LEARNING TO BE “ME”:
A STUDY OF THE IDENTITIES OF
YOUNG PEOPLE IN
A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

by
CHRISTOPHER O’NEILL

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ABSTRACT

Is it possible to have a unique and unified sense of your own identity if you eat, sleep, work and play for most of the year within the confines of what Goffman called a "total institution"?

The research, which takes the form of a case study of a group of adolescent boys who are students at an English Public School, explores the formation and presentation of unique personal identity in its subjects' written autobiographical narratives.

It seeks to answer the question: In their autobiographical writings, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

Using a narrative conception of identity derived from the work of Erikson and McAdams, the study collects a variety of biographical and ethnomethodological material in which the students present both their perceptions of themselves, and their unusual and intensive social world.

The extensive biographical data are hermeneutically and minutely analysed to reveal the large number of ways in which the students' stories achieve both idiosyncratic uniqueness as well as convincing unity. The results of these analyses are summarised in the form of a detailed Taxonomy of Narrative Differences, and a further Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns.

Theethnomethodological data concerning the students' perceptions of their private peer-group world reveal that their social world is constituted as a hierarchical "honour morality" with a "code" of unwritten rules and values which prescribe socially-acceptable behaviour and self-presentation.

Powerful though this "code" (and its associated moral lexicon) may be in regulating students' social behaviour and self-presentation amongst their peers, neither it, nor the school's official rules and values have a significant place in the students' autobiographies.

The students' autobiographies demonstrate a unique and unified sense of identity which seems to be learned as a result of their personal experiences. In this way, the study's findings validate biographical learning theories such as those of Jarvis. On the other hand, they also suggest that aspects of the work of Erikson, Goffman and McAdams may need to be re-examined.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Biographers, of all writers, have need of prayers, and answered prayers. The graceful angles and sinuations of clean prose may finally be chiselled from the language, but what about the material itself? How can the biographer know when enough is known, and known with sufficient certainty? What about secrets, what about errors, what about the small black holes where there is nothing at all? What about the wranglings among minor characters, the withholding of facts for thoughtful and not-so-thoughtful reasons – or their mishandling – and this is not even in the present but in the past, hidden in letters, in remembered conversations, in reams of papers? And what about the waywardness of life itself – the proclivity towards randomness – the sudden meaningless uplift of wind that tosses out one sheet of paper and keeps another? What about the moment that speaks worlds, as the saying goes, but in the middle of the night, and into deaf ears, and so is never heard, or heard of?

I would not be a biographer for all the tea in China.

Mary Oliver,
Blue Pastures, 1995

I owe a huge debt to Peter Jarvis, an endlessly creative, open-minded and scholarly teacher and an exceedingly generous spirit. He has been an encouragement and an inspiration. He also has an extraordinary gift for making difficult things seem easy. Without him, the present research would never have been completed.

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PROLOGUE

HOW IT ALL BEGAN:
LOST SOULS, THE SAINT, THE GURU AND THE HYPNOTIST

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception....If anyone upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls himself; though I am creation there is no such principle in me.

(David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 1739/1874)

The study described in the following chapters is an exploration of the unique personal identities presented in the autobiographical narratives of a group of adolescent boys at an English Public School. During the course of the present study, the researcher has collected more than a quarter of a million words of other people’s autobiographies. He accepts the arguments of thinkers as diverse as Polanyi (1962, 1967), Gadamer (1975/1989, 1976) and Brownhill (1983) that understanding such material inevitably engages the researcher’s own personal experiences, presuppositions and social contexts. If, as these thinkers have argued, there is therefore no presuppositionless understanding, then all knowledge is “personal knowledge” which is permeated by the “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1962, 1967) and “prejudices” (Gadamer, 1975, 1976) arising from the social contexts and “interpretative frameworks” (Brownhill, 1983) which constitute the researcher’s biography. The open and fully accountable researcher, therefore, will have to take the risk of advertising those elements of his own biography which might have a bearing on the course and conclusions of his study. This Prologue takes that risk. In the present biographical Prologue, therefore, the present author endeavours to introduce himself, to explain how and why the study came about, and in the process, to indicate those elements of his own biography which may have influenced his conduct of the study. For this reason, the author of the present study casts aside, at least for a while, his habitual formal and reserved style of writing, and, denuded of the safe impersonality of the third person, steps forward brazenly as “I”.
The immediate trajectory of the present research process began in a school classroom a few years ago when a fifteen-year old schoolboy asked his psychology teacher (me) a question about personal identity. The process finished five years later with the writing of the present Prologue shortly after attending a contemporary dance performance in a London theatre which included an Andrews Sisters song written in the 1940s. The deeper roots of the study, however, and the interpretive “prejudices” (1975, 1976) which inform the study, go back much further and deeper...

The study’s deepest roots lie in my interest in the uniquenesses of human beings, and a corresponding theoretical puzzlement in knowing how to talk about them that began when I studied philosophy and psychology. In what terms may people’s uniquenesses be expressed? If the study had been undertaken in the Middle Ages, the principal focus of the study - the personal uniqueness of each boy - might have been discussed in terms of their unique soul, or, following Scotus, of their haecceitas, “the pure and absolute thisness-and-not-thatness” (Lynch, 1963:21) which differentiated and individuated every particular existent from every other particular existent. Whatever the merits of these metaphysical terms, Hume’s scepticism, expressed so urbanely in the present Prologue’s epigraph, sounded their death knell. A post-Cartesian world proved to be inhospitable to the existence of souls, and much twentieth century philosophical thought bent its best efforts to the final exorcism of what Ryle (1949) so pungently lampooned as the “ghost in the machine”.

The project of Wittgenstein’s (1953/1958) later thought, for instance, was a sustained attack on the very notion of the metaphysical, substantial and objective Cartesian conception of the self. Likewise, though from a very different intellectual tradition, post-modernist thought, in its own ways, and using its own vocabulary, was equally hostile to the soul’s metaphysical “presence”, and sought to dissolve and deconstruct the substantiality and stability of the “subject” (so, Derrida, 1976, 1978; Foucault, 1977, 1980).

Although there were few mourners at the soul’s funeral, some of its previous functions - as the bearer of a person’s quintessential personal uniqueness and as the guarantor of their personal unity and singularity - were, at least temporarily, left in abeyance.
Perhaps it was an intuition of this neglect that disposed Freud (1893, 1896) to retain the term “soul” (Seele) in the original German texts of his writings, before Strachey’s English translation expunged Freud’s unregenerate solecism from the Standard Edition of his master’s works.

I, like Wittgenstein and Ryle, had no particular sympathy for the old metaphysical conception of the soul, nor any of its Cartesian counterparts. Nonetheless, I was troubled about the cavalier abandonment of a vocabulary in which the uniqueness, unity and singularity of a person’s identity might be discussed and represented. Later, whilst studying psychology, I found it embarrassing to be involved with a discipline that was (at least etymologically) “the study of the soul”, and yet which seemed so ill-equipped with either a vocabulary or even an apparent desire to live up to its name. The deepest roots of the present study lay in that unease.

In my forties, I returned to Oxford and addressed this unease as a philosophical question to the intellectual discipline that had most pretensions to answer it; I began to inquire what vocabulary and concepts twentieth century psychology possessed to represent the uniqueness and unity of a person’s identity. The results of that exploration (O’Neill, 1996) had both negative and positive aspects. The negative aspect of the study confirmed my earlier intuition that the many schools and approaches of which psychology is composed had neither consistent vocabularies, nor clear and agreed concepts by which a person’s uniqueness and unity might be represented. More positively, my exploration also suggested that a surprising number of psychologists from a usually incompatible range of intellectual backgrounds were suggesting that a person’s uniqueness might be seen, not so much as a soul, but as a kind of story.

I had long realised, however, that the metaphor of seeing a person as a kind of story was by no means new. As a child, I had a vivid memory of a grave stone which bore an inscription in which the deceased described himself as a story in a book. More than two hundred and fifty years ago, Benjamin Franklin had written this for his own tomb stone:-
The body
Of
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
Printer
(Like the cover of an old book,
its contents torn out
And stript
Of its lettering and gilding)
Lies here, food for worms
But the work itself
Shall not be lost
For it will, as he believed,
Appear once more
In a new
And more elegant edition
Revised and corrected
By
The Author.

Later, as a theology student in Oxford, I had come across the writings of St. Augustine, whose autobiographical *Confessions* were widely held to be an unprecedented and ground-breaking attempt to turn the intimate details of a unique person’s life into a *story*, thereby inventing the *autobiographical genre* in the process.

In my thirties, as a trainee psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, I came across a fascinating case from the casebook of that most wily of psychiatrists, Milton Erickson. In 1945, Erickson, whose researches in hypnosis pioneered so many later innovations in several branches of psychotherapy, began to treat a pregnant woman who was suffering from acute anxiety, depression, insomnia and anorexia. Aware of the inadequate parenting she had received from her own socialite mother (who resented the patient’s birth because “it practically ruined my figure”), she was terrified that she would become an equally bad parent to her own expected child. Over the course of a number of months, Erickson induced a series of deep hypnotic trances during which he got the patient systematically to relive many of the key experiences of her own childhood and later life. Rather than merely telling and re-living the story of each of these past experiences, however, Erickson suggested that a kindly fatherly figure, always on hand to supply care and advice, would be unobtrusively present to help her through each experience and supply all the support and nurture which may have been absent from the original experiences. Since this kindly figure first appeared in
February, just before the patient re-lived her fourth birthday, she called him “The February Man”. As a result of this hypnotic re-telling of her life story, her long-standing psychiatric symptoms and inadequate sense of identity were transformed. Erickson had, in effect, performed a transformative narrative therapy which had profound consequences for the woman’s sense of personal identity. That the skilled re-telling of the woman’s life story had such profound consequences on both her quality of life and her sense of identity, suggested to me that the construction of autobiographical narratives was of considerable potential significance in matters of personal identity and psychological well-being. In short, a person’s life story might fulfil some of the functions of the defunct soul in representing a person’s unique identity.

The “narrative” idea behind Erikson’s innovative therapy in 1945 (his case of the “February Man” can be found in Erickson and Rossi, 1989), proved prophetic. My earlier research (O’Neill, 1996) explored how different types of psychologist, such as psychoanalysts (Spence, 1982; Schaffer, 1981), neurophysiologists (Sacks, 1985) and Artificial Intelligence specialists (Dennett, 1991), despite their theoretical differences, seemed, with striking frequency, to suggest that narrative served as the means by which each individual constructed their unique sense of who they were; the soul, it seems, had become not a “ghost in the machine”, but a story. Narrative “webs of discourse”, many suggested, might constitute the identity of the self, along with its uniqueness and its unity.

Such narrative rumours amongst psychologists, however, did not constitute a systematic analysis of how an individual’s uniqueness and unity might be constructed and represented fully. It seemed that alone amongst psychologists, it was Harré (1998) who was raising questions about the uniqueness, unity and singularity of the individual, and beginning to propose his own rigorous and clear analysis of how these things came about. In my twenties, as a young postgraduate student in Oxford, I had worked with Harré, and when we met again in 1995 during my second sojourn at the university, Harré shared his incredulity about psychology’s omission of personal uniqueness and unity from its intellectual agenda and vocabulary, and shared some of the ideas which were to become The Singular Self (Harré, 1998).
At about the same time, my psychological reflections about personal identity were interrogated from two quite different sources. As a result of another area of my work, I found myself involved with two groups of adults who were exploring their spiritual traditions; one group was using ideas based on the teachings of the Buddha, the other drew on a tradition that went back to St. Augustine (the “guru” and the “saint”, respectively, of the Prologue's title). Both thinkers, it seemed to me, offered provocative and challenging analyses of the origins and limitations of personal identity.

