learning—of which transformative learning is one facet—focus on improving the quality rather than quantity of thinking in students. Pratt and Associates (1998) explain that developmental approaches to adult learning help bridge the gap between students’ personal experiences and what they need to know to improve their lives. Learning involves “a change in the quality of thinking and reasoning within a specific” (Pratt & Associates, 1998, p. 236) context. “Effective developmental teachers act as guides or co-inquirers, building bridges between learners’ present ways of thinking and more ‘desirable’ ways of thinking within a discipline or area of practice” (Pratt & Associates, 1998, p. 237). “As a result, developmental teachers have a profound respect for learners’ thinking and prior knowledge” (Pratt & Associates, 1998, p. 237). Transformative learning promotes learning environments in which learners can create their own meaning.

Wlodkowski (2008) offers several narrative strategies to enhance meaning for learners through activities and establishing environments conducive to learning. One strategy emphasizes the value of highlighting examples, analogies, metaphors, and stories to stimulate learners and to “give learners a way to focus new learning so that it is concretely illustrated in their own minds” (Wlodkowski, 2008, pp. 257-258). When learners construct their own examples to link new

concepts to prior experiences, they understand at a deeper level. Learners can “create meaning that reflects language and imagery more firmly anchored in their world than what we as instructors usually have to offer. When a person can give his own fitting example for something newly learned, deeper learning is at hand” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 258). Narrative approaches to learning such as autoethnography can result in deeper understanding for all participants. Merriam (2004) claims that adult-developmental learning requires a questioning of one’s close-held assumptions, a process that may be beyond some adults’ current levels of cognitive development. She suggests, corroborating Dirkx (2006), that Mezirow “substantively expand the theory of transformational learning to include more 'connected,' affective, and intuitive dimensions on an equal footing with cognitive and rational components” (Merriam, 2004, pp. 66-67). Adult learning theory suggests that adults can change over time through reflection upon lived experience. Mezirow was one of the first to argue effectively that critical reflection of experience triggers learning. “When we...use this interpretation [of experience] to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning” (Mezirow & Associates, 1991, p. 1). In this sense, reflective adult learning is a vehicle of critical self-awareness whereby learners can live, adapt, work, problem solve, and behave better in an increasingly complex world. Adult learning from a life events perspective helps tie together the constructivist epistemology of this research with its purpose, questions, and research frameworks (see Figure 3.1 Research Conceptual Linkages) regarding adult development.

Adult learning and identity development occur in a postmodernist context (Kegan, 1994). Kegan (1994) explains that a holding environment is necessary in which to grow and develop a fluid identity in a transformative learning situation:

As such, a holding environment is a tricky transitional culture, an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over. It fosters developmental transformation, or the process by which the whole ('how I am') becomes gradually a part ('how I was') of a new whole ('how I am now'). (p. 43)

Thus, a holding environment is necessary in which to grow and develop a fluid identity in an adult learning environment.

As the theoretical framework of adult learning developed, the concept expanded to explain the linkage of adult development to "...autonomous, responsible thinking" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Autonomy, related to self-authorship, links back to adult learning and development: "...becoming autonomous is a transformative process, that is, becoming free of the constraints of unarticulated or distorted meaning perspectives" (Cranton, 1994, p 60). Erikson (1963) suggests that people can develop beyond childhood; in fact, mature persons rely upon the young for "guidance as well as encouragement" (pp. 266-267). Cranton (1994) explains that adult development and learning essentially occur "in the uncovering of distorted assumptions—errors in learning" (p. 75) in the instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning domains. In other words, adult learning theory has close ties to the idea of self-authorship, as both are rooted in adult development theory. Cranton (1994) also expands this linkage to communication theory: "Transformative learning theory is embedded in the broader context of Habermas's theory of communicative competence, particularly the concepts of instrumental, practical, and emancipatory knowledge" (p. 62). In this sense, learning has social, developmental, and communicative dimensions unique to adult learners.

Mezirow (1981) builds his concept of adult developmental learning upon Habermas' ideas concerning emancipatory learning. Emancipatory learning involves a self-awareness of



personal history (i.e., lived experience) in terms of assumptions concerning roles and expectations (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1981) equates such emancipation with a critical self-awareness

*...of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings.* (p. 6, italics in original)

In this context, emancipatory learning is a distinctive brand of adult learning that is conducive to the introspective-reflective and narrative context of autoethnographic methods (Mezirow, 1981). Such reflective awareness of personal experiences helps account for transitions between stages in cognitive development theory (Erikson, 1963; Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1981) clarifies that "perspective transformation" may consist of a "sudden insight" into closely held psycho-cultural assumptions, but it more commonly entails "a series of transitions" (p. 7) toward a new perspective. The purpose of these transitions is to facilitate the deep "self-reflection essential for a transformation" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 8) which is the premise of adult development. Hoggan (2015) further expands the application of perspective transformation to clarify the typology of terms used to describe transformative learning experiences and how they may apply to data analysis. As a result of such intimate development over time, a person is likely to form new relationships and roles based on a renewed sense of self-agency with concomitant social commitments—i.e., identity development (Mezirow, 1981).

In summary, Hoggan's (2015) flexible definition of transformative learning experience adds context to my use of Cranton's transformative questioning framework to discern truly adult learning experienced in my life story of identity development: "*a dramatic change in the way a*

*person experiences, conceptualizes and interact with the world*' (p. 201, formatting by author cited). Using this definition coupled with the questioning framework enabled the analysis to achieve both the depth and breadth of transformation appropriate for the scope of this study.

### **Ties to Informal and Reflective Learning**

There is an underlying assumption in adult education that out-of-class reflection in which students make connections between the curriculum and their life experiences normally occur. Elias and Merriam (2005) describe this perspective as a “basic progressive premise that education is a process of reflective inquiry” (p. 81) that facilitates adult learners in their “reconstruction of both human experience and society” (p. 6). In this sense, adult education involves both informal and reflective modes of learning that occur throughout one’s life span.

Informal learning utilizing narratives informs identity development and self-authorship over time. The researcher-participant has asked himself several questions over time: What are the facts and assumptions concerning informal learning experiences in becoming a self-authored learner over time? How can one verify the facts? How can one validate the assumptions? Why is this knowledge personally significant? Why should/not one alter one’s perspective during his life course? Is there evidence of personal transformation into a better individual, citizen, or adult as a result of informal learning activities? Informal learning is still evolving and interdisciplinary by nature.

There seems to be a connection of narrative learning to adult development. E. Taylor (2008) further describes this conceptual linkage of adult learning and development through narrative practice. He explains that a cultural-spiritual perspective to adult learning “focuses on how learners construct knowledge (narratives) as part of the transformative learning experience...by engaging storytelling on a personal and social level through group inquiry”

(Taylor, 2008, pp. 8-9). Taylor (2008) further explains that the “teacher’s role is that of a collaborator with a relational emphasis on group inquiry and narrative reasoning, which assist the learner in sharing stories of experience and revising new stories in the process” (2008, p. 9). In this sense, informal learning through narrative inquiry consists of a “...a holistic and reflective approach to adult development that involves narrative ways of learning in particular social-cultural contexts.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, the reflective nature of narrative informal learning activities such as journaling fosters development in both breadth and depth of lived experience (see also Hoggan, 2015).

Adult development very often involves informal learning through reflective practice. Informal learning describes learner-driven, lifelong activities that employ reflection within the context of daily life, outside of formal learning situations (King, 2010; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013; Ziegler, Paulus, & Woodside, 2014). The learner-initiated activity of journaling life events can provide unique autoethnographic insights into adult development regarding self-direction, critical thinking, creativity, and coping skills (King, 2010). For example, exploring the three cultures of mental illness, spiritual development, and death/grief informed the data representation at the third and fourth levels of analysis. Likewise, informal learning offers a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to understanding adult learning, particularly highlighting the mind-body continuum (King, 2010). In this sense, informal learning is narrative in nature because it continues throughout the course of one’s life—i.e., reflecting back in order to understand the present and to proceed forward. While this study focused on personal contexts, there are further

---

<sup>36</sup> See also E. Taylor, 2008. Cranton (1994/2006) additionally links transformative learning to "self-directed learning, critical thinking, and autonomy" (p. 57).

social aspects of informal learning—e.g., peer evaluations of learning activities, online blogs—that promise to ingrain its normalization (Galanis, Mayol, Alier, & Garcia-Penalvo, 2015; Ziegler et al., 2014). Groups of adult learners may, then, find some value in narrative-reflective practices through discussion-based activities over time.

Autoethnography arose in the fields of anthropology and sociology as an alternate means of inquiry to traditional positivist methods. Rather than emphasize the collection of objective data, autoethnography arose to allow researchers to engage as participants in complex socio-cultural experiences (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). The methodology has since grown into an accepted methodology for qualitative research in which personal experience, reflection, and narrative inform socio-cultural understanding (Ellis, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Pelias, 2013). This discussion now turns toward the factors common to these facets of the research topic.

Self-reflection is a key component of deeper learning and meaning construction. Self-authorship is a critical capacity in adult development through, among other factors, emancipated voice (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Self-authorship helps link transformative learning and development over a life span (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Collay and Cooper (2008) suggest that transformative learning integrated with self-authorship have a significant role to play in adult individual and social development because learners are encouraged to construct meaning from their own experiences. The primary ways such learning occurs are by adults finding their voices and by systematically reflecting (often nurtured by journaling) on personal experiences to develop their identities (Collay & Cooper, 2008). In other words, the complementary theoretical frameworks of life events perspective and self-authorship pave pathways of self-reflection toward identity development.

Narrative learning can foster transformation across a life span because it can raise personal awareness through reflection, influence closely held perceptions through a discourse on lived experiences, and enhance deeper meaning over extended periods of time (Barner & Barner, 2011; Brendel, 2009; Hoggan, 2015). Narrative learning and inquiry symbiotically support the construction of knowledge and meaning. Narrative approaches to inquiry normally entail relating the researcher to the research in terms of time, place, personal experiences, and even transformation (Clandinin, 2013; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2013). In this sense, autoethnography can serve as a self-reflective platform upon which a researcher-participant can collect data and personally transform (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). This study embraces more of an analytical autoethnography which "focuses on connecting self-experience to existing research and theory, moving beyond the representation and description that characterizes evocative autoethnography, to critical analysis" (Cook, 2014, p. 270). In this way, autoethnography attempts to move beyond self-absorbed descriptions—which often fuel its detractors (Delamont, 2009)—toward meaning construction and analysis (Cook, 2014).

Autoethnography employs well-known narrative tools to discover the meaning of sociocultural phenomena in deep and unique ways. This combination of depth and breadth can make this practice transformative (Hoggan, 2015). Autoethnographic methods allow researchers to actively question and re-story personal memories in order to understand them in new ways (Altheide & Johnson, 2013). At the same time, the researcher-participant must realize that

...narrative inquiry requires patience and a close relationship between the researcher and the reader. This implies that I should use a 1st-person narrator (rather than observe myself) to allow the reader to feel like he/she is experiencing what I have/am.

Additionally, I cannot plan out the plot and storyboard how it will end, as much as I—a

planner—would like. This is because narrative inquiry is, by nature, a discovery of meaning through writing. I cannot determine the meaning ahead of the writing process.

(Culkin, September 24 2015, research journal)

In this context, autoethnography provides the researcher-participant with a means of inquiry into the substantive framework, life events perspective.

Another factor common to the research areas of identity development and autoethnography is their journey toward meaning. Autoethnography helps bridge these concepts as an interdisciplinary approach to qualitative research. For example, Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) describe autoethnography as a legitimate way to describe “personal transformation” (p. 61) in a lived context. The role of meaning construction in narrative learning stems largely from reflection upon experience, often facilitated by creating and analyzing narratives (Bridwell, 2012; Collay & Cooper, 2008). Because autoethnography is both methodology and outcome, it helps create meaning through stories in a way that positivist methodologies cannot (Goodall, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). It is narrative inquiry for the distinct purpose of constructing knowledge in the socio-cultural realm. Put another way, autoethnographers reflect on personal experiences and storied texts to make sense of their cultural environments. In the next few sections, emergent themes from literature will be presented and examined in the context of this research.

Bridwell (2012) refers to Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory to examine "transformative learning among six low-income and homeless women of Color pursuing their GED in a shelter-based literacy program" (Bridwell, p. 127). She conducts narrative analysis of interview data to assess the degree of transformative learning in the participants' lives. "The study suggests that groups often regarded as marginalized by race, class, and gender may

experience growth in epistemological complexity in environments where transformative learning goals are purposefully supported" (Bridwell, 2012, p. 127). Bridwell (2012) confirms that transformative learning can lead participants to deeper learning in terms of "increased epistemological complexity and greater self-agency" (p. 141). In these many aspects, both the theoretical and methodological frameworks establish the foundation for the research design.

So, over a life course, one can discern narratives that describe his reflections of particular life events. These personal stories linking past, present, and potential selves motivate one to learn more about oneself and others. In this sense, informal learning connects one's possible selves to others in community.

### **Conclusion**

Pilgrim steps forward—  
Cracking masks; freeing shadows.  
Heartfelt wounds now heal.

There are significant implications of autoethnographic activities for adult and continuing education. First and foremost, autoethnography, grounded in current theory and research, can foster the voice of individuals, particularly from marginalized populations in a contemporary society that is increasingly divided between haves and have nots. Transformative learning events can also inform adult development through extant frameworks such as cognitive development theory. Informal learning activities involving narratives and creative nonfiction, can augment identity development in numerous ways. Additionally, integrated narratives can offer counter-narratives to break tightly held stereotypes in long-stigmatized fields such as mental health, service industries, and identity development. Finally, autoethnographic methods serve as effective tools to link lived experience with meaning making—i.e., a narrative approach to informal learning.

Perhaps this journal entry says it best: “We, ourselves, give meaning to our experiences, not the other way around” (Culkin, Culkin, & Culkin, *Journal 4*, November 14 & December 25, 1997 & January 14, 1998). The researcher-participant reviewed over 2,000 pages of primary materials covering 23 years of his lived experience. The resultant integrated story ties 18 causal connections over this period spanning three decades that describe how certain key experiences have transformed the way he thinks about his identity and the manner in which he expresses self-actualized ideas, beliefs, and values.

This study suggests that autoethnographic practice is an effective methodological approach to data collection, analysis, and representation in informal learning and adult development contexts. Furthermore, personal stories of life events, when narratively analyzed in social-cultural situations, can provide a coherent narrative of one’s identity development over time. For example, in journaling for over three decades, the researcher-participant has learned to take off his masks and reveal his invisible wounds in order to become more of his true, holy self—rather than become a slave to his shadows—gradually over time. The effort expends much energy, but it has also healed without curing, enabling him to refer to past experience to live a better present and future. In a world increasingly marked by decentralization, politicization, and division, autoethnographic practice can offer an effective means for any adult—particularly those marginalized—to express his/her voice and thereby learn and develop.



## Chapter 5 - Epilogue: A Conversation with Pop-pop

Whether this personal bildungsroman is an adult educator's dream, an archaeological memoir, a pilgrimage, or a retelling of a series of life events; the story ends as it began—a continued inquiry into the incomplete puzzle pieces of the researcher-participant's life experiences. This quest has taken divergent paths such as the invisible wounds of mental illness and the masks the stigmatized put on when facing a cynical society. But those pathways have forced the researcher-participant to confront those multifaceted varieties of his personality, self-concept, and choices that have shaped his self-concept over time. These possible selves represent a contemporary contemplative who seeks spiritual grounding while also struggling with the self-centered obsessions of a mental illness that seeks to disrupt the very roots of faith and certainty sought. Other possible selves have appeared as shadowed life events, including toxic leaders who forced him to question his own worth and competence. Yet other characters, epitomized by the poet or the passionate adult educator, have sought opportunities to learn from all of these life events—the wounds of the past, the transitions of the present, and even the uncertainties of the future.

Adults in contemporary society face these transcendent concerns that influence how they learn over the life course. Adult educators, as lifelong learners themselves, can reflect upon their own life events in a similar, narrative way using informal methods to refine their pedagogical philosophies. Learners on the tortuous path of identity development, can become aware of their possible selves and how they all, including the shadows, can help them create meaning from the puzzle pieces of their life events. Life is experience, but meaning must be actively and continuously discerned. The following intersectional narrative attempts to re-story the emergent themes identified during data sorting (see Table 3.2 *Summary of Emergent Themes from All*

*Personal Stories by the First Two Levels of Data Sorting*, thereby setting the stage for the future chapters of this bildungsroman.

### **Haiku Pilgrim: An Intersectional Dialogue**

In this autoethnographic bildungsroman, I have tried to examine my multi-faceted experiences within the cultures of mental illness, spiritual development, and grieving loss through a fictionalized conversation with my grandfather. In this sense, it is an autoethnography of adult development and of identity development in particular. More generally, it is an intersectional analysis that explores rich, layered social and psychological phenomena over the course of my life span (Huber et al., 2013). In the end, this is a story of a life lived and living, its relational legacies, and future opportunities grounded in the past and present.

#### **Background**

Roses grow in spring  
from new buds born in winter—  
all colors fading.

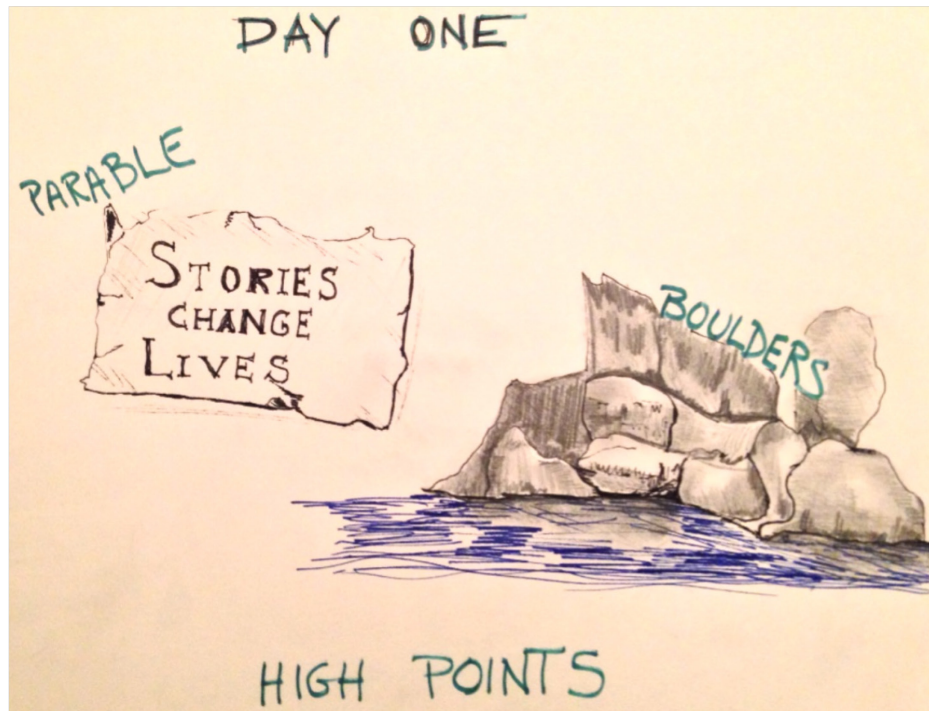
In the summer of 1991, I turned 22 and felt like I was about to really live. I was a recent West Point graduate and really wanted to make a contribution to the world. In many ways—ways in which I could not perceive then—I still do. I had learned a great deal while a cadet at West Point. As I noted in my cadet journal, the four-year experience had opened my naïve eyes and allowed me to grow interpersonally: “dealing with others so that we may live with ourselves” (Culkin, February 13, 1989). In another entry, I noted that working with fellow cadets during the summer of 1990 had changed my life: “What a joy it is to be with and enjoy other people. What greater a joy it is to know they feel likewise” (Culkin, August 26, 1990)! Ah, the exuberance of youth.... I was just as idealistic as the next hormone-ridden American youth, and I had a plan. I always had a plan.

My plan was to become an Army helicopter pilot, get a master's degree in a few years, and then see where my career would take me. Not much of a plan, looking back. In retrospect, my plan was really to escape the parochial cocoon in which I had developed until then. I was a single kid—my older brother had left home years before to join the U.S. military—with a resilient single mother who struggled with her mental stability, emotional fragility, and addictive proclivities. In one sense, he may have possessed some guilt for leaving me behind with our temperamental parent, unable to protect me (Brother, personal telephone communication, April 7, 2016). Going to an all-boys Jesuit high school followed by the monastery on the Hudson River provided me a world-class education but not much exposure to the “real world,” whatever that was. My father was present during my adolescence, but he didn't know how to communicate with people younger than 40. So, I was pretty much on my own during my young adulthood.

When I now look back on my lived experiences almost 24 years later, I can see certain high points, low points, and turning points. They help mark the milestones of change and how I learned from those experiences. The primary challenge I had to overcome was developing internal voice, a key element of self-authorship, as an introvert (Baxter Magolda, 2008). I have adapted and have grown into my own person while continuing to develop. The eighteen emergent themes found during the third level of sorting (see Table 3.3 *Compilation of Emergent Themes to Re-story the Present (Level 3 Sorting)*) are represented in italics for easy reference and context. In a way, this journey shared with my grandfather is similar to a pilgrimage. I encounter high points on the first day, low points on the second, and decide to turn in specific directions by the third. For each day, I integrate a reflection to tie the experiences to meaning via autoethnographic practice.

## Day 1—High Points

Figure 5.1 Illustration for Day 1



*Figure 5.1.* The banner signifies the use of parable to describe a three-day period as a literary framework for the integrated story. The first day covers high points, symbolized by the successful negotiation of dangerous boulders in the river.

The summer morning sun was burning through the wispy clouds that embraced the Hudson Highlands. I could smell the mull brush in the air, cleansing my nostrils and caressing my lungs. My heart was a little lighter. I was looking forward to my adult life. Then I finally met him.

“Come on over here! Over here, Haiku Pilgrim!” exclaimed Pop-pop. I had just graduated from West Point and had travelled from Highland Falls, New York, to make this rafting trip my step toward independence before I reported to my first army assignment.

I wondered why he had called me, “Haiku Pilgrim.” Perhaps he knew something I did not. Nevertheless, I put it in the back of my mind because I had longed to talk to him since he had died in 1979 when he was 91 and I was 9.

We both settled in the raft and began to paddle. The glacial water froze when it splattered on our faces, but we drove on. Then I saw the boulders ahead.

“Stay the course!” Pop-pop shouted above the living cacophony of the approaching rapids.

We both dug in and paddled as hard as we could. At the last second, the bow shifted left to avoid the boulders that would surely have penetrated our rubber vessel. We were safe for now.

I felt safe with someone spiritually secure as Pop-pop. Sure, I had sought out other guides to discern spiritual peace. Thomas Merton had been my informal guide throughout high school. I had read some of his stuff about his St. Augustine-like conversion which made me feel somewhat better about myself. I knew that, with my parent’s divorce and Mom’s depression, I couldn’t make it through life by myself, but Pop-pop reminded me that I was not alone.

“Now, remember, I’ll be there with you.... Listen to me at all times, and you’ll be fine,” Pop-pop proclaimed. His was a no-nonsense kind of personality. That sense of certainty and decisiveness somehow comforted me a little in an odd way, putting Herb into a quiet corner.

I needed the confidence boost. The rest of the day was filled with extraordinary vistas of woodlands, palisades, and reminders of times when life was a little slower paced. We found a camp site on the west side of the river and started a fire.

### **Night 1—Reflection**

“So, Dave, what have you learned from today?” Pop-pop, my namesake, queried through his thin lips and slight smile. I closed my eyes and could feel the evening winds begin to kick up and embrace us.

“Well, now I know why I have to keep walking forward and not wait for my fears to take over.”

“Good point. You’ve learned to channel your energy from love rather than from fear and anger—a key lesson.” I reflected that my high points have been mostly the norm: college graduation, completion of masters programs, and marrying my best friend. I have also, during the course of the run, completed a successful first career, am working on a doctorate, and developing a persistent spiritual awareness. These are the calm spots in the river. The challenges associated with these high points are the boulders that do not block the way but certainly force me to make a commitment. And none of them are the same in terms of intensity or consistency.

Later, I wrote the following passage in my journal.

A common thread that ties these high points together is a prayerful reflection interspersed with a sense of pilgrimage. Being a pilgrim adds a spiritual dimension to my life journey. My young narcissistic and idealist self insisted that I was destined for great personal achievement. I now realize that I am a normal schmo who likes to use Yiddish terms to vaguely describe my largely unremarkable accomplishments while attempting to reach back into my Jewish ancestry. But now I realize that *personal inquiry and spiritual awareness have permitted me to see beyond self-perception, begin to overcome past regrets, and to develop into a less self-centered person.* This awareness is also a turning point because it affects how I interpret my past and how I may choose to live in the present with a consideration of future implications. Along the way, I have realized that I cannot endure life’s journey alone.

I have found solace and confidence in the teachings of God, and Catholic saints have shown me how I can better follow those precepts. *Mystics such as Thomas Merton, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Edith Stein have pointed out a path of awareness, patience, humility, solace, and true development given my Judeo-Christian cultural context.* For

me, this path has meant self-surrender and increased humility: perhaps two of the hardest tasks I have undertaken. In other words, *let go and let God; be patiently consistent.*

Teresa of Avila, for instance, achieved spiritual union with God and, in her writings, encourages lay persons to work toward the same goal through prayer and patience.

*Prayer is the integrated path to improving my relationship with God, my choices, and development as a good person.* Through prayer, I remind myself that I'm not alone, and especially pray for my wife—my immediate family. This path to companionship is strewn with prayer and respect. A key lesson I have learned is that *refusing to take loved ones for granted permits me to invest more in my valued relationships over time—if I choose.*

After writing in my journal, I walked over to Pop-pop and sat down by the fire. I began with my heavy burden. “When you died, I found out about your autobiography. Since then, I had always wanted to possess it because it reminded me of the importance of family memory. Mom, of course, inherited the manuscript which taught me about the events of your 65-year career in construction. But I wanted to know more, deeper.... Your life epitomized the arduous and ingenious spirit of your generation that experienced first-hand both the industrial and nuclear ages. For years, I would sneak glances at the document, never finding an opportunity to delve into it. Mom would promise it to me numerous times; but her possessive nature and depression led to me inherit it only after she died in 2012. When I finally studied the memoir, a new world opened up for me. I saw a side of my ancestor only relayed through my mother until then. I loved your acute description of flying alongside Charles Lindbergh, building the Missouri state capitol, constructing the United Nations, and building the Julliard School. These images have added clarity to my mental painting of your legacy. It seemed you focused so much on your

construction career, almost forgetting about how you overcame the premature deaths of your father, losing your pregnant first wife during the World War I influenza epidemic, the lack of formal education beyond primary school, and succeeding as a member of an ethnic minority (eastern European Jew) in society. In this way, you're a part of me."

"Well, there you go," stated Pop-pop. "It sounds like you're on to something there—that I, as your grandfather, have *unwittingly served as a significant model for your identity, humor, creativity, and resilience developed through long-term autobiographical practice.*"

"By the way," I asked turning back to my habit-adorned friend, "why do you call me 'Haiku Pilgrim'?"

His stoic face broke into a glimmering shadow of a smile. "You are a poet seeking stanzas on a spiritual journey," he replied as if he had rehearsed it many times. Should I have known that?

Pop-pop continued: "Merton (1961) once noted that holiness '...means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self' (p. 31).<sup>37</sup> Thus, developing a self-concept is, in itself, a spiritual journey—one with many twists and unexpected turns."

Reflecting at that camp fire that first night, I realized that even some low points—such as not being able to read my grandfather's autobiography—later became high points—such as when I got to read the autobiography.

---

<sup>37</sup> Merton (1961) also observed that every individual has a unique set of gifts that comprise his/her identity: "...each particular being, in its individuality,...with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art" (p. 30). Put another way, every person has a responsibility to use his particular set of gifts in time and space to express his true self. This is love in human life.



## Day 2—Low Points

Figure 5.2 Illustration for Day 2



*Figure 5.2.* During the second day of the trip, the participant experiences low points represented by falling in but then being saved. These low points have tremendous learning potential.