Though these figures came from markedly spiritual traditions, both refused the comforts of a metaphysical soul as a way of encapsulating the unique and unifying characteristics of a person, both were deeply sceptical about the stability of personal identity, and both emphasized the central role of human desires and attachments in the constitution of a person’s sense of self. The Buddha’s practice of vipassana meditation lead him to conclusions at least as radical as those of Foucault or Derrida about the ultimate non-existence of the self (anatta). Augustine’s profound agnosticism on the same issue sent him exploring the ambivalences of autobiography. The Buddha’s dissolution of the self, and Augustine’s self-critical narrative construction of it, seemed to pose interesting questions about the adequacy of current psychological accounts of personal identity.

So it was that Wittgenstein, Derrida, Foucault, Harré, Erickson, Augustine, the Buddha and Benjamin Franklin’s grave all went into to the complex melting pot into which was dropped the innocent question of a fifteen year-old-boy. By now I was teaching psychology in a residential school, and the boy’s question, What make you, “you” and me, “me”? catalysed the reaction which eventually turned into the present study. The implications of that seminal question are explored in the first chapter.

The study drew to a close with the writing of the present Prologue. Shortly before doing so, I had an experience which seemed to sum up what the study had been about. I had found myself in the comfortable darkness of a London theatre watching a programme of work by the legendary American choreographer, Paul Taylor. The final work was danced to a selection of American popular songs from the 1940s, sung by
the Andrews Sisters. For all their superficial cheerfulness, their songs are predominantly love songs sung in a time of war.

A young girl in a homely frock takes the centre of the twilight stage as the Andrews Sisters begin to sing the words of a song that express the love the girl feels for the young man who joins her in the centre of the stage. Their physical language speaks of young love, with awkward jiving and jitterbugging giving way to lingering looks and tender touches. As the last few verses of the bitter-sweet song filled the theatre, a frieze of other young men are seen in silhouette against the darkening sky. Step by slow step, they are marching, fighting and dying in stylised slow motion, like figures on a thousand war memorials. Their line marches haltingly off stage, into war, into oblivion, into darkness. During the last verse of the song, the girl’s young man turns away and takes his place at the end of the receding line of men and is gone, perhaps forever. Soon, like many others in that and in other wars, he will be no more, and this gives a new poignancy to the line which is the song’s title, as well as its repeated refrain: “There’ll never be another you”.

But is the song right? That song, like the fifteen-year old boy’s question, raised the issue of the irreplaceable uniqueness of individual human beings which it was the present study’s aim to explore. Before that exploration begins in the first chapter, however, a few preliminary explanations are necessary.

First, all of the proper names - whether of particular people or places - contained in the present work have been changed to protect the anonymity of the study’s participants, and have been replaced by an alternative proper name to preserve something of the distinctiveness of the original.

Secondly, all the students who contributed to the present study attended a particular residential “Public School”. For readers unfamiliar with some of the idiosyncratic terms used in English schooling, a “Public School” is, somewhat confusingly, what many people would regard as a private school. The traditional “Public School” is an academically selective fee-paying school. Very many of them, like the school which features in the present study, are residential schools, and students can expect to live at
school for the greater part of the year. To count as an official "Public School", the school's "head master" or "head mistress" has to be elected as a member of a body called "The Headmasters' Conference"; there are also many private schools in Britain whose head teachers are not members of this body, and their schools are not, in consequence, referred to as "Public Schools". Students at all these "secondary" schools take a set of public examinations called the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) when they are about sixteen years old.

Thirdly, in both their conversations and their writings, the study's participants sometimes referred to their school explicitly by name, and sometimes used the generic term "school". In order to preserve this distinction, as well as to maintain the flavour of specificity of the original sources, the present author has taken the liberty of inventing a fictitious name for the school; Bentham's College (usually in the colloquially abbreviated form of "Bentham's"). Readers familiar with Jeremy Bentham's work on the foundations of Utilitarianism may forgive the affectionate allusion to his amiable principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people", an admirable aim for any place of learning.

Fourthly, quotations, whether from academic sources or from the students who participated in the study, are indicated by the use of a different and distinctive type face, rather than by the alternative method of indentation.

Finally, in a few places, the work of a particular author is cited with a "split" date (e.g. McAdams, 1985/1988). In such cases, the split dates usually indicate the year of the work's original publication and also the year that it was simply reprinted or translated. In the case of important works by Goffman and Ricoeur, it is hoped that this practice enables the multiple versions of their work to be easily identified. Specific details are given in the Bibliography.

The time has now come to meet Ben, the fifteen-year old boy whose question initiated the study.
CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY : ACCENTUATE THE PERMANENT

What is it that makes you, "you" and me, "me"?
Fifteen year old boy’s question

In what does the unity of a single life consist? The answer is that
its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life.
Alistair MacIntyre, After Virtue.

1.1 A Boy’s Own Question: How it all began

In the summer of 1995, I was teaching psychology in a school. A fifteen year old boy
- let us call him Ben - came up to me at the end of a lesson. He said he wanted to ask
me a question. He began with a statement:-

“There’s something funny about all these psychological theories you’ve been telling
us about.”

“And what is that?” I inquired, intrigued by what he might say next.

“Well, psychologists always seem to be making generalizations about people, but the
most interesting thing about people is what makes them unique, not what makes them
the same as everyone else.”

His tone of voice combined puzzlement with mild disdain. Then, after pausing for a
moment, he launched into his question.

“What I want to know is this; What is it that makes you, ‘you’ and me, ‘me’?”

It was a good question, but what was the answer? Like the Andrews Sisters, Ben
seemed to believe “There’ll never be another you”, but could such an understanding of
personal uniqueness be discussed, let alone validated by psychologists? A long
discussion followed which seemed to uncover both a jungle of possible psychological
terms (such as person, self, identity, self-concept, soul) and also a corresponding
desert of original research concerning personal uniqueness. Later that year, partly
prompted by Ben’s question, I started some research in Oxford which explored some
of the concepts and models available in academic psychology to encapsulate the
uniqueness of individual persons; Ben’s question, “What it is that makes you, “you” and me, “me”? had initiated a survey of twentieth psychologists' possible answers to his question (The Origins of the Self; Soul, Self and Narrative in Twentieth Century Psychology, O’Neill, 1996).

After completing that research, I returned to the world of secondary schools, partly as a teacher, and partly as a psychotherapist. Ben’s question about what constituted unique personal identity went with me. I had worked in a number of schools during the previous twenty-five years, most of which had been residential schools, and it struck me that, however academic psychologists may answer Ben’s question, every student in these schools had to answer it for themselves in a very practical and pressing way. In Ben’s words, they had to discover or create “what makes them unique, not what makes them the same as everyone else.”

Boarding schools are populated by adolescents for whom the school is not only the place where they received their formal academic education, but also where they sleep, eat, work, play and socialize for the greater part of the year. In these and many other respects, therefore, boarding schools demonstrate many of the classical characteristics of what Goffman (1961/1968) has called a “total institution”. Such institutions, Goffman argued, were “forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self.” (Goffman, 1961:12). If Goffman’s analysis is correct in this regard, and it is also accepted that adolescence is the time of life par excellence when young people explore, develop and question their own unique identities, then boarding school life presents a particularly interesting arena in which the question of unique identity formation may be explored. It might plausibly be argued that if you can be a unique individual in a total institution, you can be an individual anywhere!

An opportunity to explore how young people in just such an institution constructed and displayed their unique sense of who they were serendipitously presented itself. A sabbatical period of leave from my job combined conveniently with an opportunity to spend a period of eight months living and working in a residential school with a strong
academic tradition. This placement enabled me to undertake the present research into adolescent identity formation amongst students in a residential English Public School. The following account, therefore, is based on research I did whilst teaching at the school during that period, supplemented by a period of observation beforehand, and a small number of follow-up visits afterwards.

The opportunity to listen to a group of adolescents talking and writing about themselves in the context of the highly structured and distinctive social environment of a boarding school might, it seemed to me, provide a particularly rich opportunity to explore the development of unique personal individuality within a context of unusual social sameness, an essential part of the dynamic out of which Ben’s question had emerged. Despite their shared, even regimented social similarities, Public School students have to work out what makes them different from everyone else, and thereby provide their own personal answers to Ben’s question.

The remainder of this chapter falls into three main sections. The first section explains the study’s principal research questions, outlines the study’s approach to answering them, and then discusses the rationale for the study.

The second section explores the chapter’s main concern; to clarify and identify the central concept underlying Ben’s question about personal uniqueness. After sketching a number of possibilities, it is suggested that the term “identity” serves the purpose better than many others, even though it is not without its own ambiguities. In the course of surveying three quite distinct meanings of the term “identity”, the particular conception of identity used for the purposes of the present research is identified and clarified. It is argued that Erikson’s (1958, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1969) classic conception of identity provides an appropriate starting point, and that this conception is further clarified and developed by McAdams (1985, 1989, 1991, 1993). When McAdams’ narrative conception of identity has been outlined, the section closes with a brief discussion of three unusual cases (one saintly and two brain-damaged) whose autobiographical words raise important critical issues about both the necessity and limitations of the highly paradoxical and problematic concept of identity.
The third and final section of the chapter provides a brief outline of the study’s remaining chapters.

Given the interpretive nature of the study, it seems appropriate that those parts of the researcher’s own autobiography which have a bearing on the research should be indicated, so in this introductory chapter, as in the preceding Prologue, the traditional veil of academic impersonality remains lifted, and the researcher still appears, for a while, as “I”.

1.2 The Research Questions

The general theme of the research centres on identity-formation amongst a group of adolescent students at a traditional boarding school in the United Kingdom. More specifically, the research, taking its inspiration from Ben’s question, is concerned with the uniqueness and unity of personal identity. The students’ own senses of their identities is explored principally through their autobiographical writings. The principal research question is therefore focused specifically on the issue of how, in their autobiographical writings, pupils in this highly structured social environment achieve a sense of identity which is unique and unified. The principal research question eventually took the following form:-

In their autobiographical writings, how far do students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

Discerning the difference between what is unique and what is merely unusual when examining the autobiographies of students who live for most of the year in so idiosyncratic a social environment as that of a traditional Public School, is a tricky business. It means that the researcher’s quest for individual uniqueness must find ways of detecting and peeling away idiosyncratic features of the autobiographies which, whilst seemingly unusual to the outsider, are really manifestations of a distinctive but shared social sameness.
The uniqueness and differentiation of the individual Public School student is achieved against an obvious background of social sameness, and until some of the shared characteristics of the students’ autobiographies have been described and removed from consideration, it is difficult to discern clearly those features of the individual autobiographies which are distinctive, different and perhaps even unique.

This practical necessity to “peel away” successive layers of socially-shared sameness in order to discern more clearly distinctive personal idiosyncracies requires that the study adopts a carefully “layered” approach to its investigations. This practical necessity is, however, reinforced by a wider methodological concern that is well expressed by Jarvis:—

I am concerned that ever since the Enlightenment, we have distilled out differences and ended up with similarity. But if we distilled out similarity – then we are left with uniqueness! (Jarvis, 2001:1b).

Jarvis’ remark provides the kernel of the research strategy employed in the present study of individual differences displayed in the autobiographies of Public School boys. By “peeling away” the more general layers of their socially-shared similarities, those aspects of the autobiographies which are most individual, distinctive and different may be the more easily discerned; as Jarvis puts it, that by “distilling out similarity...we are left with uniqueness”(Jarvis, 2001: 1b).

The “peeling away” process is performed in three systematic stages which are encapsulated in a remark made by McAdams. Summarising the heuristic approach of two leading personologists, Kluckholn and Murray (1953), McAdams (1985/1988:53) says that their research was guided by the understanding that :

...every story is (a) like all other stories, (b) like some other stories, and, (c) like no other story.

This dictum provides a ground plan for the three main phases of the present study. The first phase of the study examines the most obvious way in which all students’ stories in the research school might be “like all other stories”, namely through the
formative influence of the norms, values and practices which they all share by virtue of their common membership and formation within the same “total institution”. Through their own writings and conversations, the first phase explores the local norms, values and practices which shape the students’ communal lives at school. This first phase of the study is directed by the subsidiary question:—

*What values and norms have the students learned from the social world of the school, both official and unofficial, and how far do these values and norms appear in the students' autobiographical writings?*

The focus of the second phase of the study moves from the social norms, values and practices of the students’ shared social world to begin to examine their individual autobiographies. When these individual autobiographies are collected and compared, it may still be possible to discern general patterns and characteristic social trends which, though distinctive and unusual are still less than personally unique. In other words, the second phase of the study deals with ways in which every story is “like some other stories”. This second phase of the research is directed by the subsidiary question:—

*How far can distinctive general features and patterns be discovered when the individual autobiographies are compared with each other?*

The third and final phase of the study examines the individual autobiographies to consider the ways in which the individual stories differentiate themselves from all the other stories and thus are “like no other story”. In this final phase, the study examines the manifold ways in which the students’ life stories are unified and differentiated, and thus address the principal research question:—

*In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?*
This principal research question is resolved into two constituent questions:

1) *In what specific ways do the authors unify their life stories?*

2) *In what specific ways do the authors display differences in their life stories?*

### 1.3 Outline of the Research

The principal research question thus focuses on how the participating students presented their identities in the various autobiographical writings and conversations which they produced during the period of the research.

The principal material used in answering the main research question was a collection of 42 autobiographies written by the study’s two main groups of participating students. This body of data was supported by a variety of open-ended discussions, conversations and interviews (both oral and written), an informal projective test of primary motivational themes modeled on the work of Morgan and Murray (1938) and McAdams (1985/1988), and a graph-based autobiographical exercise based on the work of Gergen and Gergen (1993b).

As a result of the study’s explorations, it is suggested that individuals learn who they are from their personal experiences and that these personal experiences are interpreted and transformed into a unique and unified sense of identity through being configured into a life story which is itself unified and unique.

To explore the possible effects which the school environment might have on the developing identities of its students, this autobiographical body of material (largely focused on each individual student’s personal experiences and interpretations) was complemented by a variety of practical exercises, written assignments and video-taped interviews designed to investigate the norms, values and rules which the students had learned from their immediate social environment within the school. This extensive body of data suggests that the students’ informal social world is governed by an unwritten, rarely-articulated and unofficial “code” which prescribes the principal
socially-approved features of behaviour and character. Contrary to Goffman’s
intuitions (Goffman, 1961/1968), the findings of the present study suggest that
although this “code” may be highly influential in shaping the students’ communal
social lives at school, it seems to play little role in the personal identities revealed by
the autobiographies. This latter finding may perhaps supply a further example of a
phenomenon noted by Alheit (1995), that contrary to the expectations of particular
social theories, the researcher who uses biographical methods may be “repeatedly
surprised by completely unexpected constellations” (Alheit, 1995:20).

The research takes the form of a case study of a particular group of students at a
particular English Public School. Within the broad map of approaches to research in
the social sciences, the present study is situated within that maverick tradition called
“the personological tradition” or “the study of lives” historically associated with the
work of Murray (1938), White (1966a, 1981), Tomkins (1987) and McAdams (1985,
(1938), the tradition has placed particular emphasis on investigating the
distinctiveness of people, often through the use of biographical methods.

From within this tradition, the present research adopts McAdams’ life story model of
identity, along with the understandings of uniqueness and unity that are associated
with it. McAdams’ analysis of the constituent features of such autobiographical
narratives also provides the basis for the research’s analytical tools.

1.4 Rationale; Why study adolescents in a residential school?

Having provided a brief sketch map of the journey to be traveled in the forthcoming
pages, it remains to examine why I set out on this particular journey at all: Why study
the autobiographies of adolescents in a residential Public school?

The choice of location and participants might appear very peculiar and eccentric to
many readers. After all, Public schoolboys are hardly typical of the general population
of the United Kingdom, and Public Schools are about as accessible and
comprehensible as nunneries to most people. Both might seem so peculiar that, for the uninitiated, a few preliminary facts and definitions may be necessary.

The participants are all adolescent boys who are pupils at a residential (or “boarding”) school with a strong academic tradition, initially founded, like many others, in the sixteenth century. Although there are a limited number of scholarships available, most of the parents of the research school’s pupils pay substantial fees. As already explained in the Prologue, the school would be classified as a “Public School”; that is, its headmaster has been elected to membership of “The Headmasters’ Conference”, a body of head teachers of those boarding schools perceived by their peers as being academically successful. The atypical socio-economic and academic standing of the majority of the school’s pupils are undeniable and distinctive features of this type of school, but such features are not, in themselves, objects of primary interest for the current study of unique individual identity formation. What reasons might there be for investigating the issue of identity-formation with such subjects, and in such a setting?

Five important reasons make these unusual subjects and their social setting of exceptional academic interest:-

First, it is a truism of developmental psychology that adolescence is a period of special importance in identity formation e.g. Erikson (1959, 1963), Marcia (1966, 1980) and Elkind (1981). Within Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, for instance, adolescence occupies the fifth of his eight developmental stages, whose principal developmental task he characterizes as “Identity versus Role confusion”. Although this view of the importance of adolescence for the formation of mature identity has not been universally accepted, it has certainly been very influential. For instance, unlike Erikson, McAdams (1985, 1993) Levinson (1978) and Kegan (1982) prefer to see identity-formation as a characteristic of all the subsequent major developmental stages, rather than being confined to adolescence alone. Nonetheless, very many researchers recognize that adolescence is the period when identity-formation begins in earnest. It would seem, therefore, that the adolescent nature of the
participants of the present study makes them particularly appropriate subjects for an inquiry into the way unique and unified identities are formed.

Secondly, the enforced uniformities that many see as characteristic of boarding school life might seem to restrict or preclude the possibility of forming a fully-developed unique identity. It might therefore be supposed that if you can be a unique individual at a boarding school, you can be a unique individual anywhere, so an examination of adolescent identities in a boarding school would provide an almost uniquely rare "laboratory" in which to inspect personal uniqueness at its most beleaguered. The view that institutions such as boarding schools and prisons exert a strongly formative influence on the identities of their inmates is, as was mentioned earlier, classically associated with the work of Goffman (1961/1968). Boarding schools, he argued in Asylums, may be seen as examples of what he has called a "total institution", a term originated with his study of patients in mental hospitals and other institutions. Goffman (1961:5-6) defines a "total institution" as social arrangements which regulate, under one roof and according to one rational plan, all spheres of individuals' lives - sleeping, eating, playing and working - so that, as was seen earlier, they act as "forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self." (1961:12). This general definition might serve as a reasonably accurate, if unflattering description of an English Public School. Although, as Wakeford (1969:42) points out, there are some differences (public school inmates are let out for the holidays, for instance), it is also true that, at the time he was writing, the average public schoolboy spent more time in his "total institution" than the average convicted criminal in prison at Pentonville. (Morris and Morris, Pentonville, 1963: 49).

If the comparison between traditional Public Schools and Goffman's "total institutions" is even partly tenable, it makes research on adolescent identity-formation in such a context particularly interesting for the light it may throw not only on the degree to which individual students' personal identities are subject to social influence, but also for the light it may throw on broader questions of social theory regarding the extent to which human "nature" is socially and discursively constructed. How far, for
instance, might there be some justice in Wrong’s claim (1961) that the social sciences have adopted an “over-socialised” conception of human beings which does insufficient justice to the dynamic and creative capacities of individuals?

Thirdly, although the collection of the life stories of individuals has begun to occupy a much more prominent place in social science research (see, for instance, Denzin, 1984, 1987, 1989; Josselson and Lieblich, 1993, 1995; Atkinson, 1998), Harré (1998) argues that such studies rarely take sufficient cognizance of the specific social contexts of their subjects’ social lives into detailed consideration. Although Harré’s criticism is less true of recent educational biographical research (e.g. Alheit, 1995; Bron-Wojciechowska, 1995; Dominice, 1990), the design of the present study nonetheless endeavours to meet Harré’s criticism by providing not only a detailed analysis of the autobiographies of the individual participants, but doing so against their accounts of their distinctive shared social world. Although not comparable to the standardized conditions possible in a laboratory experiment, the confined and institutional nature of the students’ social world provides a more encompassing and homogenous social environment than are available in many other fields of social research.

Fourthly, there has been little recent social research done into the Public School sector of education. Neither Public Schools themselves, nor the effects of private boarding schools on the personal development of their pupils, have been the subject of very much research, and none of the research that exists is of recent date. (This earlier literature on Public Schools is briefly reviewed in Appendix A). The present research might, at least tangentially, go some small way to remedying this omission in educational research, particularly at a time when, according to the Independent Schools’ Information Service, boarding education is once again becoming more popular. Some recent commentators such as Duffell (2000) have claimed that boarding schools have long-lasting detrimental effects on the well-being and personal development of significant numbers of those who attend them. Writing on the basis of his own and others’ experiences in boarding schools, Duffell’s book (“The Making of Them”, 2000) raises such concerns in an
insistent form. At a time when boarding education is once again experiencing a rise in popularity, he argues that it damages many who experience it. “Boarding schools may no longer be associated with fagging and bullying, but they can still wreak emotional havoc,” he argued in a recent interview with Alan Franks in The Times (10th November, 2001). In his professional capacity as a psychotherapist, Duffell has worked with many patients over the last ten years who believe that some of their acute personal problems in later life may have derived from their experiences as boarders in residential schools. As if to underline the identity-damaging effects of boarding schools, there is now a helpline for “Boarding School Survivors”. Meanwhile, according to the same article in The Times, the first-ever formal study on the developmental impact of boarding on children of different ages is being conducted at a day-and-boarding school in the Home Counties. At the time of writing, the survey had yet to be completed, but the therapist conducting it apparently shares some of Duffell’s concerns. Although the present study focuses primarily on other aspects of development - the development of a unique and unified sense of self - it would nonetheless be of considerable interest to see if the present study bears out any of Duffell’s concerns, particularly as we come to discuss the last of the present study’s research questions.

Finally, in the process of investigating the possibility that individual students might construct for themselves a unique and unified sense of their own identity, even amidst the pressures towards social conformity encountered in the strongly institutional setting of a boarding school, the study hopes to open up a theoretical space capable of displaying and examining uniquenesses and distinctivenesses often otherwise overlooked; beneath the obvious and superficial samenesses of the school uniform lie previously untold (in both senses of the term) personal stories.