The next morning, the smoke from the fire burning Pop-pop’s breakfast of powdered eggs and bacon<sup>38</sup> inflamed my nostrils. It wasn’t a stinging feeling as if vinegar was being poured down my throat. It was more of a hot-pepper scent that sparked memories of summer campfires from my youth. Then I noticed the hot pepper sauce by his left hip as he wrote in his journal. “What do you have there, Pop-pop?”

“We all experience moments that indelibly mark us with the negative emotions of anger, jealousy, and humiliation that yield emptiness and soulful yearning.”

---

<sup>38</sup> Pop-pop would eat bacon but “abstained from all shellfish (which can never be kosher) his entire life” (Brother, e-mail, August 1, 2016).

I replied, “That’s really good, and makes me think of my mental health issues.” He smiled because he was aware of my situation. He was my mentor after all.

An insidious mental illness has pervaded almost every facet of my daily life and is the common thread that interweaves most of my low points. Even as a young man, an overarching fear of failure, regret, and uncertainty resulted in obsessive thoughts...thoughts that convinced me that I was a fundamentally bad person.

*“My fears have primarily concerned failure, regret, loss of control (i.e., uncertainty), and falling short of others’ expectations,”* I once had written in my journal. Whatever compulsion I did in response—i.e., briefing my wife of my woes, or repetitively writing detailed accounts of my feelings—only resulted in temporary relief. I could not get past the undercurrent of worthlessness and self-doubt. In this way, *self-centeredness and hypersensitivity to others’ thoughts of me have retarded my development.*

“So, Pop-pop, how do fears relate to the future?” I asked, curious. He put his bacon back down on the little paper plate that rested on his lap.

He then pondered and surmised, “As a young man, I couldn’t see the hope of the future, only the tearful past. Life was a series of worrisome problems to be solved, not moments of joyful sharing and camaraderie. I was building a successful construction business, but I had lost my parents and my first wife. The last two had died in my arms (Aronberg, 1968, Appendix A). Looking back, I repressed the pain.” He resumed bacon eating.

My belief in working hard before playing only reinforced the negative experiences. In this atmosphere of perpetual mental imprisonment, *my fears have fed my mental illness.* In the course of a few years, for example, my uncommanded and unfounded thoughts ranged from sexual orientation, to domestic violence, to religious scrupulosity. It was not until diagnosis that I

came to believe these experiences to be indicators of a disease rather than of a serious character flaw.

Pop-pop continued his lesson, shifting the focus to the role of authority. “The hardest thing for many young people to accept is not the hard work but the obedience to superiors. It’s kinda un-American if you think about it,” he said, relishing the last remnants of the bacon delight.

For the next hour, the older self and I shared our low points, focusing on misled bosses and the deaths of loved ones. We didn’t describe them as tragedies but as opportunities to learn. It seemed the only way not to go to some dark place quickly. At the same time, I felt a live connection with him, experiencing him as he really was and not through an intermediary like my mother.

External influences, such as troubled people in positions of authority, have also triggered low points described in my journals. For example, I experienced professional toxicity while working for two senior officers at a major military command. Their overwhelming need to control the actions of others to brighten their own self-image allowed them to project a unique image to others. On one occasion, one blamed me for going long on a presentation that he and his guest had hijacked! In such cases, my humiliation fed anger. It was some time before I chose to respond with love rather than anguish; however, that choice would become a turning point in my adult experience.

While my wrinkled yet jovial grandfather listened to my story, he would occasionally close his eyes and smile while releasing an “Ah” which seemed to release some type of spiritual pressure from his body, somehow adding to his resilience. Pop-pop also thoughtfully rolled his

white, furry eyebrows to show his non-judgmental mental tags. It was like he was posting trail markers throughout my tale. I finally got to my most recent low point—the deaths of my parents.

I started, “Mom and Dad died within eight months of each other. This loss changed the status of my brother and me forever. We were now orphans. With eight months months separating their deaths, it was difficult for my brother and me to grieve in our unique ways. I cried for my mother but did not for my dad in public, though I was closer to him. This experience also has become a turning point.”

Some hikers were passing nearby. They had all the latest outdoor regalia: hiking poles, fancy sun glasses, and spandex. What an indelible image! Suddenly, I felt I was a stranger in the forest, alienated from anything familiar. My mind was jumbled.

When I tripped a few minutes later and fell into the river in my confused state, Pop-pop reached out to grab me. His grip was strong and reassuring.

“Come on,” he smiled to encourage me. “Let’s take on the next leg!” I couldn’t argue with him. He had plenty of credibility with me. Who was I to complain?

## **Night 2—Reflection**

That night by the campfire, I journaled more by the campfire.

There comes a time in one’s life when he must accept his strengths and weaknesses. Without such acceptance, one cannot grow. I needed to learn to accept constructive criticism and handle uncertainty. How can I learn not to worry about what others think of me, especially when I fail?

Hypersensitivity had bugged me for years. And, yet, there it was, between being singled out as an unworthy alien lacking basic skills expected of everyone and falling in necessitating someone else to risk his life for me, I was feeling low.

“Do you realize those were great tests today?” Pop-pop asked me with his knowing and comforting smile. His gaze made my heart feel warmer. He went on to explain that my distraction by unnecessary things caused me to fall. My faith and new-found turn toward love, represented by Pop-pop’s guidance and lifesaving grasp, in turn saved my life. “Of course, you will continue to fall, but your faith will always remind you that you are not alone.” My heart pattered at peace.

“How many times has my wife offered me that same hand?” I pondered in my journal. Have I not pushed my loved ones away at times when I needed them most? Was my body paralyzed by the fear of failure or doubt of past regrets? I then realized that I was not only with loved ones but that those tests made me stronger.

These thoughts led me to reminisce about my dog, Schneider, whom my mother put to sleep on February 10, 1990 (Culkin, D.T., February 9, 1990). My mother called me two days prior to inform that that she would have him put down. He had been suffering for quite some time, and I acknowledged that it was the humane thing to do. It was the first time that I felt deep loss and wrote a brief stanza of love and memorial:

Dear Schneider  
You gave more love,  
More lightheartedness,  
More selfless tenderness,  
Than is good for this earth.  
May you rest in peace. (Culkin, February 9, 1990)

Pop-pop then leaned forward. His eyes and kindness eked out from the growing shadows. “When face tests of faith with love, your anger and impatience become meaningless. Incompetence, failure, regret...those are meaningless when you have faith in yourself and God.

Be like the vine that must be pruned so that you can bear quality grapes.<sup>39</sup> This means that suffering is necessary for growth and, although cutting may hurt, it will never kill you.”

### Day 3—Turning Points

Figure 5.3 Illustration for Day 3



Figure 5.3. At the end of the trip on Day 3, the participant looks back and reflects on the high, low, and turning points. These help describe his identity development life events over time.

The final morning of the trip, I woke up alone. I mean, no one was in the camp. Pop-pop, my guide and companion, had departed as quietly as he had re-entered my life. I felt alone, but I also knew that he was with me in spirit. In fact, he had left me a little prayer written on a gum wrapper:

Don't look back but forward.  
Live each day as one reborn.  
For you have enjoyed great triumphs,  
And have been reminded of your frailties.

---

<sup>39</sup> John 15:1-17 (New American Bible, Revised Edition). Hays (1981/2007) also describes vines as a metaphor to understand suffering, particularly grief and illness.

You have fallen in the muddy trails,  
But have gotten up to continue the journey.  
You have looked back to learn where you have been  
And where you may go. But  
As long as you have God, you need  
Nothing else.<sup>40</sup>

As I trod down the trail on the final leg, I somehow knew this wasn't the end. The trees were in full color. The wind just a mild breeze, keeping the humidity comfortably low. The water calmly splashed the banks of the nearby river.

I saw some tall mountains to climb ahead, but I was prepared. Unlike the other day, I knew what to expect and—more importantly—I knew I could handle whatever was coming. It wasn't easy, as I had learned during this tortuous journey, but I had confidence in my skills and choices. I felt renewed.

The rest of the trip was uneventful and very peaceful. As I pulled into the trail head, I knew I was a different person than the one who had started the journey. In fact, I was different because of the journey.

Sitting on a boulder not far from the rest area, I could look back on the river below and recount the course. I had some hours to kill before my wife came by to pick me up the next morning, so I began to journal with some poetry:

As I look back on the river I have just conquered,  
It seems beautiful—even peaceful—if not alive.  
Walter pulsates against impregnable rocks,  
Breaking them into pebbles and sand.

I realized then that I had experienced some turning points—or significant changes in perspective—that I could only see when looking back on the journey I had just taken. Some were low points, like falling down, and some were high points, like vanquishing the feared boulders

---

<sup>40</sup> Saint Teresa of Avila said something similar in a prayer during the trials of suffering from a painful illness.

and sharp turns. It wasn't that I was now an expert outdoorsman...far from it. But, I did have a better sense of myself by understanding what I had experienced and how I could now proceed.

### **Night 3—Closing Reflections (Integrated Poem)**

That night, I was left alone with my thoughts and memories. The fire kept me warm as I thought about what Pop-pop taught me. What a lot to take in and write in my journal, a counter narrative. At these times, poetry helps me make sense of things...:

As I look back on the mountain I have just conquered,  
It seems beautiful—even peaceful—if not alive.  
Walter pulsates against impregnable rocks,  
Breaking them into pebbles and sand.

Transformation has been at the high & low points, and in between.  
The large boulders in the first leg were a turning point:  
My decision to live a life fueled by love rather than anger.  
Seeing possibilities rather than risk has saved my life.  
Falling in the water is another turning point:  
The point I realized that I was mentally ill and not a bad person.  
People may not see the real me under water, but I can swim.  
The dramatically poised boulder at the sharp turn is also a turning point:  
My choice to wed my soul mate and life partner.  
She has been always there for me, regardless of time.  
Looking back, confidence in my skills and choices  
Defines my sense of self-authorship.  
I lean back and howl in joyful affirmation of  
My strengths, fears, regrets, and weaknesses.  
My internal voice is no longer silent.

As I look back on the river I have just conquered,  
It seems beautiful—even peaceful—if not alive.  
Walter pulsates against impregnable rocks,  
Breaking them into pebbles and sand.

\*

\*

\*

\*

Reflection and journaling have served as the primary tools I have used to transform these lived experiences into turning points or best practices. Such *prayerful reflection—and narrative practices such as journals and poetry in particular—on lived experiences has promoted my*



*cognitive & spiritual development over my lifespan while fostering my confidence & capacity to adapt during transitions, to heal from past failures, to cope with adversity, to discern meaning, and to glean best practices for future benefit.* Through this process, I have endeavored to make both high and low points a part of my spiritual journey. More specifically, finding my voice through drawing, praying, reflection, and writing has enabled me to find new wells of strength to cope with life's challenges. *Art—e.g., poetry, drawing, creative writing—therapeutically facilitates resilience, awareness, and expression through self-dialogue.* I call my internal voice Haiku Pilgrim because it epitomizes the journey of spiritual awareness while capturing the opportunities for self-expression provided by art—especially poetry and drawing.

Along the way, I have been painfully aware that I cannot endure life on my own. It is not that I need someone else; rather, I do not have the mental, spiritual, or physical stamina or weaponry to consistently confront the challenges, setbacks, and even triumphs of life. Indeed, I now realize that *seeking help for mental illness is not only a good idea but also an obligation to myself and my loved ones.* Through reflective journaling, I have discovered that *humor, resourcefulness, and self-reliance enhance my resilience and my relationships.* A balance is necessary for my development into a self-authored person.

*Becoming self-authored for me means consistently living a balanced life—spiritually, physically, & intellectually—on my terms while not obsessing about others' opinions.* I pray daily to build a relationship with God and to maintain an energy source for inner transformation. *Spirituality is a metaphor for my relationship with God, how I interact with others, and my lifelong journey of awareness toward holiness.* It is a pilgrimage. I regularly work out not to meet job requirements but to stay healthy and do God's will. I study, read, and reflect to

cognitively develop my mind so that I can synthesize my efforts across all dimensions of lived experience.

Over time, my decisions have influenced the changes in the roles that I have assumed. For instance, *I choose my response to the challenges of daily life. These choices define my self-dialogue, attitude, relationships, and spiritual awareness.* In particular, *my selection of love over anger as a daily motivator has been a significant decision in my development as a self-authored individual.*<sup>41</sup> It is a significant turning point. Over time, deliberately choosing love over innate anger has lowered my stress, has brightened my outlook on my future, and has gradually helped develop my deleterious attitude into a more positive demeanor. This is tough for someone mentally ill.

In my professional life, I have chosen to seek cognitive development in myself and others. Critical thinking has become more than a catch phrase; it is the currency of my intellectual life, continuously seeking the networked connections among the gossamer patchwork of knowledge and experience. As an adult educator, I seek this development for my students. To that end, I have tried to incorporate collaborate learning techniques, the avatar-centric narrative of Major Happy to invite mid-career students to their own learning goals, and guest speakers who apply doctrinal concepts in the real world. I believe that *innovation in pedagogy leads to the development of creative and critical thinking in generations of students.*

As I look back on the river I have just conquered,  
It seems beautiful—even peaceful—if not alive.

---

<sup>41</sup> Baxter Magolda (2008) links self-authorship to adult learning and (identity) development: "Self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations, has emerged in the past 15 years as a developmental capacity that helps meet the challenges of adult life" (p. 269). Furthermore, she suggests that transformational learning fosters critical thinking through reflection and a development of self-authorship through the cultivation of internal voices (Baxter Magolda, 2008). For me, my decision to use love as a motivator was the first primary move down the path where I could be more aligned with my inner voice.

Walter pulsates against impregnable rocks,  
Breaking them into pebbles and sand.

As a result of re-storying my life events over the past three decades, implications for the four audiences of this research have emerged. For the committee, the process of narrative inquiry may represent a welcome change from more traditional qualitative dissertations that have set structures and content expectations.<sup>42</sup> However, the members of the committee and other adult educators may also find insights into their graduate students who struggle with the invisible wounds of mental illness and grief and who often cover these wounds with masks of pride, stoicism, or hypersensitivity. Conversely, adult learners with OCD and associated anxiety disorders, along with their care givers, may see cause to voice their challenges with their mentors. By actively discussing their interpretations of academic, personal, and professional situations with their instructors, adult learners may accrue more advanced knowledge and deeper meaning (Andrews et al., 2001). Additionally, they may narratively learn in informal situations through journaling over time. Voicing concerns that were once muted can empower such marginalized adult learners to break down barriers of stigma in accessing educational resources. In this sense, narrative learning of formerly marginalized learners can create counter narratives for future practices in adult education. Finally, my family members and I can gain a better understanding of how their husband/brother has coped with mental illness to promote healing. They may also learn more about my grandfather's life story and how it has influenced our family over time.

---

<sup>42</sup> Of course, the members may also find embarrassment at the quality of the analysis. Hopefully not!

## **The Story Continues—The Nested Doll**

As I think about the times I could have with my grandfather, given what I have experienced to this point in my life story, I imagine he would pass along some sage advice...some Kafkaesque witticism that captures a universal truth about anxiety and identity. After undergoing the process of narrative inquiry, I'm inclined to think—both as a grandson and as the researcher-participant—that he would tell me just one word: Live. At the same time, I imagine him still giving me advice his Russian Jewish mother could have given him through traditional stories. One story could describe how the identity development of possible selves over time replicates, in many respects, the crafting of nested matryoshka dolls. I would retrieve a weathered doll from my cognitive archaeological site and ask him about it....

My matryoshka doll is not like others, but it still illustrates my identity development over time. The outside shell is like other dolls because it looks like me as a fully functioning person in contemporary society. It is the public *I* whom I present to the world every day. It is also a mask (Poulos, 2012) that conceals any ongoing internal change, challenge, or transformation.

Iterative identity development occurs in the under layers. The deeper the layer, the earlier life events and longer-lasting changes are revealed. For example, the penultimate (i.e., most recently completed) layer in my life course is shaped like a soldier. The uniform and rank served as my mask of authority, position, and competence for over a twenty-one-year career.

From a different perspective, the nested doll has three primary layers, all of which are informed by events experienced over my life course. These layers are physical, mental/intellectual, and spiritual; and they represent key elements of my self-concept (see also Maskulak, 2012). The physical nature of the external shell represents what I choose to present the world and others. I keep its patina glossy and strong through a prudent diet and regular

exercise. The mental/intellectual facet informs the physical—i.e., decision making regarding behaviors—but also is its own phenomenon. I nurture it through reading, study, and writing. Similarly, the innermost spiritual layer informs the other two, but I care for it very differently—often through prayer and compassion. This inner layer could represent my truest, holiest self which is “always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment” because spiritual development consists of “moving toward...a more authentic self” (Tisdell, 2003, p. xi) through other self-fabricated selves across the course of life (Chalmers, 2014; Day, 2011).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, each aspect of possible self—physical, mental/intellectual, or spiritual—may have more than one layer of growth. In this context, consider the doll as a living tree-like being, growing in layers over time at different rates. When I grow in holiness by learning new prayer methods or acts of charity, for instance, my spiritual layer may thicken or even form a newer, more interior level to signify this development. A strain or crack in an interior layer will often translate to an external layer, and a strain on the physical—i.e., illness or suffering—can test the strength of the others. Thus, each possible self has a unique function but is interrelated with the others to varying degrees.

Put another way, my self-concept or identity has developed over time through a series of life events, particularly pertaining to transition and challenge. Adversity often comes with innate drama and dilemmas that demand at least partial resolution for growth and development to occur.

---

<sup>43</sup> Chalmers (2014), a Carmelite priest, describes the representations of possible selves as the “false self” (p. 41) which individuals must confront and defeat before proceeding in spiritual development toward holiness. For me, these false selves emerge when my emotional responses to life events do not align with holy attitudes toward life. Recent examples of this dissonance include shaking my hand in rage at a driver who cut me off in traffic (i.e., I should be more patient), harboring self-righteous anger at new job obligations (i.e., I should be grateful to have a job), and falling asleep while praying (i.e., I should be alert when conversing with the God whom I behold as a sacred sovereign).

This is why most of my personal stories highlight life events of shame, regret, and doubt. Adversity has stimulated identity development over my life course. No one single story represents my holistic identity, just as no one layer constitutes my whole nested-doll being. Each layer is informed by and informs the others in unique ways at different places, times, frequencies, and intensities. The fragmented personal narratives represent events in which those layers intersected to varying degrees, evoking growth and learning.

The goal is to synergize these three primary layers so that my actions, words, and thoughts intersect in all three dimensions of my identity. In this context, the layers, which have formed and thickened (or weakened) over time, continuously interact in a transcendental manner. Through reflection, grace, and guidance, my identity continues to develop through time and space in the three-dimensional doll of my self-concept. When I am compassionate to others, am humble in my thinking, and pray to develop a relationship with God, I know I am developing in a positive direction.

Furthermore, my voice plays a critical role in the expression of identity and self-concept. Archetypal narrators in my personal stories provide a mythical technique and conceptual basis for various voices that I have developed over time (Jung, 1957/1958; see also Dirkx, 2001). These voices fill the voids between the layers of the matryoshka doll, expressing both the positive affect of the masks and the depressing sorrows of the shadows (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). Poetry particularly fills the void of the interior spaces and shadows within my multi-layered identity represented by the doll (Bhattacharya, 2013; Boylorn, 2013; Cahnmann, 2003). In short, these voices help comprise an individual who must grow by facing the shadows and by choosing which masks to wear—or not. Perhaps I am ultimately called to scrape away all the built-up, varnished layers of falsities to expose my true, holy self to the world. In this sense, a

person has an inner pilgrim, a contemplative, an artist, a storyteller, and/or a scholar at different times to varying degrees. The archetypal narrators in the personal stories represent some possible selves rooted in events I have experienced over my life course. These are key voices and layers in my doll. What are the key voices and layers in yours?

#### Nested Doll—A Person

Nested doll—a person in layers.  
Physical, intellectual, spiritual;  
enveloped within each other—  
identity develops over time.  
Matryoshka: public mask; physical *I*,  
concealing invisible wounds and  
weaknesses we choose to reveal.

Identity transforms internally;  
deeper layers, earlier life events.  
External masks are physical;  
diet and exercise their patina.  
Inside is mental, intellectual;  
reading, study, writing fostered.  
Closest to the heart is spirit;  
prayer sets the bridge to God  
over the river of life.

Each possible self is unique;  
fate tied to neighbors  
in either direction. Healing  
exposes my true, holy self.

My doll grows over time and events.  
Flourishes in adversity:  
transition, challenge, doubt, grief.  
Reflection, grace, guidance develop  
compassion for others, humility;  
prayer with God.

Archetypes voice poems between shells;  
fragmented aspects of ever-changing  
self-concepts. Possible selves whisper,  
narrated over a life course,  
nested in a layered menagerie.

The old rabbi asks, “Is this God’s way?  
What if this is all there is?”  
I have fallen in the muddy trails,  
but have gotten up to continue the journey.  
I look back to learn where I have been  
and where I may go. But  
as long as I have God, I know I  
need nothing else.

As I look back on the river I have just conquered,  
it seems beautiful—even peaceful—if not alive.  
Walter pulsates against impregnable rocks,  
breaking them into pebbles and sand.  
Earthen aromas penetrate with hints of  
hope, anticipation, and fear.  
Shadows once muted by anxiety stand by,  
now soothing reminders of my limits.

The sun rises on the next chapter,  
illuminating the new layers of the doll  
as the crisp, dry air bathes my lungs....

Adult humans tend to spend so much energy on those events they convince themselves are causes of their victimization, stigmatization, and marginalization. Perhaps an emergent truth is that, rather than play to the resultant anxiety, they should embrace these disorders, griefs, and shadows by discarding their protective masks to live the lives we are all called to. I, as the researcher-participant, now realize I must embrace OCD, the deaths of my parents, the perceived affronts to my self-righteousness, and spiritual darkness as milestones on a sacred path of continued transformation.

### **Future Chapters—A Way Ahead**

When reviewed in context of this research project, the initial questions pertaining to my identity development seem somewhat parochial and short-sighted. While the analysis and representation have addressed the research questions pertaining to life events (Question #1) and possible selves (Question #2) throughout my life course, the complexity of each individual’s shadowed life begs further inquiry into the nature of adult learning and development.



Indeed, rather than merely consider implications for my own life in terms of coping with mental illness and grief, I ponder how this research can benefit other citizens or social groups for their life spans. What is the way ahead, given the transcendental nature of this journey of meaning, feedback from familial reactions, and my current epistemic situation? How do the voices expressed in this bildungsroman speak to adult learning and development? How can the audiences of this research apply those unmuted voices as senses of meaning to benefit others? The audiences and future researchers must answer these questions within their own situated contexts; but the following reflections respond to these inquiries by considering three elements of my fragmented bildungsroman: its nature, its message, and its call to action.

### **Nature of the Narrative**

The preceding story of the nested doll not only reminds us all of our shadowed selves, but it also symbolizes that our life journeys—and the fragmented narratives of our development—are essentially spiritual in nature. A spiritual journey is holistic and driven by self-determined meaning. An adult can learn spiritually and thus develop meaning by engaging in and reflecting upon multilayered experiences within his social-cultural contexts. By developing through and within multiple layers of time, relationships, and life experiences, one can perceive a way ahead that is unique and meaningful.

Writing this bildungsroman has forced me to develop spiritually by reflecting upon my identity development over time. This has been a long journey of learning. The journey started with a desire to explore the narrative fragments of my life experiences (i.e., research purpose). Choosing an autoethnographic methodological approach enabled me to inquire into key aspects viewed through the Life Events Perspective of adult development: e.g., shadows, life events, and possible selves. My developmental transformation gradually occurred over several years, rather

than during specific episodic experiences, and was marked by multiple life events documented in the field notes presented.<sup>44</sup> As a result, I have been able to re-story my personal narrative by putting more pieces together, thereby constructing a more cogent narrative of my identity development over time.

One factor that has influenced my narrated perceptions while conducting this research has been my relationships with intimate others (Ellis, 2007). My relationships have not only impacted the way I see myself but also how I have narrated my personal stories. For example, seeing the pain I have caused my wife over the course of our marriage through the sub-conscious manipulations of OCD has heightened the urgency I have felt to seek healing through telling our story. Sharing this story with my older brother has highlighted for him some of my secret agonies of which he was not aware (phone conversation, August 2016). Allowing him to read about my humiliating obsessions (that I have concealed for my entire life) after having worked as a team to administer our parents' estates has put our relationship into a broader, more mature perspective. Collaborating with both my wife and brother, my only remaining close relatives, has enhanced our relationships with a renewed sense of trust.

Writing this bildungsroman has also placed the life events I have experienced into a new context. By writing to understand the seemingly disparate puzzle pieces of my life journey, I have learned that my personal identity has been the thread tying them together. The act of writing has also been an act of voicing my identity. Every word written in support of the research purpose has been a word spoken in my own emerging voice. This voice can now grow to spread its message.

---

<sup>44</sup> Christian mystics discovered long ago that spiritual development normally is a lifelong process of transformation; it occurs gradually over our life spans and rarely in singular episodes (Chalmers, 2014).

## **Message**

The voices of the multiple possible selves expressed in this autoethnography speak to adult learning and development through the bildungsroman construct. As a narrative of a person's identity development over his life span, this bildungsroman not only has documented key life events in my development but has also attached a voice to their meanings. It has given me, as an adult learner with OCD, the courage to commit to continued development despite insidious doubts and anxiety. For example, discerning emergent themes from data sorting (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3) has enabled me to re-story related life events from episodic memories (i.e., ten discrete personal stories in Chapter 2) into a continuous—albeit fragmented—narrative in which I have a better sense of my identity in relation to my wife, grandfather, parents, brother, colleagues, and even my mental disorder. The process has demanded patience and perseverance from me as a researcher and as a participant. Despite the invisibility of many of my shadows, the increased awareness of how they have affected me over time has facilitated my identity development. I am grateful for that gift of understanding.

## **Call to Action**

As a responsible citizen, I would like to think I will heed Dewey's (2008) call to improve society with this more developed understanding of my self-concept. If I can start to re-story my essential identity and voice through narrative, cannot others? The four designated audiences of this research could consider how they can apply the concept of emancipated voices to benefit others.

First, the dissertation committee members can endeavor to educate scholars in other fields about the therapeutic and procedural aspects of autoethnographic inquiry. Is there value in writing trustworthy narratives that counter prevailing theories or opinions in particular fields? In

adult education, the few autoethnographic dissertations published could demonstrate the viability and power of such narrative inquiry.

Next, adult education professionals can seek a deeper understanding of learners with invisible wounds and muted voices by allowing them the space to create and share their own fragmented narratives in their own ways. Researchers can further explore the impacts of mental illness in adult education (Brookfield, 2011). One possible area of research is the design of “smart learning” (Zhu, Yu, & Riezebos, 2016, p. 3) environments that differentiate pedagogical tools to better accommodate adult learners with mental disorders. Other related potential research questions abound:

- How do adults with anxiety/depressive/traumatic disorders experience learning, given the social-cultural stigma of seeking assistance?
- How can adult educators accommodate the unique learning needs of their adult students with anxiety/depressive/traumatic disorders while contending with associated stigma?
- How can counter-narratives deepen an understanding of key social-educational issues: mental health stigma, reflection to construct meaning in a fast-paced world, or turning to narrative means of learning?
- How has higher education institutional policy evolved—or not—to address issues related to mental illness and invisible wounds in learners?
- How can adult educators be more empathetic to students’ shadows such as grief while harnessing the learners’ innate capacities to transform in uniquely meaningful ways?

Asking these questions will help develop the field of adult and continuing education through a deeper understanding of the needs of adult learners.

Fellow adult learners/sufferers can also have the courage to commit with emancipated voices despite devious doubts and anxiety. They can learn to learn in informal environments through introspective reflection and journaling. By writing about their fears, doubts, and anxieties, lifelong learners can begin to confront them while learning to cope with them. More importantly, adult learners can accept these barriers to learning as valuable life experiences that will inform their development for the rest of their lives.