The second and major part of this introductory chapter is occupied with a discussion of the meaning of the concept which is central to the whole study; identity. After exploring a number of alternative possibilities such as “self”, “person” and
“subjectivity”, it is suggested that the term “identity” serves the needs of the present study better than other terms, even though it is not without its own ambiguities. In the course of discussing three different meanings of the term “identity”, the particular conception of identity used for the purposes of the present research is clarified. It is argued that Erikson’s (1958, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1969) conception of identity provides the classic starting point for the conception of identity employed in the present research, and that this conception is further clarified and developed by McAdams (1985, 1989, 1991, 1993). The section concludes with a brief discussion of three unusual cases (one saintly and two brain-damaged) whose autobiographical words raise important issues about both the necessity and the limitations of the highly paradoxical concept of identity. From the annals of fourth century theology, Augustine’s (1992) Confessions supplies a paradigm case of a narrative identity in the process of construction, whilst from the casebook of a twentieth century psychopathologist, two cases of selective brain-damage furnish theoretically telling examples of its disintegration or destruction.

Thus, with the study’s origins, principal research questions, rationale and main features outlined, the chapter turns to its main business; the search for a concept which will encapsulate the individual’s perception of their own uniqueness and unity.

1.5 Finding the right word: “Identity”

The search for an adequate and appropriate concept to represent Ben’s question was amongst the most difficult aspects of the research process. Finding a single concept that would encapsulate the individual’s perception of their own uniqueness and unity required not only considerable analytical thinking, but also the scrutiny of a wide range of philosophical and psychological literatures. Only the most salient of these are discussed in the following summary which, in loosely autobiographical fashion, follows the author’s analytical journey. The confusions of the journey were compounded by the confusion and inconsistency that seem to be endemic features of the vocabularies of both philosophy and psychology when they discuss the individuality of persons. It would be presumptuous to pretend that I can solve or
clarify the variety and confusion of these philosophical and psychological vocabularies in a work of this scope, but I can at least offer a sketch map of the confusion and indicate my own position on it before the research proceeds further. The eventual choice of the term “identity”, and of Erikson’s definition of the concept for the purposes of the present research occurred only after a protracted period of reflection, the main milestones of which are outlined in the following sections.

Ben expressed his concerns about what constitutes a person’s unique individuality with the question: What is it that makes you, “you” and me, “me”? As has already been mentioned, the present chapter suggests that the most satisfactory concept available which corresponds to Ben’s question, is that of identity. In the discussions which follow, reasons are first given for preferring this term to other terms, such as self, personality, or subjectivity. The term identity, however, is also beset by its own considerable ambiguities, being used in at least three quite distinct senses by English philosophers, psychologists, Continental intellectuals and sociologists. The discussion endeavours to outline these three broadly different senses of the term. The first sense is that used by Anglophone philosophy, and is exemplified by Strawson (1959). The second type of usage is the preserve of developmental psychologists who have followed Erikson’s pioneering and influential work in developing and clarifying the concept. Seen pre-eminently in the work of Erikson (1959, 1968) this second use of the term may also be seen in the work of McAdams (1985, 1991). The third, and much more amorphous use of the term can be seen at large in post-structuralist Continental thought, as well as in the work of sociologists such as Goffman (1961/1968, 1963/1968). For convenience, these three meanings will be referred to, respectively, as the “philosophical”, “psychological” and “post-structuralist” or “sociological” conceptions of identity. Reasons will be given for adopting the second “psychological” meaning of the term for the purposes of the present study, and the classical origins of this version of the concept in the work of Erikson (1959) will be examined. When this has been done, the concept’s subsequent exposition and development by McAdams (1985, 1993) is outlined.
1.6 Identity crisis? : finding the right word within the confusing vocabulary of personal uniqueness

At the start of my research, it was difficult to find a single word which expressed what it was that I wanted to examine. One of the major problems that overshadowed the earlier stages of the research was the absence of an obvious technical vocabulary in terms of which the research questions might be articulated. During the twentieth century, a variety of terms such as “person”, “self”, “character”, “subject”, “subject position”, “self concept”, “ego”, “individual” and “identity” have swirled vertiginously around. In times gone by, Ben’s question, “What makes you, ‘you’ and me, ‘me’?” would have received a simple answer: “the soul”. Although everyone from Plato (1951, 1959, 1970, 1973) to Descartes (1985) had assumed that their unique essence was encapsulated in the indestructible metaphysical pearl which was “the soul”, Descartes acknowledged its problematic connection to the body (he proposed the pineal gland as the mysterious interface between the two), David Hume (1739/1874, quoted in the Prologue) had doubted its existence, and eventually Wittgenstein (1953) had performed the final philosophical exorcism of what Ryle (1949) amusingly characterised as “the ghost in the machine”. By Ryle’s time, most people didn’t think they had a soul anyway, or if they did, they usually avoided admitting to it in public, particularly if they were scientists. Freud (1910, 1940) was the last psychologist to try to hang on to the word “soul” (or at least its German equivalent, Seele). Despite Freud’s humanistic and holistic intentions in using the old term, argues Bettelheim (1982), James Strachey’s English Standard Edition of Freud’s work systematically replaced Freud’s “soul” (Seele) with the less potentially metaphysical word “mind”. Since Strachey’s amputation of Freud’s soul, the gaping hole in the post-Freudian psychological lexicon seems to have been commonly replaced by the term “self”, influenced, perhaps, by its early use by thinkers as disparate as William James (1977) and Jung (1958).

The history of the term “self” is, as far as I know, still to be written, though Greenblatt (1980), Elias (1978, 1982, 1983), Taylor (1989) and Giddens (1991) have all made interesting and influential contributions. Whether or not because of Jung’s early influence, this term seems to have become the preferred way of referring to the
singularity and uniqueness of persons in cognitive and social psychology. G.H. Mead (1934), for instance, makes influential use of it and is followed by hosts of others, with Rogers (1951, 1952) adding the particular refinements of “self concept” and “ideal self” in the 1950s.

Whereas cognitive and social psychologists seem to prefer the term “self” when discussing what distinguishes one person from another, philosophers, psychoanalysts and developmental psychologists seem to prefer to use the term “identity”, even though the developmental psychologists and the philosophers seem to mean quite different things by the term. McAdams (1987), whose conception of “identity” has some significant points of overlap with Rogers’ (1951, 1952) “self concept”, is also aware of major differences between the terms “identity” and “self”. McAdams recognises that the latter is much broader than the former term:-

Identity refers to something smaller, a part of the personality for sure, but not its totality. At most, identity may be a grand schema of self. (McAdams, 1987: 22).

Harré (1998) has shown himself to be acutely aware of both the terminological and underlying conceptual confusions which bedevil psychologists’ and philosophers’ discussions of what distinguishes one person from another.

To add still further to the confusion, in post-structuralist and feminist discourse, for instance, the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” are common. Sarup (1993) suggests that:-

The term “subject” helps us to conceive of human reality as a construction, as a product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious. (Sarup, 1993:2)

In this post-structuralist sense, the choice of the term “subject” seems to be as problematically capacious as the term “self”, and also to conjure up determinist overtones (as in the phrases “subject to” and “subjected”), focusing attention on the ways people are passive and helpless “products” (see quotation above) of social and cultural meanings beyond themselves. The trend of such post-structuralist analyses is to focus its primary attention away from specific individuals and towards those
"discourses", social practices, political forces, and "signifying activities" which constrain the individual. Both of these features render the term "subjectivity" unsuited to the present research, though post-structuralist discussions of "identity" are considered later in the chapter.

With a background in both philosophy and social psychology, Harré’s (1998) solution to the foregoing confusion is to propose his own analysis of the terms “person” “self” and “identity” which, he argues, goes some way towards clarifying the terminological confusion, as well as providing a convenient conceptual framework for future use. Despairing of the diffuseness of vocabularies outlined above, and bewitched by the prospect of a ready-made solution to my conceptual confusion produced by a distinguished social psychologist and philosopher, I turned for help to Harré.

1.7 Cutting through confusion?: Harré’s analysis of the terms “person”, “self” and “identity”

Harré calls his persuasive analysis of how the terms “person” and “self” should be understood, the “Standard Model” (Harré, 1998: 9). Drawing on insights borrowed from Strawson (1959), Stern (1938) and James (1977), he suggests that persons, as Strawson (1959) elegantly argued, are the basic particulars of the human world. A person is the singular, unique and embodied human being who exists “as a thing among other things in a world laid out in space and time.” (Harré, 1998: 72). He recognises that the word “self” is not used consistently amongst psychologists, and therefore proposes to distinguish three different aspects of the term which he calls, respectively, Self 1, Self 2 and Self 3. Going back to the seminal work of William James (1977) and G.H.Mead (1934), Harré (1998: 8ff; 92ff) distinguishes three quite separate senses in which the term “self” might be used. First, there is the sense of self as “I”, a physical centre of embodied consciousness and perception in the present moment. This “self” as a singular embodied centre of action and experience is Self 1. Secondly, there is the sense of self as “me”, the person as seen by themselves, the self-conscious awareness which the person has of themselves as a collection of particular attributes, beliefs and as having both a particular spatio-temporal trajectory and a
particular autobiography. This “self”, with affinities to both Rogers’ (1951, 1952) “self concept” and Mead’s (1934) “me”, is Self 2. Thirdly, there is the self which is presented to and perceived by other people, a self differing in different social situations and being judged according to differing local conventions. This social “self” has obvious affinities to sociologists’ ideas about the connections between an individual’s social identity and the social roles and expectations current in their ambient culture.

Using Harré’s three distinctions, it can be seen, for instance, that the embodied individual centre of perception and action which William James (1977: 187) prefers to call the “self”, would correspond to Harré’s Self 1. The work of Goffman (1959, 1963), in contrast, focusing primarily on the way individuals manage their multiform social roles and impressions, focuses primarily on a variety of Self 3s. In addition to the well-known work by Rogers (1951) on the “self-concept”, many other writers have explored the different ways in which people conceive of themselves (Jung, 1943/1953; Kegan, 1982; Kohut, 1977; Loevinger, 1976 etc). All of these latter theoretical enterprises would constitute attempts to explore what Harré’s schema calls Self 2.

There can be no doubting the clarity, comprehensiveness, plausibility and ingenuity of Harré’s “Standard Model” (which is further discussed in Chapter 2 and in Appendix D), nor his determination to take seriously the question of the singularity and uniqueness of the individual. His analysis clarifies a number of ways in which the term “self” is commonly used by psychologists, and relates these in a clear way to the philosophical term “person”. However, it is not yet clear whether Harré’s “Standard Model” would be able to provide both a technical term and a concept which would satisfactorily encapsulate the idea of “what makes ‘me’, me, and ‘you’, you” underlying Ben’s question. Being trained as a philosopher as well as a psychologist, Harré recognizes that the standard term denoting personal uniqueness is “identity”, so it is to an examination of this term that the chapter now proceeds.
1.8 “Identity”: three meanings

Harré (1998) realizes that, within the English-speaking world, philosophers have a special term for “what make you, ‘you’, and me, ‘me’”; that term is identity. However, Harré has also recognised that the term can have two distinct meanings:-

We must distinguish between how the identity of a person appears to others and how that person experiences and expresses his or her own identity. (Harré, 1998: 90).

For the present research, this distinction is of crucial importance; Harré here draws attention to an important distinction between what might be called an observer-centered or “philosophical”, and a subject-centered or “psychological” sense of the term identity. A brief exploration of this distinction will enable us to define the interests of the present research more specifically. The “philosophical” conception of identity, essentially, is concerned with the observer’s perspective, rather than the subject’s view of themselves. Readers will doubtless recall that English-speaking philosophers usually employ the term “identity” to mean how the uniqueness of a person is established by observers other than the person themselves. The usual criteria for achieving such an identification are principally connected with bodily continuity. Harré summarizes the traditional view:-

The identity of each person for others is expressed in criteria for judging whether this is one and the same person as the one who has been identified at some time or other time and place. These criteria are based, for most purposes, on material attributes of the embodied person, especially those bearing on the question of whether the person has enjoyed an intact spatio-temporal trajectory. (Harré, 1998: 90-91).