Finally, my family and I have a renewed sense of healing commensurate with a mission to spread the word. My wife and I will now seek opportunities to present papers describing our journey at conferences and published venues to reach out to fellow educators, sufferers, and care givers. Contemporary societal perceptions of mental illness have begun to shift, but more needs to be done. Telling personal stories of survival, redemption, and transformation can be an effective tool in this struggle for continued social evolution.

## **Conclusion**

This bildungsroman has provided me an opportunity to establish a way ahead, develop my unique voice, and insight into how to apply these lessons learned. The journey of autoethnographic inquiry has not been straight, and the winding paths have led me in unexpected directions but never to dead ends. There have been a few switch backs in which I have had to reconsider former life events from new perspectives. But I have realized that the developmental journey continues—it must continue. While some fragments of my narrative have congealed, others remain apart. That's OK. In this resulting aura of calm and fulfillment, I revisit the poetic introduction from the Prologue and refashion it as a broader spiritual reflection of social mindfulness in identity development. My italicized inner voice helps to illuminate some shadows:

My nested doll is layered, chipped, with dark spaces in between...  
*But I constructed it by my free will.*

When I dream, I ponder uncertainty and wo/ander  
*how I can embrace it more.*

What I should have told Mom & Dad before they died 8 months apart...  
*doesn't matter because I can still show them my love and thanks.*

Why I have uncommanded thoughts that I must share with my wife...  
*I still control my attitude and choices.*

Fear telling others about mental illness because of social stigma, so  
*So what? They don't have to live with the consequences of not seeking help.*

I wear a mask of professional aloofness to fit in—then realize...  
*masks don't heal; be patient, for transformation is gradual.*

My voice has been muted but I cannot cope alone.  
*So, I must speak out for others to listen.*

Who can mentor me along the path to spiritual maturity & peace  
*God through a contemplative stance in daily life.*

And fulfill God's will for me? What is that path, and  
*God will show me because He is part of my social reality.*

How can I navigate through its shadows?  
*Shadows are tools for development.*

My soul casts the darkest shadow.  
*If I let it. Light is needed to cast a shadow.*

How do I know if I am on the right path?  
*Who does? Look back and see how good the path  
has been all along.*

## References

- Ackerman, J. (1995). Stories of Elijah and medieval Carmelite identity. *History of Religions*, 35(2), 124-147.
- Adler et al. (2015). Variation in narrative identity is associated with trajectories of mental health over several years. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(3), 476-496. doi: 10.1037/a0038601
- Aguirre, A., Jr. (2005). The personal narrative as academic storytelling: a Chicano's search for presence and voice in academe. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18(2), 147-163. doi: 10.1080/0951839042000333956
- Altheide, D. L., & Johnson, J. M. (2013). Reflections on interpretive adequacy in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 381-411). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Anderson, L., & Glass-Coffin, B. (2013). I learn by going: Autoethnographic modes of inquiry. In S.H. Jones, T.E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 57-83). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Andrews, C., Ironside, P., Nosek, C., Sims, S., Swenson, M., Yeomans, C., Young, P., & Diekelmann, N. (2001). Enacting narrative pedagogy: The lived experiences of students and teachers. *Nursing and Health Care Perspectives*, 22(5), 252-259.
- Anonymous, S. (2015). Father figuring: An autoethnography of fatherhood. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(1), 11-19. doi: 10.1177/1077800414550464
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2015). *Light in the dark=Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*. A. Keating (Ed.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ardener, S. (2005). Ardener's "Muted Groups": The genesis of an idea and its praxis. *Women & Language*, 28(2), 50-54.
- Artistico, D., Berry, J. M., Black, J., Cervone, D., Lee, C., & Orom, H. (2011). Psychological functioning in adulthood: A self-efficacy analysis. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 215-247). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Attard, K., & Armour, K. M. (2005). Learning to become a learning professional: Reflections on one year of teaching. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 28(2), 195-207. doi: 10.1080/02619760500093321
- Baer, L. (2001). *The imp of the mind: Exploring the silent epidemic of obsessive bad thoughts*. New York: Dutton.

- Bage, G. (1999). *Narrative matters: Teaching and learning history through story*. London: Falmer Press.
- Balen, R., Rhodes, C., & Ward, L. (2010). The power of stories: Using narrative for interdisciplinary learning in health and social care. *Social Work Education, 29*(4), 416-426. doi: 10.1080/02615470902991742
- Bamberg, M. (2011). Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity. *Theory and Psychology, 21*(1), 3-24. doi: 10.1177/0959354309355852
- Barber, J., King, P., & Baxter Magolda, M. (2013). Long strides on the journey toward self-authorship: Substantial developmental shifts in college students' meaning making. *The Journal of Higher Education, 84*(6), 866-896.
- Barbosa, F., & Amaral, M. (2010). Adult education, narratives and cultural values. *International Journal of Learning and Change, 4*(3), 263-268.
- Barge, J. K. (2004). Antenarrative and managerial practice. *Communication Studies, 55*(1), 106-127.
- Barner, R. W., & Barner, C. P. (2011). Mindfulness, openness to experience, and transformational learning. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 347-362). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barreto, M., & Frazier, L. (2012). Coping with life events through possible selves. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 42*(7), 1785-1810. doi: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2012.00918.x
- Baxter Magolda, M. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Baxter Magolda, M. (2007). Self-authorship: The foundation for twenty-first century education. In P. Meszaros (Ed.), *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 109 (pp. 69-83). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Baxter Magolda, M. (2008). Three elements of self-authorship. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(4), 269-284. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0016
- Bhattacharya, K. (2007/2015). *Introduction to qualitative methods: A student workbook*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2013). Voices, silences, and telling secrets: The role of qualitative methods in arts-based research. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 6*(4), 604-627. doi: 10.1525.irqr.2013.6.4.604
- Bhattacharya, K., & Payne, R. (2016). Mixing mediums, mixing selves: Arts-based contemplative approaches to border crossings. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2016.1201163



- Bhattacharya, K., & Varbelow, S. (2014). Cultural brokers and aliens: Marking and blurring interlocking spaces of difference. *Qualitative Inquiry*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/1077800414545229
- Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Bochner, A. P. (2012). Terms of perfection. *Review of Communication*, 12(1), 3-20. doi: 10.1080/15358593.2011.621091
- Bochner, A. P. (2013). Putting meanings into motion: Autoethnography's existential calling. In S. Jones, T. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 50-56). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Bold, C. (2012). *Using narrative in research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Bolkan, C., Hooker, K., & Coehlo, D. (2015). Possible selves and depressive symptoms in later life. *Research on Aging*, 37(1), 41-62. doi: 10.1177/0164027513520557
- Boucouvalas, M., & Lawrence, R. L. (2010). Adult learning. In C.E. Kasworm, A. D. Rose, J. M. Ross-Gordon (Ed.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 Edition ed., pp. 35-48). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2009). *Southern black women: Their lived realities* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Accession No. 304996448)
- Boylorn, R. M. (2013). *Sweetwater: Black women and narratives of resilience*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Brendel, W. (2009). A framework for narrative-driven transformative learning in medicine. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 7(1), 26-43. doi: 10.1177/1541344609334803
- Bridwell, S. D. (2012). A constructive-developmental perspective on the transformative learning of adults marginalized by race, class, and gender. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 63(2), 127-146. doi:10.1177/0741713612447854
- Brookfield, S. (2002). Overcoming alienation as the practice of adult education: The contribution of Erich Fromm to a critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(2), 96-111.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (2006). *The skillful teacher: On technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Brookfield, S. (2010). Theoretical frameworks for understanding the field. In C. Kasworm, A. Rose, & J. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 ed., pp. 71-81). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Brookfield, S. (2011). When the black dog barks: An autoethnography of adult learning in and on clinical depression. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 132, 35-42. doi: 10.1002/ace.429
- Brookfield, S. (2013). Scholarly personal narratives as a new direction for the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 16(2), 127-128. issn: 1368-4868
- Brooks, A. K. (2000). Transformation. In *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning* (pp. 139-153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brooks, C. F. (2011). Social performance and secret ritual: Battling against obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(2), 249-261. doi: 10.1177/1049732310381387
- Bruner, J. (1997). A narrative model of self-construction. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 818(1), 145-161. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-6632.1997.tb48253.x
- Cahnmann, M. (2003). The craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in educational research. *Educational Researcher*, 32, 29-36. Retrieved at kakali.org. doi: 10.3102/0013189X032003029
- Caine, V., Estefan, A., & Clandinin, D. J. (2013). A return to methodological commitment: Reflections on narrative inquiry. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(6), 574-586. doi: 10.1080/00313831.2013.798833
- Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for lifelong learning: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cantor, N., Markus, H., Niedenthal, P., & Nurius, P. (1986). On motivation and the self-concept. In R. Sorrentino & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behavior* (pp. 96-121). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Carbon, S. E. (2003). *Conversational narrative: A meta-analysis of narrative analysis* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 305307362)
- Cardinal, T. (2010). *For all my relations: An autobiographical narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of one Aboriginal graduate student* (Master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, National Institute of Mental Health, The Carter Center Mental Health Program. (2012). *Attitudes Toward Mental Illness: Results from the Behavioral*

- Risk Factor Surveillance System*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Cervero, R. M., & Wilson, A. L. (2001). At the heart of practice: The struggle for knowledge and power. In *Power in practice: Adult education and the struggle for knowledge and power in society* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 1-20). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chalmers, J. (2014). *Mary the contemplative*. Rome: Edizioni Carmelitane.
- Chang, H. (2013). Individual and collaborative autoethnography as method: A social scientist's perspective. In S. Jones, T. Adams & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 107-122). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Charmaz, K. (2012). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage. isbn: 978-0-7619-7353-9
- Chase, S. E. (2013). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 55-83). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Chaucer, G. (1948). The prologue. In V. F. Hopper (Trans.), *Chaucer's Canterbury tales (selected): An interlinear translation* (pp. 1-54). Great Neck, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.
- Chaudhry, L. N. (1997). Researching 'my people,' researching myself: Fragments of a reflexive tale. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10(4), 441-453.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chittister, J. (2004). *In the heart of the temple: My spiritual vision for today's world*. Erie, PA: BlueBridge.
- Christiansen, A. (2011). Storytelling and professional learning: A phenomenographic study of students' experience of patient digital stories in nurse education. *Nurse Education Today*, 31, 289-293. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2010.10.006
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Murphy, M. S. (2009). Relational ontological commitments in narrative research. *Educational Researcher*, 38(8), 598-602.

- Clark, M. C. (1991). *The restructuring of meaning: An analysis of the impact of context on transformational learning* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 303962047)
- Clark, M. C. (2001). Off the Beaten Path: Some Creative Approaches to Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 89, 83-91.
- Clark, M. C. (2010). Narrative learning: Its contours and its possibilities. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 126, 3-11.
- Clark, M. C., Merriam, S. B., & Sandlin, J. A. (2011). The relationship between adult learning and development. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 17-38). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, M. C., & Rossiter, M. (2006). "Now the Pieces are in Place": Learning through personal storytelling in the adult classroom. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 20(3), 19-33. doi: 10.1002/nha3.10258
- Clark, M. C., & Rossiter, M. (2008). Narrative learning in adulthood. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 119, 61-70. doi: 10.1002/ace.306
- Collay, M., & Cooper, J. (2008). Transformational learning and role of self-authorship in developing women leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 3(2), 1-21. Retrieved at KSU Libraries from sagepub.com on July 17, 2015.
- Collins, M., & Peerbolte, S. L. (2012). Public administration emergency management pedagogy: Cultivating the habit of critical thinking. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 18(2), 315-326.
- Colyar, J. (2013). Reflections on writing and autoethnography. In S. Jones, T. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 363-383). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Congdon, M., Jr. (2014). What's wrong with me?: An autoethnographic investigation of the co-cultural communicative practices of living with Tourette Syndrome during adolescence. *The Qualitative Report*, 19, 1-25.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Cook, P. S. (2014). 'To actually be sociological': Autoethnography as an assessment and learning tool. *Journal of Sociology*, 50(3), 269-282. doi: 10.1177/1440783312451780
- Cooper, J. E. (1991). Telling our own stories: The reading and writing of journals or diaries. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (pp. 96-112). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Cortazzi, M. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. London: The Falmer Press.

- Cranton, P. (1994/2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cross, S., & Markus, H. (1991). Possible selves across the life span. *Human Development*, 34(4), 230-255.
- Crotty, M. (1998/2004). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Culkin, D. T. (1989, February 13-1990, August 26). [Reflection notes from papers]. Copies in possession of author.
- Culkin, D. T. (2013a, January-February). Discerning the role of the narrative in strategy development. *Military Review*, 61-66.
- Culkin, D. T. (2013b). *The medieval Carmelite experience in social narratives*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Culkin, D. T., Wife, & Father. (1992, May 20-2002, May 9). *Journal 4* [Reflective journal and correspondence]. Copy in possession of authors, Leavenworth, Kansas.
- Culkin, D. T. (2015, September 24). *Research journal*. [Research journal maintained by researcher on WIKI]. CulkinAutoethnography at <https://culkinautoethnography.wikispaces.com/>
- Cutcher, A. J. (2015). *Displacement, identity and belonging: An arts-based, auto/biographical portrayal of ethnicity and experience*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- D'Amico, D. (2004). Race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in adult literacy: Power, pedagogy, and programs. In J. Comings, B. Garner, & C. Smith (Eds.), *Review of adult learning & literacy: Vol. 4. Connecting research, policy, and practice* (pp. 17-70). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Davidson, M. R. (2004). A phenomenological evaluation: Using storytelling as a primary teaching method. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 4(3), 184-189.  
doi: [http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/S1471-5953\(03\)00043-X](http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/S1471-5953(03)00043-X)
- Day, J. M. (2011). Religious, spiritual, and moral development and learning in the adult years. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 318-345). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delamont, S. (2009). The only honest thing: Autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork. *Ethnography and Education*, 4(1), 51-63. doi: 10.1080/17457820802703507
- Demuth, C., & Keller, H. (2011). Culture, learning, and adult development. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 425-443). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 1-41). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Department of the Army. (2012). Narrative construction. In *Army doctrine reference publication (ADRP) 5-0* (para. 2-27 through 2-28). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army.
- Department of the Army. (2014). *Field Manual 3-94: Theater, Army, Corps, and Division Operations*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army.
- Derrida, J. (1979). Scribble (writing-power). *Yale French Studies*, 58, 117-147.
- Dewey, J. (2008). *Democracy and education*. Radford, Virginia: Wilder Publications, LLC.
- Dey, E. L. & Associates. (2010). *Engaging diverse viewpoints: What is the campus climate for perspective-taking?* [Report]. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities. Retrieved from [http://www.aacu.org/core\\_commitments/documents/Engaging\\_Diverse\\_Viewpoints.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/core_commitments/documents/Engaging_Diverse_Viewpoints.pdf)
- Dirkx, J. M. (2001). Images, transformative learning the work of soul. *Adult Learning*, 12(3), 15-16.
- Dirkx, J. M. (2006). Engaging emotions in adult learning: A Jungian perspective on emotion and transformative learning. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 109, 15-26. doi: 10.1002/ace.204
- Dubay, T. (1989). *Fire within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel, on prayer*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.
- Dwyer, S., & Buckle, J. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63.
- Elias, J. L., Merriam, S. B. (2005). *Philosophical foundations of adult education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Ellis, C. (1991). Sociological introspection and emotional experience. *Symbolic Interaction*, 14(1), 23-50. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1525/si.1991.14.1.23>
- Ellis, C. (2002). Shattered lives: Making sense of September 11th and its aftermath. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 31(4), 375-410.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), 3-29. doi: 10.1177/1077800406294947