The kind of understanding outlined above will be readily recognised by readers familiar with the extensive literature within English-speaking philosophy which discusses what is often referred to as “problems of personal identity”. The work of Strawson (1959), Kenny (1989), Swinburne (1973) and, more recently, Parfit (1984) have been prominent landmarks within this well-ploughed field. Harré goes on to contrast this “philosophical” or observer-centered use of the term identity with a quite different “psychological ” or subject-centered use:-
The identity of each person for him or herself is expressed in the grammar of first person discourse by which each individual’s sense of self as a singularity is expressed. The diversity of beliefs and opinions each person has about their personal characteristics and their personal history appears in the autobiographical tellings of everyday life. (Harre, 1998:91)

This second sense of the term is quite different from the first; “identity” in this second sense is thoroughly subjective; it is about who the person thinks he or she is, not about who other people think they are. “Identity” in this second sense involves the idiosyncratic personal meanings and interpretations of individual subjects, and it is their own estimations of themselves which are decisive in establishing their “identity”, rather than the estimations of outside observers about the persistent and continuous existence of their bodies. In summary, “identity” in this second sense is the person’s own sense of who they are, rather than someone else’s understanding of who they are.

An interesting illustration of the crucial difference between the observer-centered and subject-centered ways of defining identity is provided from a post-feminist and postmodernist perspective in Jagose’s (1996) critical introduction to Queer Theory. She discusses the formidable problems which arise in trying to decide the issue of homosexual identity:-

For example, is the man who lives with his wife and has children, but from time to time has casual or anonymous sex with other men, homosexual? Many men in this situation, when interviewed for the purposes of AIDS research, did not identify themselves as homosexual. One interviewee said of his sexual identity: "It’s not important to me. I do it with men on occasions. It’s more important that I am married and love my wife...It’s no one’s business what I do on the odd afternoon off." (Bartos et al., 1993:27). Another interviewee rejected a gay identity more explicitly:

_I am not really gay. Gay sex is something that I do 2-3 times a week. It amounts to so little of my time. If you were to add up the time I spend looking for and having sex with men it would total 1-2 hours weekly. The rest of the time I am heterosexual, married, a family man._ (ibid)

(Jagose, 1996:7)

In the course of her discussion, Jagose demonstrates the considerable difference between defining a person’s identity (in this case sexuality) by the behavioural criteria accessible to an outside observer, as opposed to allowing individual subjects to decide
their own identities through their own individual interpretations and choices. As the examples above demonstrate, there can be a radical difference between observer-centered and subject-centered conceptions of identity.

Faced with Harré’s precise and refined distinction between the two different senses of the term “identity”, Ben immediately jumped at the second meaning; he wanted to know how each person works out their own subjective sense of who they are, not how you reliably pick someone else (or even yourself) out of a line-up. At last, therefore, the concept behind Ben’s question was becoming clearer - but what word or term should be used to describe it? Did Harré have a word for it, and did his “Standard Model” provide an adequate analysis of this subjective sense of an individual’s idiosyncratic identity?

Unfortunately, Harré does not have a separate term to represent this distinctive subjective conception of identity, nor is his model entirely clear about its place in his schema. Indeed, whilst recognizing the importance of this subject-centered sense of identity, Harré shies away from using it as the basis for his analysis of personal uniqueness. Further scrutiny of the details of his analysis (see Appendix D) reveals that his “Standard Model” adopts a perspective similar to that of his mentors James (1977) and Strawson (1959), and makes the bodily centre of action and perception the foundation-stone of his nested array of personal concepts, Self 1, Self 2, and Self 3. For Harré, it is thus the observer-centered criterion of the body and its spatio-temporal location that is determinative for a person’s identity. The person’s body, according to Harré’s analysis, occupies a unique place in space and time, as well as in a complex array of social and moral matrices which transcend it. The individual’s position in this spatio-temporal-moral-social matrix will be unique, and, since the person has only one body, singular. Though satisfying his desire to offer an account of each person’s singularity and uniqueness, Harré’s analysis, therefore, does this at the cost of relegating the person’s subjective sense of who they are to the status of additional attributes of their body. One important consequence of this decision is that Harré’s analysis thus becomes effectively aligned with the analyses of philosophical
“objectivists” like Strawson; objective physical spatio-temporal location is privileged over subjective consciousness as definitive of personal identity.

Moreover, Harré also rejects the term “identity”, arguing that the term has become less useful because it

...has drifted right across the semantic landscape to come to mean more or less its opposite. Someone’s “identity” in much contemporary writing, is not their singularity as a unique person, but the group, class or type to which they belong. (Harré 1998: 6).

Harré’s preferred strategy is to abandon the term “identity”, and to press into service his own “Standard Model” (Harré, 1998: 9), with its constituent terms, person, Self 1, Self 2, Self 3. For the purposes of the present research, however, there are two unfortunate consequences of this. First, because bodily location is privileged over subjective awareness in defining identity, the observer’s point of view is privileged over the subject’s own view of themselves; in effect, the “philosophical” meaning of the term identity supplants the “psychological” meaning of the term. Secondly, the importance of personal subjectivity in defining identity is no longer seen as central.

For both these reasons, Harré’s persuasive analysis, alas, was thus unable to provide either a technical term, or a clear analysis of the present study’s central concept.

To complicate matters further, the term “identity” can, it seems, be used in a third way which is quite different from the two previous senses outlined by Harré. Harré acknowledges this third use of the term in the passage quoted above (Harré, 1998: 6), and cites it as his main reason for choosing to avoid the term “identity” altogether in his own discussions. He recognizes, it will be recalled, that “in much contemporary writing”, someone’s “identity”:-

...is not their singularity as a unique person, but the group, class or type to which they belong. (Harré, 1998: 6, researcher’s italics)

In making this observation, Harré not only alludes to an enormous and amorphous field of literature (“much contemporary writing”), but also expresses his judgement that “much contemporary writing” uses the term “identity” in ways almost diametrically opposed to the traditional usages of English-speaking philosophy and
psychology. Though such a large and amorphous corpus of literature cannot be explored in detail here, it is too important to be entirely ignored. Though it would be reckless in a chapter of this limited scope to attempt a detailed survey of the literatures of post-structuralist thought, Continental philosophy, identity politics and sociology, it is important, however, to sketch the direction in which these literatures tend, and to indicate why these literatures have not been adopted as the principal intellectual background for the present study.

The contemporary literatures of post-structuralism, Continental philosophy, post-structuralist literary theory, early feminist identity politics, lesbian and radical feminism, gay liberation, racial and ethnic identity politics and, most recently, Queer Theory, have all made their own appropriations of the term “identity”. Harré, as was seen above, has argued that much of this contemporary writing, along with that of many sociologists (such as Goffman), tends to use the term “identity” to indicate the socially-given group, class or type with which a particular individual may identify, rather than as “their singularity as a unique person”. The justice of his claim, because of the limitations of space, is illustrated here by single example taken from an introductory text on post-structuralism by a well-known British author:-

Identity can be conceived of as a set of psychological characteristics, or as a social role, as a recognition of the appropriateness to oneself of a classification, or as membership of a group....Identity implies sameness. (Belsey, 2002: 51-52)

The quotation’s admirably explicit definition of “identity” makes it clear that its author conceives of identity in terms of “social role”, “membership of a group” and “classification”, precisely the kinds of “group, class or type” properties to which Harré alluded, rather than the kind of unique personal characteristics which were the focus of Harré’s analysis and Ben’s question.

It might also be argued, moreover, that post-structuralism’s interest in “identity” has continuously reinforced this characteristic social rather than unique individual focus by two major aspects of its critical project. Influenced by thinkers such as de Saussure, Althusser, Freud, Lacan, and also - most importantly - by Barthes, Derrida and
Foucault, post-structuralism has been embarked on a far-reaching project to “deconstruct” the traditional metaphysical picture of a stable “self”, along with its natural and inherited “identity”. Within this project, two distinct but relevant enterprises may be discerned. The first is a sustained critique of the Cartesian subject, and the second, a critique of the stability and “naturalness” of various social “identities” such as those of gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

The primary thrust of the entire deconstractive critique of the “modern” or Cartesian “self” is, as Sarup (1993) argues, the dissolution of the “modern” self. The notion that there is a privileged, stable, unitary, autonomous and irrefragable “self” that stands independently over-against the changes and chances of the social world is heavily criticized as unrealistic. Whether “called forth” by, and created by the political structures and ideologies which “interpellate” it (Althusser, 1968/1975), driven by psychodynamic forces (Freud, 1933) of which it is unconscious, constituted by the very language (de Saussure, 1974) or Symbolic Order (Lacan, 1966) it speaks, or systematically constructed by the power relations which permeate the various “discourses” (Foucault, 1966/1973, 1969/1974, 1975/1977) in which it is inextricably enmeshed, the “self” is more puppet than puppeteer, more created than Creator. The subject, in short, is defined, determined and constructed by the things it is “subject to”.

Having deconstructed the “modern” self’s privileged ontological status, along with its stability and autonomy, a second critique within contemporary thought has contested the nature of “identity” itself. Early feminism, the sexual identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s, later lesbian and radical feminism of the 1980s, and most recently, in Queer Theory, have launched a sustained critique on traditional conceptions of “identity”. Discussing, for instance, the nature of lesbian or gay “identity”, Butler (1990), Wittig (1992), Clausen (1990) and Califia (1983) have argued strongly that there are no universally normative, natural or culturally stable categories of sexual identity. “Gender” and “sexuality”, far from being “natural” and biologically-given categories of identity are culturally constructed through a person’s participation in a particular society. According to Butler (1990), a person’s gender-identity is not biologically given, but is, instead, an effect of the culture’s representational codes; it is
a culturally-induced “fantasy”, a result of a person’s unwitting “performativity” within the culture’s formative discourses. According to this understanding, therefore, “identity” is now re-conceptualised as a persistent and sustaining cultural fantasy or “myth” which often hides from the individual the realization that there are no universally fixed, natural and normative identities, but that instead, identity is unstable, shifting, provisional, contingent and multiple. Foucault’s presence in these debates is unmistakable, challenging older essentialist conceptions of identity in the name of something more socially and discursively constructed.

However, despite the importance and validity of the issues raised in the two debates briefly outlined in the previous paragraphs, for the purposes of the present study, Harré’s assessment is surely not far of the mark. When the conception of “identity” used in these post-structuralist and post-feminist debates is scrutinized, it reveals itself as a term which designates “the group, class or type” (whether “natural” or discursively constructed) to which people belong, rather than designating a specific individual’s sense of their own “singularity as a unique person.” Identity in these post-structuralist debates is a social category which, whatever its origins, transcends the unique individual, even as it may also constitute them.