- Ellis, C. (2013). Preface: Carrying the torch for autoethnography. In S.H. Jones, T.E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 9-12). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011, January). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/>
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 429-449. doi: 10.1177/0891241606286979
- Emerald, E., & Carpenter, L. (2014). The scholar retires: An embodied identity journey. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(10), 1141-1147. doi: 10.1177/1077800414545232
- English, L. M. (2005). Historical and contemporary explorations of the social change and spiritual directions of adult education. *Teachers College Record*, 107(6), 1169-1192.
- English, L. M. (2008). Revisiting voice, subjectivity and circles: Feminist pedagogy in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 5(2), 112-125. doi: 10.1558/jate2008v5i2.112
- English, L. M., & Tisdell, E. J. (2010). Spirituality and adult education. In C. Kasworm, A. Rose, & J. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 ed.). Los Angeles: Sage, 285-293.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959/1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Eyring, M. (1998). How close is close enough? Reflections on the experience of doing phenomenology. In K. deMarrais (Ed.), *Inside Stories* (pp. 139-150). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fadjukoff, P., Kokko, K., & Pulkkinen, L. (2010). Changing economic conditions and identity formation in adulthood. *European Psychologist*, 15(4), 293-303. doi:10.1027/1016-9040/a000061
- Faulkner, S. L. (2016). The art of criteria: *Ars criteria* as demonstration of vigor in poetic inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(8), 662-665. doi: 10.1177/1077800416634739
- Flannery, D. D. (2000). Identity and self-esteem. In *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning* (pp. 53-78). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage. isbn: 978-1-84787-323-1.

- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Freeman, M. (1997). Why narrative? Hermeneutics, historical understanding, and the significance of stories. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1-4), 169-176.
- Freeman, M., deMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., & St. Pierre, E. (2007). Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse. *Educational Researcher*, 36(1), 25-32. doi: 10.3102/0013189X06298009
- Freire, P. (2011). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M.B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970).
- Gaeta, M., Loia, V., Mangione, G., Orciuoli, F., Ritrovato, P., & Salerno, S. (2014). A methodology and an authoring tool for creating Complex Learning Objects to support interactive storytelling. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 620-637.
- Galanis, N., Mayol, E., Alier, M., & Garcia-Penalvo, F. J. (2015). Supporting, evaluating and validating informal learning. A social approach. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55(Part A), 596-603. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.chb.2015.08.005>
- Gazarian, P. K. (2010). Digital stories: Incorporating narrative pedagogy. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 49(5), 287-290. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20100115-07>
- George, L. (1993). Life events. *Encyclopedia of Adult Development*, 274-278. Retrieved from Kansas State University Library. (Call # BF 724.5.E53 1993)
- George, L. G., Helson, R., & John, O. P. (2011). The "CEO" of women's work lives: How big five conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness predict 50 years of work experiences in a changing sociocultural context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, doi: 10.1037/a0024290
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Gillis, C. (2014). Lawrence's bildungsroman and the science of sexual development. *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 60(3), 273-304.
- Gliner, J., Morgan, G., & Leech, N. (2009). *Research methods in applied settings: An integrated approach to design and analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Goodall, H. L. Jr. (2006). *A need to know: The clandestine history of a CIA family*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Goodall, H. L. Jr. (2008). *Writing qualitative inquiry: Self, stories, and academic life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.



- Goodall, H. L. Jr. (2010). From *tales of the field* to tales of the future. *Organizational Research Methods, 13*(2), 256-267. doi: 10.1177/1094428109340039
- Goodall, H. L. Jr. (2013). Section Two Introduction: Cool kids on the quad. In S.H. Jones, T.E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 204-208). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Griffin, M. (2009). The narrative case study meets hypertext: Case studies in the digital age. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 5*(4).
- Grumet, M. R. (1991). The politics of personal knowledge. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (pp. 67-77). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Gudmundsdottir, S. (1991). Story-maker, story-teller: Narrative structures in curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 23*(3), 207-218.
- Gust, S. W. (2005). *A performance of identity: Reflections upon automethods* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Accession No. 305389121)
- Gutierrez, I. A., & Park, C. L. (2015). Emerging adulthood, evolving worldviews: How life events impact college students' developing belief systems. *Emerging Adulthood, 3*(2), 85-97. doi: 10.1177/2167696814544501
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action: Reason and the rationalization of society* (T. McCarthy Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hallqvist, A., & Hyden, L. (2013). Work transitions as told: a narrative approach to biographical learning. *Studies in Continuing Education, 35*(1), 1-16. doi: 10.1080/0158037X.2012.712037
- Hansman, C. A., & Mott, V. W. (2010). Adult learners. In C. Kasworm, A. Rose, & J. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 ed., pp. 13-23). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Hanson, J. (2013). From me to we: Transforming values and building professional community through narratives. *Nurse Education in Practice, 13*, 142-146.
- Hayes, E. (2000). Voice. In *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning* (pp. 79-109). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hays, E. M. (1981/2007). *Pray all ways*. Easton, KS: Forest of Peace Books.
- Heider, K. G. (1975). What do people do? Dani auto-ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research, 31*(1), 3-17.

- Helle, A. P. (1991). Reading women's autobiographies: A map of reconstructed knowing. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (pp. 48-66). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Hernandez, K. C., & Ngunjiri, F. W. (2013). Relationships and communities in autoethnography. In S. Jones, T. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 262-280). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Hoelterhoff, M., & Chung, M. C. (2013). Death anxiety and well-being; Coping with life-threatening events. *Traumatology, 19*(4), 280-291. doi: 10.1177/1534765613477499
- Hoffman, K. V. (2008). Shared narrative: Story brokering as an approach to contextual learning at seminary (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 304651983)
- Hogan, D. P. (1978). The variable order of events in the life course. *American Sociological Review, 43*(4), 573-586.
- Hoggan, C. (2015, May). Bringing clarity to transformative learning research. In J. Zacharakis & R.A. Collins (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 198-203). Manhattan, Kansas: KSU College of Education.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2000). *The self we live by: Narrative identity in a postmodern world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, J. (2014). *Interview study of African American and Latino/a alumni of agriculture stem programs: Exploring reasons attributed to successful completion of their bachelor's degrees* (Unpublished manuscript and IRB). I used excerpts to craft my own IRB and protocols.
- Huber, J., Caine, V., Huber, M., & Steeves, P. (2013). Narrative inquiry as pedagogy in education: The extraordinary potential of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories of experience. *Review of Research in Education, 37*, 212-242. doi: 10.3102/0091732X12458885
- Hultsch, D., & Bortner, R. (1974). Personal time perspective in adulthood: A time-sequential study. *Developmental Psychology, 10*(6), 835-837. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1037/h0037264>
- Hultsch, D., & Plemons, J. (1979). Life events and lifespan development. *Life-span Development and Behavior, 2*, 1-36.
- Hutchison, E. D. (2005). The life course perspective: A promising approach for bridging the micro and macro worlds for social workers. *Families in Society, 86*(1), 143-152.
- Hyman, B., & Pedrick, C. (1999). *The OCD workbook: Your guide to breaking free from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

- Infurna, F. J., Gerstorf, D., & Zarit, S. H. (2011). Examining dynamic links between perceived control and health: Longitudinal evidence for differential effects in midlife and old age. *Developmental Psychology, 47*(1), 9-18. doi:10.1037/a0021022
- Ironside, P.M. (2006). Using narrative pedagogy: Learning and practising interpretive thinking. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 55*(4), 478-486. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03938.x
- James, H. (1920). *The letters of Henry James* (P. Lubbock, Ed.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- James, H. (1934). *The art of the novel: Critical prefaces*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Jeppsson, F., Haglund, J., Amin, T., & Stromdahl, H. (2013). Exploring the use of conceptual metaphors in solving problems on entropy. *Journal of the Learning Sciences, 22*(1), 70-120. doi: 10.1080/10508406.2012.691926
- Johnson-Bailey, J. (2010). Learning in the dimension of otherness: A tool for insight and empowerment. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education, 126*, 77-88. doi: 10.1002/ace.373
- Jones, A. (2011). Philosophical and socio-cognitive foundations for teaching in higher education through collaborative approaches to student learning. *Educational Philosophy & Theory, 43*(9), 997-1011. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00631.x
- Jones, S.H., Adams, T., & Ellis, C. (2013). Introduction: Coming to know autoethnography as more than a method. In S.H. Jones, T.E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 17-47). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Jones, S.R., Kim, Y., & Skendall, K. (2012). (Re-) Framing authenticity: Considering multiple social identities using autoethnographic and intersectional approaches. *Journal of Higher Education, 83*(5), 698-723.
- Jung, C.G. (1957/1958). *The undiscovered self* (R.F.C. Hull, Trans.). Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Kamberelis, G., & Dimitriadis, G. (2013). Focus groups: Contingent articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 309-344). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Karpiak, I.E. (2010). Summoning the past: Autobiography as a "movement toward possibility." *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education, 126*, 13-24.
- Kear, T.M. (2009). *An investigation of transformative learning experiences during associate degree nursing education using narrative methods* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 880545169)
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- King, K.P. (2010). Informal learning in a virtual era. In C.E. Kasworm, A.D. Rose, J.M. Ross-Gordon (Ed.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 ed., pp. 421-429) American Association for Adult and Continuing Education.
- King, L.A. (2001). The health benefits of writing about life goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(7), 798-807.
- Kroger, J., & McLean, K. C. (2011). Identity narratives during the adult years: Development and learning. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 173-185). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lamoreaux, A., & Taylor, K. (2011). Prior learning assessment and the developmental journey: From "mapless" to cartographer. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 80-100). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lander, D. (2000). Mixed metaphors for reading and writing the qualitative thesis in adult education. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 32(2), 148.
- Langer, E.J. (1997). *The power of mindful learning*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Lanthier, R.P., & Campbell, A.J. (2011). Sibling relationships as opportunities for development and learning in adulthood. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 381-395). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lather, P., & Smithies, C. (1997). *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Lawler, M. (2012). The role of story in leadership change: A look at the impact of restorying on transition for leaders. *Tamara Journal of Critical Organisation Inquiry*, 10(1), 23-29.
- Levinson, D. (1986). A conception of adult development. *American Psychologist*, 41(1), 3-13.
- Levinson, D., Darrow, C., Klein, E., Levinson, M., & McKee, B. (1976). Periods in the adult development of men: Ages 18 to 45. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 6(1), 21-25.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1966). *The savage mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Libby, L.K., & Eibach, R.P. (2011). Self-enhancement or self-coherence? Why people shift visual perspective in mental images of the personal past and future. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(5), 714-726. doi: 10.1177/0146167211400207
- Lim, J. H. (2011). Qualitative methods in adult development and learning. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 39-60). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Lindeman, E.C. (1926). *The meaning of adult education* (1989 ed.). Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma Research Center for Continuing Professional and Higher Education.
- Lovegreen, L.D., & Settersten, R.A. Jr. (1998). Educational experiences throughout adult life: New hopes or no hope life-course flexibility? *Research on Aging*, 20(4), 506-538.
- Lyons, N. (2007). Narrative inquiry: What possible future influence on policy or practice? In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 600-631). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- MacDonnell, J.A., & Macdonald, G. (2012). Arts-based critical inquiry in nursing and interdisciplinary professional education: Guided imagery, images, narratives, and poetry. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 9(4), 203-221. doi: 10.1177/1541344612441083
- MacLure, M. (2011). Qualitative inquiry: Where are the ruins? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(10), 997-1005. doi: 10.1177/1077800411423198
- Madan, R.S. (2012). *Narrative disruptions in composition's culture of scholarship* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 1222872599)
- Marcia, J., & Josselson, R. (2013). Eriksonian personality research and its implications for psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality*, 81(6), 617-629. doi: 10.1111/jopy.12014
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maskulak, M. (2012). Edith Stein: A proponent of human community and a voice for social change. *Logos*, 15(2), 64-83.
- Mattsson, T. (2014). Intersectionality as a useful tool: Anti-oppressive social work and critical reflection. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 29(1), 8-17. doi: 10.1177/0886109913510659
- McAdams, D. P. (2012). Personality, modernity, and the storied self: A contemporary framework for studying persons. In K.D. Vohs, & R.F. Baumeister (Eds.), *Self-concept and Self-esteem* (pp. 227-273). Los Angeles: Sage.
- McAdams, D. P., & Logan, R. L. (2006). Creative work, love, and the dialectic in selected life stories of academics. In D.P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* (pp. 89-108). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- McKenzie, E. A. (2015). An autoethnographic inquiry into the experience of grief after traumatic loss. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 23(2), 93-109. doi: 10.1177/1054137315576620
- McLaughlin, K. A., Kubzansky, L. D., Dunn, E. C., Waldinger, R., Vaillant, G., & Koenen, K. C. (2010). Childhood social environment, emotional reactivity to stress, and mood and