In this sense, therefore, neither post-structuralist deconstruction of the subject per se, nor, more specifically, the post-structuralist critique of “identity”, address the fundamental problem addressed by the other two types of “identity” outlined earlier by Harré. Regarding the first of the two main thrusts of the post-structuralist critique of the subject just outlined, the deconstruction of the “subject” is, ultimately, an exercise in anti-Cartesian metaphysics, which, in its sheer generality, has nothing particular to say about what differentiates one individual from another. On the other hand, the second area considered - the contemporary debate about the nature of “identity” - directs its critical attention to the discussion of identity categories that, whatever their origin, focus primarily on the socially-available category rather than the particular individual. Both aspects of the post-structuralist critique of the subject therefore devolve around either the plausibility of common metaphysical realities, or supposed normative social categories, rather than the individual uniqueness of being one, and only one distinctive person. Despite the considerable interest and value of
this extensive field of contemporary literature, it thus has only tangential relevance to the specific conception of subjective individual uniqueness which was the object of Ben’s question. This literature, therefore, important though it is, is not extensively used further in the present study. Three reasons are advanced in support of this reluctant decision:-

First, as argued above, although much of the contemporary post-structuralist literature briefly sketched above uses the term “identity”, the concept designated by the term is a quite different concept from that which is the object of scrutiny in the present study (same signifier, different signifieds). Post-structuralist and post-feminist debates conceive of “identity”, roughly, as a contested social category that may be shared by many other individuals. In contrast, the conception of identity which lies at the heart of the present study concerns an individual’s perception of their own distinctiveness and uniqueness that is characteristic of one, and only one person. Secondly, the Continental and post-structuralist tradition of thought is foreign to those thinkers (such as Erikson, McAdams and Harré) who have been most influential on the present study’s concepts and design, and there are formidable difficulties involved in attempting an intellectual marriage of Continental philosophy and American psychology in an already complex study. Finally, the post-structuralist literature rarely discusses the sources of unity and uniqueness of particular individuals’ senses of identity. This constitutes a much more serious impediment which precludes greater use being made of post-structuralist analyses. The emphasis in much post-structuralist discussion of the “subject” is, as has already been argued, upon the deconstruction and dissolution of the unities, stabilities and uniquenesses of the individual; its goal is “not to constitute but to dissolve him” (Sarup, 1993:1). An important consequence of this emphasis on deconstructing and dissolving the unities of the subject, however, is that such analyses are no longer well-placed (even if they were so inclined) to account for the unity, stability and uniqueness of an individual’s (albeit socially-constructed) identity. Having dismissed the stability of the Cartesian soul and offered accounts of identity that see them as contingent products of a variety of political, social and discursive forces in a pluriform social world, how is the identity of the individual to be rescued from the fate of becoming a social cipher, the unstable and unoriginal “effect” of the multiple discourses in which they participate? Whilst such an issue is
central to the present study, it is either peripheral to, or commonly ignored by much post-structuralist literature. For all these reasons, post-structuralist literature is not well-suited to the present study’s needs.

In the present section’s search for an adequate conception of unique personal identity, the study therefore leaves aside the post-structuralist literature on “identity” (it deals with the wrong concept and is not very good at talking about personal unity and uniqueness). With equal reluctance the study leaves aside Harré’s “Standard Model”. Although it welcomes Harré’s earlier distinction between two different conceptions of “identity” (the “philosophical” observer-centered type and the “psychological” subject-centered type), his “Standard Model” subordinates the subject-centered or “psychological” conception of identity to an objective observer-centered conception; he also rejects the term “identity” itself on the grounds of its (mis)appropriation by much contemporary writing. Earlier discussions found terms like “soul” too mysterious, “personality” and “self” too big, and “subjectivity” too freighted with a post-structuralist agenda.

In summary, the discussion has indicated that the term “identity” has at least three distinct meanings, two of which (the “philosophical” and the “post-structuralist”) were insufficiently focussed on the individual person’s point of view to be of use in elucidating Ben’s question. The remaining subject-centered “psychological” conception of “identity”, though not without its own difficulties, would seem to have more potential to provide both a term and a concept for the present study. This concept is classically outlined by Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969), and then developed by theorists as diverse as McAdams (1985, 1987, 1991, 1993), Claxton, (1984, 1994) and Ricoeur (1992/1994). Their conception of identity represents not only the person’s own view of themselves, but also one which is unique and unified. These features suggest that this conception of identity may serve as an adequate and appropriate way of representing Ben’s subjective conception of personal uniqueness, and therefore as the present study’s central concept. This Eriksonian conception of identity is therefore examined in the next section.
1.9 Erikson’s conception of Identity

Amongst the psychological literature on personal identity and its formation, Erikson’s work (1958, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1969) provides the classic starting point for much subsequent work. Perhaps more than many other psychologists in the twentieth century, Erikson (1959) has made the term *identity* his own, and some of Erikson’s terminology, such as “identity crisis” (1959: 113) has entered the popular vocabulary. Erikson’s conception of identity has thus been widely influential, and, in contrast to the “objective” or “philosophical” meaning of the term *identity* discussed earlier, Erikson presents a conception of identity which is resolutely “subjective” and “psychological”. Although the concept is neither articulated precisely nor developed in detail by Erikson, his discussions of the process of identity formation contain the principal elements of a distinctive conception of identity which is later developed and clarified by McAdams. McAdams’ (1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1993) work on identity also has parallels in the work of other writers such as Claxton (1994), Dennett (1991/1993) and Ricoeur (1992/1994).

For Erikson (1959, 1963), “identity” is a “configuration” (Erikson, 1959:113), a reflective and critical putting-together of different aspects of the person’s characteristics, autobiography and social experiences into a distinctive and unified pattern in such a way that it gives the person a sense of their “continuity” and “sameness” (Erikson, 1963: 261). “Identity”, for Erikson is thus the way that the person cognitively encapsulates their essential *uniqueness*, as well as offering the person a way of achieving an element of paradoxical *unity* and *stability* in their sense of who they are amidst the variations and changes of their multiple social and temporal selves. In terms of young Ben’s question, Erikson’s conception of identity is precisely “what makes you, ‘you’ and me, ‘me’”, which is why Erikson’s conception of “identity” is adopted as the concept most appropriate for the needs of the present research.

Within the context of his developmental psychology, Erikson sees the formation of identity as a very important psychological task. He argues that the formation of a
stable identity is one of the principal tasks to be accomplished during adolescence, the
fifth of his eight psycho-social stages of development. During adolescence, the young
person reviews critically their past commitments and identifications, and, as their
bodies change, their cognitive capacities grow, and they contemplate their possible
place in the adult world, they begin to explore who they have been and who they may
be. Into the melting pot go “constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs,
favoured capacities, significant identifications, effective defences, successful
sublimations, and consistent roles” (Erikson, 1959: 116).

Their bodily and sexual changes, cognitive development and the approaching
proximity of the adult world of work and social responsibility, he argues, catalyse
profound changes in most adolescents. In response, he argues, adolescents
characteristically begin to reflect critically on their past lives, loyalties and beliefs.
New feelings, new beliefs and new possibilities may stimulate a radical or a gradual
transformation in who they believe themselves to be:-

The integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is, as pointed out,
more than the sum of childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of
the ego’s ability to integrate all identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido,
with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities
offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued
confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are
matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others.
(Erikson, 1963: 261)

The result of this process is an integration and a re-organisation of the young person’s
previous ideas about themselves, experiences and values, into a new understanding of
who they are. Consciously or unconsciously, it is a critical process involving the
selective “repudiation” and “assimilation” of their previous personal heritage which
results in a “new configuration”. Erikson says:-

It arises from the selective repudiation and assimilation of childhood

For Erikson, therefore, “identity” is a type of critical, selective and creative self-
understanding which McAdams (1987:22) summarises as being “a grand schema of
self”, or what Claxton has called “a minitheory, a concept of self” (Claxton, 1994: 84).
The formation of a new sense of identity requires the young person to see their own past, present and future as having meaningful continuity, and it requires them to find and integrate themselves with their social place in the adult world:–

To be adult means among other things to see one's own life in continuous perspective, both in retrospect and in prospect. By accepting some definition of who he is, usually on the basis of a function in an economy, a place in the sequence of generations, and a status in the structure of society, the adult is able to selectively re-construct his past in such a way that, step for step, it seems to have planned him, or better, he seems to have planned it. (Erikson, 1959: 111).

Identity, therefore, is the fruit of a process of critical and creative self-understanding whereby the person comes to “some definition of who he is”. The process requires the person to integrate their various current social roles and experiences (what Erikson calls “sameness”), as well as their past and future biographical experiences (what Erikson calls “continuity”) into an integrated whole. It is this highly idiosyncratic and selective integration of disparate elements that gives the person’s sense of identity its characteristic distinctiveness and unified stability despite, paradoxically, the ever-changing flux of the person’s life.

In the passage quoted earlier (Erikson, 1963: 261), Erikson refers to two distinct types of unity which this process of integration must accomplish. He calls these “inner sameness” and “continuity”; they have also been called synchronic and diachronic identity by McAdams (1987: 18; 1990: 166; 1991: 146).

Regarding the former - “sameness” or synchronic identity - adolescents may come to recognize that they play different social roles, and may even seem to be a different person in different social situations. They may ask themselves: How am I the same person from one social situation to the next? There may be a confident recognition that, in Whitman’s words, “I am large, I contain multitudes”. (Whitman, 1975:123). Or, like Holden Caulfield, Salinger’s character in Catcher in the Rye, they may be anxious about being a social chameleon or “phony”. The adolescent needs to begin to consolidate a sense of inner sameness which persists despite the wide variety of their contemporaneous social situations. This may be called synchronic unity of identity.
Adolescents also have the problem of considering their relationship to both their past and future selves. Are they the same person that they were when they were very young? How are they continuous over time? Such questions raise the issue that Erikson calls the “continuity” of personal identity, and which McAdams calls *diachronic* identity.

These *stabilising* and *unifying* functions of identity are well encapsulated by Claxton’s felicitous phrase; identity is something which serves to “accentuate the permanent” (Claxton, 1994: 116). They are also echoed by Ricoeur’s claim that identity confers upon the individual an element of “continuity” and “self-constancy” (Ricoeur, 1994:123).

McAdams also emphasizes that for both Erikson and himself, “identity” is defined from the *individual subject’s* point of view, and that the concept is concerned with questions such as:

What is the person from the standpoint of the person? How does the person define him- or herself as a person? (McAdams, 1990:151).

In terms of Harre’s important distinction outlined earlier, Erikson’s conception of identity is thus resolutely *subject*-centered rather than observer-centered, and revolves around “how that person experiences and expresses his or her own identity”, rather than “how the identity of a person appears to others”. (Harre, 1998: 90).

Before leaving Erikson’s conception of identity, however, an important ambivalence in his thinking needs to be examined. Two distinctive interpretations of his concept have arisen, both of them influential. These different interpretations might be represented respectively by the work of Marcia (1966, 1980) and McAdams (1985, 1987, 1993). Marcia (1966, 1980) and his colleagues (e.g. Bourne, 1978) view identity as a “status” that is “achieved”. According to this view, the process of identity formation is substantially *completed* during adolescence, after which time the person moves on to other developmental tasks. There are also suggestions that identity formation should be seen as a largely *passive* process of merely “fitting in” to adult society through the acceptance of a career, a social place and an ideology.
According to McAdams (1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991), however, identity is a more continuous and active process of self-understanding rather than a “status”. Whilst it may begin in adolescence, it continues throughout the life course, and so is rarely “achieved” in any fixed and final form. This interpretation is supported by Erikson himself:

While the end of adolescence thus is the stage of overt identity crisis, identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence: it is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society. (Erikson, 1959: 113).

The idea that identity formation is a lifelong process that continues throughout adulthood is supported by the researches of Gould (1980), Gutman (1980), Kegan (1982) and, most importantly, Levinson (1978). For these, and other reasons, McAdams’ reading of Erikson is here preferred to that of Marcia’s.

Erikson’s conception of identity can thus be summarized as having five principal features. First, it is a “configuration” or kind of cognitive schema, a “minitheory” about the self. Secondly, it is a cognitive schema constructed from each individual’s own point of view. Thirdly, the identity “configuration” represents those aspects of the person that they consider most distinctive and unique. Fourthly, the “configuration” unifies the person’s various historical selves into some kind of coherent and meaningful “continuity”. Finally, the “configuration” harmonizes the person’s various social selves so that they achieve a unified and credible integrity or “sameness”.

1.10 McAdams’ development of Erikson’s conception of identity

As will be seen in more detail in the next chapter, McAdams adopts, clarifies and develops Erikson’s conception of identity, espousing a similarly subject-centered perspective; identity is “the person from the standpoint of the person” and deals with the question: “How does the person define him- or herself as a person?” (McAdams, 1990:151).
Identity is also, he suggests, a cognitive achievement, “a grand schema of self” (McAdams, 1987: 22) which acts as a type of organizing idea through which the individual brings unified and distinctive order to the plethora of possible personal attributes and experiences. It is a “configuration” of what the person believes to be most important and distinctive about themselves.

McAdams’ work is important, however, not just for interpreting Erikson’s thought about identity, but also for developing it. He does this primarily by suggesting, as we saw earlier in the chapter, that the “configuration” which gives to the person both their identity as well as their sense of “sameness” and “continuity”, takes the narrative form of an autobiographical story:

This is the main thesis of my work: Identity is a life story – an internalized narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose. (McAdams, 1989:161).

Although Erikson’s work does not explicitly argue that “identity” should be conceived of in narrative terms, it is instructive that most of his detailed explorations of particular people’s identities (Young Man Luther, 1958 and Gandhi’s truth, 1969) adopt a resolutely narrative form. The implications of this insight are made explicit in McAdams’ work, for whom a person’s identity takes the form of a story.

Since narrative models of identity are explored fully in the next chapter, they are not further discussed here. The main part of the present chapter concludes by probing the plausibility of the narrative conception of identity outlined above through a discussion of three unusual cases selected to illuminate the contributions and limitations of narrative in the construction of a person’s sense of who they are.

1.11 Probing the plausibility of narrative identity: Three Unusual Cases

The very notion of “identity” is, in many ways, very puzzling. Erikson’s conception - which seems to articulate the common understanding of many people - is an inherently paradoxical concept. On the one hand, “identity” represents the stable, unique and unified characteristics of a person. On the other hand, the concept tacitly
recognizes that people have many past and future selves, and also that they have a multiplicity of potential social selves which vary according to social circumstance. It is widely recognized that people are always changing, and yet the conception of “identity” tries to isolate something which is stable and persistent. In many ways, the supposed stability and persistence of “personal identity” might be dismissed as fraudulent or deceptive; a socially-sanctioned exercise in self-deception or illegitimate self-objectification. Claxton (1994) provides a robust critique of the self’s fakeries, liberally laced with insights from evolutionary biology, neurophysiology and Buddhist spirituality. The pompous pseudo-objectivity of such a “self” is rightly called into question. From a quite different perspective, post-modernist thought has expended oceans of ink in “deconstructing” such bogus stabilities and “presences”. Levy-Strauss, according to Sarup (1998:1), believed that “the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him.”

However, before the acid bath of Buddhist and post-modernist philosophy are allowed to dissolve completely every conception of identity, there may be some good reasons for believing that, paradoxical and even fraudulent as it may be, “identity” may be something that we cannot live without. The casebooks of psychopathologists and other mental health professionals suggest that fundamental personal coherence and sanity may be compromised by a loss of identity. From a philosophical perspective, Ricouer (1992/1994) argues that a fragmented sense of personal identity may have serious implications for a person’s moral integrity too.

Some of these issues can be illustrated through the discussion of three contrasting examples of autobiographical writing. The first example is arguably the foundational work of western autobiography, Augustine’s Confessions. In this paradigmatic work, Augustine both knowingly uses narrative to construct an account of himself, whilst, at the same time, he also adopts an agnostic attitude to his own self-construction. The other two cases come from the contrasting world of abnormal psychology in which the patient’s normal sense of self is disrupted in dramatic and florid ways when neurological damage to subjects’ memories impairs their capacity to tell coherent life
stories. These two disparate types of material may help to interrogate the usefulness of the narrative conception of identity.

The first autobiography: Augustine re-writes his soul

Many scholars (so, Brown, 1967; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 1993) see Augustine’s Confessions as definitive for the Western tradition of autobiographical construction; he is seen as the first Westerner to write an autobiography which, in any modern sense, is recognizable as such. This extraordinary fourth century figure has left behind a complex autobiographical narrative in which he not only reviews part of his life course, but also reflects on the nature of identity as he does so. According to Brown (1967), three features of Augustine’s account stand out in his explorations of his own identity; first, the foundational importance of memory for his sense of who he is; secondly, the inescapably narrative form in which he presents his account of himself, and thirdly, the emphasis which his account places on the movements of his will and affections. Interestingly, all three features remain central to the personological tradition associated with Murray (1938) and, more recently, McAdams (1985, 1993).

Many contemporary writers in the social sciences have held up the fourth century saint as the founding father of Western autobiographical writing, among them Denzin (1989), Atkinson (1998), Murray (1938) and McAdams (1993). The originality and foundational importance of the Confessions is widely recognised: “a startlingly original book” (Brown 1967: 165); “the first autobiography”, and “the first modern book” (Clark 1993: 1, 3). Augustine’s Confessions is popularly held to be the first recognizable “autobiography” to be produced in the West. Some commentators have seen the Confessions as the template from which all later Western autobiographical writing derives:-

“Augustine’s work changed the very course of civilisation, ushering in an entirely new picture of selfhood and what it meant to understand it” and

“...the Confessions marks the beginning of autobiographical reflection as we have come to know it.”
is how Freeman (1993: 26) and Weintraub (1978: 25), respectively, estimate the importance of Augustine’s *Confessions* for autobiographical reflection in the West. They, like Denzin (1989:14ff) argue that Augustine’s *Confessions* became not only the pattern for all later Western autobiography, but also a foundational metaphor for conceiving of the self *narratively*. Williams (1979/1990) summarises its importance:

...it was a new kind of book. It was a work in which the writer’s struggles were worked out on the written page, in which a meaningful life had to be created in words. Augustine is never merely remembering; he is searching for significant patterns, making a biography. (1979/1990:71)

Freeman (1993) suggests that many cultures may “seek to place their experience within a narrative order of some sort”, but that Augustine offers the paradigm for the characteristically Western way of doing so; “the self with which Augustine, as well as ourselves are concerned is constituted, defined and articulated through its history.” (Freeman, 1993: 29). We may see in Augustine’s *Confessions*, therefore, not just the beginnings of Western autobiography, but also the historic paradigm for the *narrative model of identity* which McAdams’ work later articulates. Freeman suggests the three crucial features of autobiographical discourse which Augustine bequeaths to the West were *history, memory* and *narrative* :-

...the history one tells, via memory, assumes the form of a narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one’s self came to be. (1993:33) and

Memory is not just to do with recounting the past, but with making sense of it – it is an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self. (1993:29).

It is fascinating to see Murray (1938), himself a founding father of the modern narrative tradition of personological research, arguing in similar vein that: -

...the history of the organism is the organism. (Murray, 1938:39).

More than fifteen hundred years later, modern readers of Augustine’s *Confessions* can read his autobiographical narrative and still descry the clear traces of his distinctive, turbulent and unique identity, encapsulated through the story he tells. Almost alone amongst other historical figures from the ancient world, Augustine stands out; the uniqueness of his own sense of himself has been preserved in narrative form for later
generations to encounter. Augustine’s example is, therefore, suggestive; autobiographical narrative might not be the only means of presenting and dramatising an individual’s sense of themselves, but it is certainly a potent way of encapsulating a subject’s sense of their identity and personal uniqueness.

Although the most obvious feature of Augustine’s Confessions is that it takes a narrative form, that form however, is not a naïve one. Derrida (1967/1976) and Denzin (1989) are not correct in implying that it is only post-modernist writers who have problematised the act of writing and given us the understanding that “there is no clear window into the inner life of the person” (Denzin, 1989: 14). With extraordinary modernity, Augustine admits to a fundamental agnosticism about himself. He insisted “that no man could ever sufficiently search his own heart, that the ‘spreading, limitless room’ of memory was so complex, so mysterious, that no one could ever know his own personality.” (Brown, 1967: 179). Augustine complains that “there is in me a lamentable darkness in which my latent possibilities are hidden from myself, so that my mind, questioning itself upon its own powers, feels that it cannot rightly trust its own report” (Conf, X, xxxii, 48). Augustine is thus self-consciously aware that what he writes is only one possible version of the self that he might have written about, and that even this account may be unstable. If there were to be a reliable autobiographical account of his life, he suggests, only God would know it: “…but whether I may be like this, I just do not know… I beseech You, God, to show my full self to myself.” (Conf. X, xxxvii, 62).

Beneath the biographical details of his narrative re-construction of his life, however, Augustine believes that what truly defines and constructs his sense of who he is and who he will be in the future, is his “heart”. For Augustine, it is desire (in his Latin, amor) that is constitutive of the sense of self; the direction, meaning and shape of his life is given by the things and people that are the objects of his desire. His identity is constituted by “the history of my loves.” (Williams, 1990: 76), or as another distinguished Augustinian scholar puts it:-

The Confessions are, quite succinctly, the story of Augustine’s “heart” or his “feelings”. (Brown 1967: 169).
Augustine was acutely aware of his own unruly heart and turbulent passions, and came to believe that what we think, do and write is animated or drawn by what we find desirable. Whatever personal narratives he might construct, Augustine believed that his identity, ultimately, could only be re-configured by the re-orientation of its fundamental desires towards more appropriate objects; a view later echoed by both Freud and Feminism. Augustine’s model of the self is therefore dynamic, conflictual and often cognitively agnostic. This kind of model, as Wrong (1961) has argued in *The Oversocialised Concept of Man*, questions the validity and adequacy of more passively conceived social constructionist and discursive accounts of identity formation.

As will be seen in the next chapter, this more dynamic understanding of identity formation is also echoed in the accounts of Murray and McAdams in their emphasis on the definitive importance of motivation, as well as in the work of Bruner (1986). Bruner’s influential dictum: “Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions” (Bruner, 1986: 16) might have been written with Augustine’s *Confessions* in mind.

*Neurological damage and the dissolution of identity: the Lost Mariner and other stories from a Neurophysiologist’s case book*

The neuropsychologist Oliver Sacks has presented (1985) some interesting cases of patients with a specific type of neurological damage known as Korsakov’s syndrome. First identified in 1887, *Korsakov’s syndrome* is caused by damage to the mammillary bodies deep within the brain, often through alcoholic degeneration. The damage to these structures results in severe impairment of the individual’s capacity to remember parts of their past; in extreme cases, it can result in the loss of almost all memories of the past, the extent of memory loss being dependent upon the degree of neural damage.

In one case that Sacks documents, that of Jimmie G, the memory loss is considerable but not total. A seventy year old man, Jimmie G has extensive but not total damage to
these structures. In 1943, as a seventeen year old, he had joined the American Navy, and, as a result of his quick mind and technical skills, found himself as assistant radio operator on a submarine. He enjoyed his life in the Navy and remained there until he was discharged in 1965. He had been drinking heavily before his discharge, and his increased drinking resulted in the alcoholic destruction of his brain’s mammillary bodies, giving rise to the Korsakov’s Syndrome which was the cause of his admission to the Home at which Sacks was consultant neurologist. As a result of the alcohol-induced neurological damage, Jimmie G retained his memories of being a young naval rating, but could remember little or nothing of the succeeding fifty years of his life.