- anxiety disorders across the life course. *Depression and Anxiety*, 27(12), 1087-1094.  
doi:10.1002/da.20762
- McLean, K.C., Syed, M., & Shucard, H. (2016). Bringing identity content to the fore: Links to identity development processes. *Emerging Adulthood*, 1-9.  
doi: 10.1177/2167696815626820
- Merriam, S.B. (2004). The role of cognitive development in Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 60-68.  
doi: 10.1177/0741713604268891
- Merriam, S.B., & Brockett, R.G. (2007). *The profession and practice of adult education: An introduction*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Merriam, S.B., Caffarella, R.S., & Baumgartner, L.M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Merriam, S. B., & Clark, M. C. (2006). Learning and development: The connection in adulthood. In C. Hoare (Ed.), *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 27-51). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merton, T. (1961). *New seeds of contemplation*. Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books.
- Meszaros, P. (2007). The journey of self-authorship: Why is it necessary? In P. Meszaros (Ed.), *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 109 (pp. 5-14). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100-110.
- Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education*, 32(1), 3-24. Retrieved from aeq.sagepub.com through Benedictine University Library on May 28 2015.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, (74), 5-12.
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58-63. doi:10.1177/1541344603252172
- Mezirow, J., & Associates. (1991). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Michelson, E. (2013). If the self is a text, what genre is it? Structure and ideology in narratives of adult learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 63(3), 199-214.  
doi: 10.1177/0741713612442785

- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc. isbn: 978-1-4522-5787-7
- Mr. Y. (2011). *A national strategic narrative*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center.
- Modesti, S. (2011). *(We)ducation: A narrative and autoethnographic analysis of the teaching and learning process postured as an intimate relationship* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 918830792)
- Nash, R.J. (2004). *Liberating scholarly writing: The power of personal narrative*. New York: Teachers College Press. issn: 0-8077-4525-1
- Nerstrom, N. (2013). *An emerging model for transformative learning*. Paper presented at the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education Conference, South Carolina. Hard copy retrieved from attendee.
- Neugarten, B.L. (1969). Continuities and discontinuities of psychological issues into adult life. *Human Development*, 12(2), 121-130.
- Newman, D. (2009). *Global consciousness: The transformative power of love autoethnography and personal narratives* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Accession No. 305181350)
- Newman, M. (2012). Calling transformative learning into question: Some mutinous thoughts. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 62(1), 36-55. doi: 10.1177/0741713610392768
- Noe, R., Tews, M., & Marand, A. (2013). Individual differences and informal learning in the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 83(3), 327-335. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.06.009>
- Ollerenshaw, J.A., & Creswell, J.W. (2002). Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(3), 329-347.
- Omiunota, N.U. (2010). Teachers' reflections on pedagogies that enhance learning in an online course on teaching for equity and social justice. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 7(3), 227-255. issn: 1541-4914
- O'Neill, S. (2009). The stories we live by: Exploring music learning through personal narratives. *Canadian Music Educator / Musicien Educateur au Canada*, 51(2), 25-28.
- Orth, U., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2010). Self-esteem development from young adulthood to old age: A cohort-sequential longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(4), 645-658. doi:10.1037/a0018769
- Overton, S.L. (2008). The stigma of mental illness. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 86(2), 143-151.

- Pals, J. L. (2006). Constructing the "springboard effect": Causal connections, self-making, and growth within the life story. In D.P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and story: Creating Self in Narrative* (pp. 175-199). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Pathman, T., Doydum, A., & Bauer, P. (2013). Bringing order to life events: Memory for the temporal order of autobiographical events over an extended period in school-aged children and adults. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 115*(2), 309-325. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.jecp.2013.01.011>
- Patt, J., Warkentyne, M., & Till, B. (2010). *Haiku: Japanese art and poetry*. M. Warkentyne (Calligrapher). San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate.
- Pelias, R.J. (2013). Writing autoethnography: The personal, poetic, and performative as compositional strategies. In S. Jones, T. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 384-405). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Penzel, F. (2000). *Obsessive-compulsive disorders: A complete guide to getting well and staying well*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-22.
- Peshkin, A. (1993). The goodness of qualitative research. *Educational Researcher, 22*(2), 23-29.
- Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, J.G. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative. In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Polanco, M. (2013). Democratizing academic writing: A revision of an experience of writing an autoethnographic dissertation in color. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(17), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/docview/1504408303?accountid=11789>
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23.
- Poulos, C.N. (2009). *Accidental ethnography: An inquiry into family secrecy*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Poulos, C.N. (2012). Life, interrupted. *Qualitative Inquiry, 18*(4), 323-332. doi: 10.1177/1077800411431565
- Pourreau, L. (2014). Analyzing flying chameleons: Using autoethnography to explore change in the female educator. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(102), 1-22.



- Pratt, D.D. & Associates. (1998). *Five perspectives on teaching in adult and higher education*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.
- President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*. Retrieved from [http://www2.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/Home4/Home\\_Page\\_Spotlights/Spotlight4/FinalReport.pdf](http://www2.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/Home4/Home_Page_Spotlights/Spotlight4/FinalReport.pdf)
- Preston, A.J. (2011). Using autoethnography to explore and critically reflect upon changing identity. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 110-125.
- Randall, W. L. (1996). Restorying a life: Adult education and transformative learning. In J.E. Birren, G.M. Kenyon, J. Ruth, J.J.F. Schroots, & T. Svensson (Eds.), *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development* (pp. 224-247). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Reinertsen, A.B. (2015). A minor research and educational language: Beyond critique and the imperceptible beingness of engagement; creating spaces for collective subjectivity intensities, for change, and for social justice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(7), 623-627. doi: 10.1177/1077800414555074
- Richards, L. (2009). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Richards, R. (2008). Writing the othered self: Autoethnography and the problem of objectification in writing about illness and disability. *Qualitative Health Research*, 18(12), 1717-1728. doi: 10.1177/1049732308325866
- Richardson, L. (2001). Getting personal: Writing-stories. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(1), 33-38. doi: 10.1080/09518390010007647
- Richardson, L. (2010). Jeopardy: A grandmother's story. *Symbolic Interaction*, 33(1), 3-17. issn: 0195-6086
- Ricoeur, P. (1976). *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press.
- Riessman, C.K. (2002). Analysis of personal narratives. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (pp. 695-710). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rifa-Valls, M. (2011). Experimenting with visual storytelling in students' portfolios: Narratives of visual pedagogy for pre-service teacher education. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 30(2), 293-306.
- Rogers, C. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- Rogers, C., & Russell, D. (2002). *Carl Rogers the quiet revolutionary: An oral history*. Roseville, California: Penmarin Books. isbn: 1-883955-31-9
- Ronai, C. R. (1995). Multiple reflections of child sex abuse: An argument for a layered account. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 23(4), 395-426.
- Ronai, C. R. (1996). My mother is mentally retarded. In Arthur P. Bochner & Carolyn Ellis (Eds.), *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (pp. 109-131). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Ross, M., & Conway, M. (1986). Remembering one's own past: The construction of personal histories. In R. Sorrentino & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behavior* (pp. 122-144). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Ross, M., & Wilson, A. E. (2012). Autobiographical memory and conceptions of self: Getting better all the time. In K.D. Vohs, & R.F. Baumeister (Eds.), *The Agentic Self* (pp. 343-349). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Rossiter, M. (1999a). A narrative approach to development: Implications for adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(1). Retrieved from EbscoHost. (Accession No. 07417136)
- Rossiter, M. (1999b). Understanding adult development as narrative. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 1999(84), 77-85. doi: 10.1002/ace.8409
- Rossiter, M. & Clark, M. (2007). *Narrative and the practice of adult education*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Ryan, I. (2012). A career journey: An auto-ethnographic insight. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(8), 541-568. doi: 10.1108/17542411211279724
- Ryff, C., & Dunn, D. (1985). A life-span developmental approach to the study of stressful events. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 6(2), 113-127.
- Saint John of the Cross. (1951/2000). *Saint John of the Cross: The poems* (R. Campbell, Trans.). London: The Harvill Press.
- Saint John of the Cross. (1987). *John of the Cross: Selected writings* (K. Kavanaugh, Ed.). New York: Paulist Press.
- Saint John of the Cross, & Steuart, R.H.J. (2006). *Mystical doctrine of St. John of the Cross*. London: Continuum International Publishing. Retrieved from ebrary on March 9, 2015, at <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10250712&p00=dark%20night%20soul>. E-isbn: 9780826442321
- Saint Therese of Lisieux. (1972/2005). *Story of a soul: The autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux* (study edition, J. Clarke, Trans.). Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications.

- Saldana, J. (2003). Dramatizing data: A primer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(2), 218-236.  
doi: 10.1177/1077800402250932
- Sameshima, P. (2007). *Seeing red: A pedagogy of parallax: An episotolarly bildungsroman on artful scholarly inquiry*. Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press.
- Schlossberg, N.K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 159-162.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Schwandt, T.A. (2015). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Sharp-Grier, M.L., & Martin, J.L. (2016). Broken windows, broken promises: Grief, privilege, and hope in the mythical post racial, a call and response. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(7), 561-567. doi: 10.1177/1077800415624716
- Shaw, J., & DeForge, R. (2014). Qualitative inquiry and the debate between hermeneutics and critical theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(11), 1567-1580.  
doi: 10.1177/1049732314549028
- Sinnott, J. (2009). Complex thought and construction of the self in the face of aging and death. *Journal of Adult Development*, 16(3), 155-165. doi: 10.1007/s10804-009-9057-z
- Smith, M. C., & Taylor, K. (2010). Adult development. In C.E. Kasworm, A.D. Rose, J.M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (2010 ed., pp. 49-58) American Association for Adult and Continuing Education.
- Smith-Sullivan, K. (2008). *The autoethnographic call: Current considerations and possible futures* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Accession No. 304462879)
- Squire, C. (2013). From experience-centred to socioculturally-oriented approaches to narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 47-71). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Squire, C., Andrews, M., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). Introduction: What is narrative research? In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 1-26). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Stanage, S.M. (1986). "Unrestraining" liberty: adult education and the empowerment of persons. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 36(3), 123-129. doi: 10.1177/0001848186036003001
- Stein, E. (1986). Life in a Jewish family. In L. Gelber & R. Leuven (Eds.) & J. Koepfel (Trans.), *The Collected Works of Edith Stein* (Vol. 1). Washington, DC: ICS Publications. (Original work written in German 1985)

- Stein, E. (1987/1993). *Self-portrait in Letters: 1916-1942* (L. Gelber & R. Leuven, Eds.; J. Koepfel, Trans.). Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications. (Original work published in German in 1987)
- Stein, E. (2000). Philosophy of psychology and the humanities. In M. Sawicki (Ed. & Trans.) & M.C. Baseheart (Trans.), *The Collected Works of Edith Stein* (Vol. 7). Washington, DC: ICS Publications. (Original work published in German 1922)
- Stone, R. (1985). *The art of fiction*. Interview by William C. Woods. *The Paris Review* (No. 98). Retrieved on July 18, 2015, from <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2845/the-art-of-fiction-no-90-robert-stone>
- Sykes, B.E. (2014). Transformative autoethnography: An examination of cultural identity and its implications for learners. *Adult Learning*, 25(1), 3-10. doi: 10.1177/1045159513510147
- Taylor, A. (2009). *The Impostor Phenomenon: A look at the outside, the inside, and the other side through scholarly personal narrative* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 304862929)
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, E. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, 5-15. doi: 10.1002/ace.301
- Thomson, M.D. (2011). *The storied leadership of military spouses* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database. (Accession No. 963986149)
- Tillotson, R. (2012). *A parallel education: An autoethnography of Ms. Robin and Mrs. Tillotson* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Accession No. 1041256301)
- Tisdell, E.J. (1999). The spiritual dimension of adult development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 84, 87-95.
- Tisdell, E.J. (2002). Spiritual development and cultural context in the lives of women adult educators for social change. *Journal of Adult Development*, 9(2), 127-140.
- Tisdell, E.J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Tracy, S.J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851. doi: 10.1177/1077800410383121
- Vandermause, R.K., & Townsend, R.P. (2010). Teaching thoughtful practice: Narrative pedagogy in addictions education. *Nurse Education Today*, 30(5), 428-434. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.09.017>

- Van der Merwe, & Brewis, J. (2011). From problem-solving paradigm to co-ontogenic drift: How do learning narratives self-generate? *Leonardo*, 44(2), 133-138.
- Walsh, M. (2011). Narrative pedagogy and simulation: Future directions for nursing education. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 11(3), 216-219.  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.nepr.2010.10.006>
- Watson-Gegeo, K. (2005). Journey to the 'new normal' and beyond: reflections on learning in a community of practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18(4), 399-424. doi: 10.1080/09518390500137592
- Watt, D. (2007). On becoming a qualitative researcher: The value of reflexivity. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1), 82-101.
- Weg, A. H. (2011). *OCD treatment through storytelling: A strategy for successful therapy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Witherell, C. (1991). The self in narrative: A journey into paradox. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (pp. 83-95). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Wlodkowski, R.J. (2008). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, California: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Wolfe, B., Song J., Greenberg, J., & Mailick, M. (2014). Ripple effects of developmental disabilities and mental illness on nondisabled adult siblings. *Social Science & Medicine*, 108, 1-9. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.021>
- Zhu, Z., Yu, M., & Riezebos, P. (2016, March). A research framework of smart education. *Smart Learning Environments*, 3(4). doi: 10.1186/s40561-016-0026-2
- Ziegler, M., Paulus, T., & Woodside, M. (2014). Understanding informal group learning in online communities through discourse analysis. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(1), 60-78. doi: 10.1177/0741713613509682

## Appendix A - List of Primary Research Sources and Active Pages

- Aronberg, D. G. (circa 1969). *65 years in construction: 1902-1967—An autobiography* [Inherited memoir manuscript with photographic negatives and prints]. Copy in possession of grandson, Leavenworth, Kansas. 341 active pages with negative sheets.
- Culkin (brother). (October 29, 1990). [Letter to David Culkin]. Copy in possession of David Culkin. 3 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (February 13, 1989-August 26, 1990). [Reflection notes from papers]. Copies in possession of author. 26 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (circa 1990). *Leavings* [Poem in journal papers]. 1 active page.
- Culkin, D. T. (1991-2004). *Journal 1* [Reflective journal and sketch book]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 84 active (i.e., not blank or torn out) pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (September 28, 1996). [Letter to participant's uncle]. Copy in possession of David Culkin.
- Culkin, D. T. (August 31, 2003-January 14, 2007). *Journal 2* [Reflective journal]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 154 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T., & Wife. (July 29, 1995-August 15, 1995). *Journal 3* [Reflective journal and diary]. Copy in possession of authors, Leavenworth, Kansas. 18 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T., Wife, & Father. (May 20, 1992-May 9, 2002). *Journal 4* [Reflective journal and correspondence]. Copy in possession of authors, Leavenworth, Kansas. 133 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (April 2005-March 2011). *Journal 5* [Reflective journal, class notes, and sketch book]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 101 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (August 2005-June 2007). *Journal 6* [Reflective journal and class notes]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 139 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (December 18, 2006-April 2008). *Journal 7* [Reflective journal and class notes]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 131 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (August 30, 2007-September 9, 2008). *Journal 8* [Reflective journal and professional diary]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 33 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (April 23, 2008-May 31, 2009). *Journal 9* [Reflective journal and professional diary]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 79 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (June 1, 2009-June 24, 2011). *Journal 10* [Reflective journal and professional diary]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 220 active pages.

- Culkin, D. T. (2011-2012). *Journal 11* [Reflective diary and professional calendar]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 84 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (2013). *Journal 12* [Reflective diary and professional calendar]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 141 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (July 15, 2002-July 23, 2014). *Journal 13* [Reflective diary and sketch book]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 76 active pages and photos.
- Culkin, D. T. (October 11, 2011-September 1, 2012). *Journal 14* [Reflective diary and professional journal]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 118 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T. (January 2014-November 2014). *Journal 15* [Professional diary and journal]. Copy in possession of author, Leavenworth, Kansas. 57 active pages.
- Culkin, D. T., & Family. (1993-2009). *Journal 16* [Personal correspondence]. Copy in possession of author's wife, Leavenworth, Kansas. 137 active pages.

## Appendix B - Research Timeline

This study was to be completed within 40 weeks upon committee approval of the proposal. The table below presents the initial research timeline that describes how the researcher-participant planned to collect data and when the products of data analysis and representation were completed according to key milestones (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Major milestones were reported and tracked on the research WIKI (particularly the time line and research journal sections) at <https://culkinautoethnography.wikispaces.com/Time+Line>.

Table B.1

### *Research Timeline*

Weeks/Dates	Project Item	Remarks
<b>Week P-3</b> January 10-16, 2016 (P=Proposal Week)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Coordinate date/time/location</b> for proposal defense/comps NLT 26 February 2016</li> <li>2. <b>Draft slides</b></li> <li>3. <b>Send slides &amp; proposal to peer &amp; co-chairs</b> for review</li> <li>4. <b>Set up rehearsals &amp; practice sessions</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure contact with each committee member</li> <li>2. Coordinate with co-chairs</li> <li>3. Coordinate with peer &amp; co-chairs</li> <li>4. Qual student &amp; doctoral support group</li> </ol>
<b>Week P-2</b> January 17-23, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Rehearse defense/comps and revise slides with feedback</b></li> <li>2. Journal</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As needed</li> <li>2. As needed</li> </ol>
<b>Week P-1</b> January 24-30, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Confirm date/location for proposal defense</b></li> <li>2. <b>Rehearse proposal defense</b></li> <li>3. <b>Refine slides</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In person and/or Zoom</li> <li>2. Coordinate with co-chairs</li> <li>3. Coordinate with co-chairs</li> </ol>



Weeks/Dates	Project Item	Remarks
<b>Week Proposal (P)</b> January 31-February 6, 2016	1. <b>Send follow-up e-mail</b> with key revisions to address 2. Journal	1. As coordinated 2. As needed
<b>Weeks 1-3</b> February 7-27, 2016	1. <b>Clarify KSU IRB requirements &amp; submit requests</b> as needed 2. <b>Defend proposal/comps in front of committee on 26 FEB, 1-3 pm, KSU Olathe</b> 3. Journaling	1. Not required 2. Document in research journal on WIKI with key feedback 3. As appropriate on WIKI
<b>Weeks 4-6</b> February 28-March 19, 2016	1. <b>Receive proposal approval</b> 2. <b>Revise proposal</b> 3. Refine document protocols 4. <b>Refine research timeline &amp; review</b> with committee chairs 5. <b>Submit revised proposal</b> for peer review 6. Journaling	1. As coordinated with co-chairs 2. As directed by committee 3. As directed/needed 4. As directed; post on personal calendar 5. Coordinate with peer 6. Ongoing
<b>Weeks 7-9</b> March 20-April 9, 2016	1. <b>Finish proposal draft in EDRT</b> with peer feedback 2. <b>Write intersectional story</b> 3. <b>Send revised proposal to committee</b> for review & updates 4. <b>Collect other data sources</b> (e-mail, letters, research journal) 5. Journaling	1. Make appointment with Hale librarian if needed for format help 2. According to approved levels of analysis 3. As directed; maintain comment resolution matrix if needed 4. As needed 5. As needed
<b>Weeks 10-12</b> April 10-30, 2016	1. <b>Complete intersectional story</b> according to levels of analysis 2. <b>Refine narratives &amp; linkages</b> to academic sections 3. <b>Request peer review of narratives</b> 4. Journaling	1. Analyze other data sources, answer research questions, & refine causal connections 2. Focus on narratives; refine EDRT format 3. Focus on narratives 4. As needed

Weeks/Dates	Project Item	Remarks
<b>Weeks 13-15</b> May 1-21, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Refine levels of analysis and narratives</b> with peer feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Send narratives to committee</b> for review</li> <li>3. <b>Draft findings, implications, &amp; conclusions</b> while addressing research questions</li> <li>4. Journaling</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refine narratives</li> <li>2. As directed; note previous feedback</li> <li>3. Focus on final two chapters</li> <li>4. As needed</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 16-18</b> May 22-June 11, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Refine narratives</b> with committee feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Send revised narratives to committee</b> for review</li> <li>3. <b>Draft analysis, interpretations, &amp; synthesis chapters</b></li> <li>4. Journaling</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As directed</li> <li>2. As directed</li> <li>3. Focus on final two chapters; ensure address research questions</li> <li>4. As needed</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 19-21</b> June 12-July 2, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Complete revisions on narratives</b> with committee feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Draft conclusions &amp; recommendations</b> (findings)</li> <li>3. <b>Request peer review</b> of findings &amp; conclusions</li> <li>4. <b>Review draft manuscript for alignment</b></li> <li>5. Journaling</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As directed</li> <li>2. Focus on final two chapters &amp; research alignment</li> <li>3. Focus on final two chapters</li> <li>4. According to research alignment diagram approved by committee</li> <li>5. As needed</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 22-24</b> July 3-23, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Revise final two chapters</b> with peer feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Send revised final chapters to committee</b> for review</li> <li>3. <b>Draft title &amp; abstract</b></li> <li>4. Proofread &amp; Edit</li> <li>5. <b>Set up dissertation defense</b> date/time/location</li> <li>6. Write up Journaling</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As needed</li> <li>2. As directed</li> <li>3. Given feedback</li> <li>4. Given feedback</li> <li>5. In person &amp; Zoom; coordinate with co-chairs; assemble list of citations</li> <li>6. As needed</li> </ol>

<b>Weeks/Dates</b>	<b>Project Item</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Weeks 25-27</b> July 24-August 13, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Revise final two chapters</b> with committee feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Assemble manuscript</b></li> <li>3. <b>Submit manuscript</b> to committee for review</li> <li>4. <b>Draft</b> defense presentation <b>slides</b></li> <li>5. <b>Confirm dissertation defense</b> date/ time/location/media</li> <li>6. Write up Journaling</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As directed</li> <li>2. Coordinate appointment with Hale librarian if need help with format; ensure headings &amp; implications logically flow</li> <li>3. As directed/required</li> <li>4. As directed</li> <li>5. Follow-up; arrange for video teleconferencing if needed (Zoom); confirm list of comps questions</li> <li>6. As needed</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 28-30</b> August 14-September 3, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Revise manuscript</b> with committee feedback</li> <li>2. <b>Send draft slides to co-chairs</b> for review</li> <li>3. <b>Send out final draft</b> manuscript to committee</li> <li>4. <b>Rehearse</b> defense presentation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As directed</li> <li>2. As directed; keep simple &amp; concise</li> <li>3. As directed/required</li> <li>4. As practical; with Qual and/or doctoral support group(s)</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 31-33</b> September 4-24, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Rehearse</b> defense presentation</li> <li>2. <b>Defend dissertation with committee</b></li> <li>3. <b>Revise</b> manuscript as required</li> <li>4. <b>Journal</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Present to qual student group &amp; co-chairs</li> <li>2. As scheduled</li> <li>3. As directed/required</li> <li>4. In Research Journal on WIKI</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 34-36</b> September 25-October 15, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Submit manuscript</b> approved by committee</li> <li>2. <b>Register &amp; copyright manuscript</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As directed</li> <li>2. Publish through KSU Graduate School</li> </ol>
<b>Weeks 37-39</b> October 16-November 5, 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Submit final dissertation</b> to committee members &amp; boss</li> <li>2. <b>APPLY FOR GRADUATION!</b></li> <li>3. <b>Update CV &amp; resume</b></li> <li>4. <b>Request official transcript</b></li> <li>5. <b>Complete</b> all graduation requirements</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As required</li> <li>2. Enjoy life! Clean up plan of study with dissertation hours or certificate.</li> <li>3. As needed</li> <li>4. As available</li> <li>5. As required</li> </ol>

*Note:* This schedule may adjust according to unexpected factors. Researcher was on a paid leave of absence for 15 August 15-October 15 2016 to complete this dissertation.

## **Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Letter and Reviews**

The enclosed letter shows that the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted a research exemption for the proposal of this research on July 18, 2016. In addition, the researcher, as an employee of the Department of Defense, requested reviews of this manuscript for proprietary concerns in accordance with federal policy. Officials reviewed this manuscript against classified disclosure and public affairs criteria and cleared the document by July 15, 2016. The researcher's wife and brother reviewed the contents for family-proprietary purposes by August 1, 2016, and the researcher then incorporated their feedback. The researcher also called the model for the archetype narrator, Colleen, who has consented to using some of her life events for the purposes of re-storying the narrative (phone conversation, August 11, 2016). The following figure exhibits the Kansas State University IRB letter, co-reviewer cover letter, and signed (partially redacted for privacy) co-reviewer statements by both the researcher's wife and brother.

Figure C.1 Compliance and Co-reviewer Forms



TO: Royce Ann Collins  
Educational Leadership  
22201 W. Innovation Dr. Olathe, KS 66061

Proposal Number: 8356

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 07/18/2016

RE: Proposal Entitled, "A NEED TO HEAL: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC BILDUNGSROMAN EXPLORING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND GRIEF"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 4, subsection:**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**CO-REVIEWER AGREEMENT**

**PROJECT TITLE:** A NEED TO HEAL: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC BILDUNGSROMAN EXPLORING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND GRIEF

**PROJECT PROPOSAL APPROVED:** February 2016

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Royce Ann Collins, PhD

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):** Kakali Bhattacharya, PhD

**CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:** Royce Ann Collins, PhD,  
[racollin@ksu.edu](mailto:racollin@ksu.edu)

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:** *If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research with an official of the university or institutional review board (IRB), you can contact the following:*

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:** The purpose of the research project is to describe how documented events have influenced the researcher-participant's identity development over his life and to create meaning with the audiences.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:** In this autoethnographic study, the researcher is the only subject and will examine primary materials that personally belong to him in order to interpret meaning from lived experiences. These materials include his grandfather's inherited, unpublished autobiography and several personal journals and correspondence that span over three decades. Your role as co-reviewer will be to review draft manuscripts of the dissertation for factual accuracy and limits of family privacy. You will not be audio/video taped or compensated in any manner.

**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO REVIEWER:** Confidentiality will be maintained for all family members (living and deceased), but this will be difficult for the researcher-participant's wife and brother—despite not using their names. Identifiable details of the researcher-participant's living members from his immediate family (i.e., you as my wife or brother) will be concealed by using pseudonyms or by avoiding the use of names other than "my wife" or "my brother." This form protects you and the researcher-participant by explaining potential discomforts to you and by allowing you to agree to these terms beforehand.

**LENGTH OF STUDY:** estimated 5 months

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:** There are no foreseeable risks from this study, but readers may be able to determine personally identifiable public information related to you.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:** Reasonably expected benefits to you from this research will be a better understanding of 1) how a family member has coped with mental illness to promote healing, 2) our grandfather's life story and how it has influenced his family, and 3) the value of facing the effects of mental illness and grief in family life.


Last revised on May 20, 2016

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** The researcher-participant will protect the confidentiality of private data by maintaining positive control of the information at all times. He will be the only researcher and participant, so he can better control access and use of that data. Additionally, the researcher-participant will use a pseudonym or "my mother, brother, wife, etc." to identify a particular family member when it is necessary in the analysis and findings.

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION:** I understand this project is research, and that my participation as a co-reviewer is completely voluntary. I also understand that I may withdraw my agreement at any time, and without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this form, and willingly agree to co-review this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this form.

Co-reviewer Name  
(Please print):  Calkin

Co-reviewer Signature:  Calkin Date: 6/4/16

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** The researcher-participant will protect the confidentiality of private data by maintaining positive control of the information at all times. He will be the only researcher and participant, so he can better control access and use of that data. Additionally, the researcher-participant will use a pseudonym or "my mother, brother, wife, etc." to identify a particular family member when it is necessary in the analysis and findings.

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION:** I understand this project is research, and that my participation as a co-reviewer is completely voluntary. I also understand that I may withdraw my agreement at any time, and without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this form, and willingly agree to co-review this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this form.

Co-reviewer Name  
(Please print):  Calkin 

Co-reviewer Signature:  Calkin Date: 07 June 2016

*Figure C.1.* These forms indicate that ethical relationships with intimate others (Ellis, 2007) were constantly on the researcher's mind during data collection, analysis, and representation.