This loss produces enormous, but not total disintegration in his sense of self. His sense of himself - his identity - remains that of a twenty year old young man, even though, at the time of the extract below, Jimmie G was a grey-haired man in his seventies. His current memory span was less than two minutes:-

'What year is this, Mr G.?' I asked, concealing my perplexity under a casual manner.
'Forty-five, man. What do you mean?' He went on, 'We've won the war, FDR's dead, Truman's at the helm. There are great times ahead.'
'And you, Jimmie, how old would you be?'
Oddly, uncertainly, he hesitated a moment, as if engaged in calculation.
'Why, I guess I'm nineteen, Doc. I'll be twenty next birthday.' Looking at the grey-haired man before me, I had an impulse for which I have never forgiven myself - it was, or would have been, the height of cruelty had there been any possibility of Jimmie's remembering it.

'Here,' I said, and thrust a mirror toward him. 'Look in the mirror and tell me what you see. Is that a nineteen-year-old looking out from the mirror?'
He suddenly turned ashen and gripped the sides of the chair. 'Jesus Christ,' he whispered. 'Christ, what's going on? What's happened to me? Is this a nightmare? Am I crazy? Is this a joke?' - and he became frantic, panicked.
'It's okay, Jimmie,' I said soothingly. 'It's just a mistake. Nothing to worry about. Hey!' I took him to the window. 'Isn't this a lovely spring day. See the kids there playing baseball?' He regained his colour and started to smile, and I stole away, taking the hateful mirror with me.
Two minutes later I re-entered the room. Jimmie was still standing by the window, gazing with pleasure at the kids playing baseball below. He wheeled around as I opened the door, and his face assumed a cheery expression.
'Hiya, Doc!' he said. 'Nice morning! You want to talk to me - do I take this chair here?' There was no sign of recognition on his frank, open face.
'Haven't we met before, Mr G?' I asked casually.
'No, I can't say we have. Quite a beard you got there. I wouldn't forget you. (Sacks, 1985:23)
In the second case, that of William T, the damage to the mammillary bodies is much more extensive and the corresponding memory loss severe, resulting in an extreme disruption of the sense of self. Admitted to hospital only a matter of weeks before Sacks first saw him, William T remembers his name, and occasionally recalls that he was a grocer earlier in life, but little else. William T is nonetheless a confabulatory genius. His neurological condition is in its most florid phase; he jabbers away continuously, inventing an unending flow of inconsistent stories in which to clothe his continuously evaporating experience. He remembers nothing for more than two or three seconds, and then forgets that he's forgotten. Abysses of amnesia keep opening behind him at every moment, yet he is never at a loss for words:-

"What'll it be today?" he says, rubbing his hands. "Half a pound of Virginia, a nice piece of Nova?"

(Evidently he saw me as a customer - he would often pick up the phone on the ward, and say 'Thompson's Delicatessen'.)

'Oh Mr Thompson!' I exclaim, 'and who do you think I am?'

'Good heavens, the light's bad - I took you for a customer. As if it isn't my old friend Tom Pitkins...Me and Tom' (he whispers in an aside to the nurse) 'was always going to the races together.'

'Mr Thompson, you are mistaken again.'

'So I am,' he rejoins, not put out for a moment. 'Why would you be wearing a white coat if you were Tom? You're Hymie, the kosher butcher next door. No bloodstains on your coat though. Business bad today? You'll look like a slaughterhouse by the end of the week!'

Feeling a bit swept away myself in this whirlpool of identities, I finger the stethoscope dangling from my neck.

'A stethoscope!' he exploded. 'And you pretending to be Hymie! You mechanics are all starting to fancy yourselves as doctors, what with your white coats and stethoscopes - as if you need a stethoscope to listen to a car! So, you're my old friend Manners from the Mobil station up the block, come in to get your baloney-and-rye...' (Sacks, 1985:103)

Whereas Jimmie G, is able to hang onto some personal memories, and this seems sufficient to sustain a minimal, though precarious, sense of personal identity, William T is unable to retain any real unity or stability in his sense of self. With the ground falling away from him every second, he re-creates a new identity just as frequently; he is, as Sacks says, "a whirlpool of identities". Sacks (loc cit.) adds "One tended to speak of him, instinctively, as a spiritual casualty, - a lost soul."
Both of these cases reinforce strongly the Augustinian intuition that both memory and narrative are fundamentally important for constructing our distinctive sense of who we are. The particularly disturbing second case seems to exemplify someone whose sense of himself is fragmentary in the extreme, but who is making an incessant attempt to unify the fragments through the construction of a unified and coherent autobiographical narrative. Unfortunately for him, without sufficient memory he cannot successfully construct a unified, stable, and continuous sense of self. He produces, serially and with great facility, multiple but fragmentary versions of his current subjectivity. Rather than seeing him as a devotee of Derrida (1976), a follower of Foucault (1970), a post-structuralist prodigy who eschews illegitimate stabilities and “presences” in favour of the endless jouissance of language, or even as a Buddhist adept who has realised a condition of selfless anatta, Sacks sees him, perhaps more realistically and compassionately, as “a lost soul”. Without sufficient memory of any of his past experiences, he is unable adequately to achieve what Erikson would call the “continuity” and “sameness” necessary to attain a minimal sense of his own identity. His endless loquacious narrations, disconnected almost completely as they are from his actual biography, prevent him from producing a unified and coherent sense of who he is. William T’s loss of identity seems pitiable, rather than, in a post-modern or Buddhist sense, enlightened, and this may suggest that, meretricious and paradoxical as it may be, the stability and unity created in the process of identity formation is less easily dispensable than post-structuralism might suggest.

What Sacks’ cases seem to demonstrate is that, as Augustine thought, both memory and narrative are important foundations for a person’s sense of identity. Furthermore, when memory is radically compromised, the unity, continuity and coherence of a person’s identity are also jeopardized. Profound memory loss, even when accompanied by prodigious narrative fluency, cannot rescue the person’s identity from incoherence and instability. Such cases may also indicate that post-structuralism’s sustained dissolution, dismissal and deconstruction of the necessary stabilities of personal identity may overlook a more fundamental characteristic of identity which the existence of the deconstructive project precludes. Illusory or not, a coherent and
unified sense of personal identity seems to require a certain basic minimum of personal memory, as well as a basic capacity for autobiographical narrative if it is to weave the memories into the "continuity" and unifies stability which seems to be an essential component of both identity and basic personal coherence. Both Erikson’s and McAdams’ conception of identity recognizes the importance of both these components, and the cases discussed suggest that McAdams’ life story model of identity may have considerable plausibility for the purposes of the present study.

The context, origins and development of this narrative model of identity are the subject of the next chapter. Before that discussion begins, however, the present chapter concludes with a brief outline of study’s remaining chapters.

1.12 Answering the research questions: an outline map of the journey

The present chapter began with a fifteen-year old boy’s question: What makes you, ‘you’, and me, ‘me’? After providing an initial outline of the study, the chapter has described the search for an adequate and appropriate concept that would represent and clarify Ben’s question. It has been argued that, amidst the plethora of other psychological terms available, Erikson’s conception of “identity” has many of the required characteristics. The implicitly narrative nature of Erikson’s conception of identity has been made explicit in McAdams’ life story model of identity, which is thus adopted as the principal conceptual tool for operationalising the study’s main research question:-

In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

In addition, the study also adopts:-

- A narrative model of identity derived from the work of McAdams and Ricoeur
- A learning perspective on the process of identity formation inspired by the work of Jarvis
- An interpretive methodology influenced by the work of Gadamer, Denzin and McAdams
• A case study design
• A biographical research method which owes much to the work of Murray, McAdams, Atkinson and Denzin

These features are explained and examined during the course of the following chapters:-

The main purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a critical examination of McAdams' life story model of identity, and to assess its appropriateness for the purposes of the present study. This is achieved by placing McAdams' work within the context of the recent "narrative turn" in the social sciences, and then by subjecting McAdams' narrative model of identity to a detailed philosophical and psychological critique. The philosophical critique raises a number of general epistemological issues, and these are developed by contrasting McAdams' work on identity with Ricoeur's influential philosophical work on narrative identity. The psychological critique which follows the chapter's philosophical discussions is effected by comparing McAdams' idiographic life story model of identity with a major nomothetic alternative model; McCrae and Costa's (1985, 1987) "five-factor model".

Chapter 3 seeks an appropriate overall theoretical framework for the study that can incorporate both the social and individual aspects of identity formation. The extent to which a person's individual characteristics are subject to the formative social constraints of culture and discourse have been the subject of considerable theoretical debate in the social sciences, and a wide variety of accounts have been given of the relationship between the two. At one end of the spectrum stand theories, such as those of Allport (1937), Eysenck (1975), Cattell (1965) and Kelly (1955), which present human beings as self-contained unitary individuals whose social bonds are not of primary or constitutive importance to their identity. At the other end of the spectrum stand those contrasting theories, such as those of Gergen (1985), Althusser (1971), Habermas (1972) and Foucault (1970, 1977, 1979, 1986), which envisage society's social and discursive practices as largely determinative of individual identity. Given that the study aims to explore the unique identities of a group of students who live and
work within the shared life and norms of a traditional boarding school, the debate about the relationship between social constraint and personal uniqueness cannot be avoided. Reasons are given for rejecting those perspectives which, on the one hand, fail to acknowledge sufficiently the socially- and discursively-constructed nature of individuality. Those perspectives, on the other hand, which are "oversocialised" and deny the individual sufficient scope for interpretive autonomy and creativity are likewise rejected. After discussing a number of more promising perspectives on this issue, such as those of Stern (1985), Bruner (1986, 1990), Harré (1998) and G.H.Mead (1934), the chapter suggests that a learning perspective derived from recent theories of experiential learning is capable of incorporating both the social and individual aspects of identity formation; students' learn about both their social environment and about themselves through a process of experiential learning. The chapter concludes by advocating Jarvis' (1987, 1992, 1999) particular account of experiential learning as a unifying perspective for exploring both the individual and social aspects of identity formation.

Chapter 4 falls into two distinct parts. In the first part, ethical and practical methodological issues raised by a study of identity formation amongst adolescent boys by a researcher who is placed in the role of a teacher (albeit a temporary one) in their school are raised, discussed and, it is hoped, resolved. The first section of the chapter thus endeavours to explain and justify why the researcher did what he did. The second part of the chapter discusses the methodological implications of the conceptual, ethical and practical decisions made earlier. The implications of adopting of both McAdams' life story model of identity and Jarvis' learning perspective on the process of identity formation, it is argued, naturally impels the study towards an interpretive and qualitative research paradigm. After discussing a number of other possibilities, a case is made for preferring Gadamer's (1975, 1976) account of the interpretive methodology.

Chapter 5 outlines the study's overall design and presents a schematic summary of the main stages through which the study passed, before going on to describe the social context of the study, the sample of student participants, and the principal research
methods employed. The general approach to data analysis, the three principal phases of data analysis and the analytical methods applied to the data are then discussed.

Chapter 6 is the first of four chapters which report and then discuss the data collected during the course of the study. The sixth chapter examines the social context in which the student autobiographers live and work by reporting their perceptions of some of the characteristic social rules, norms and social practices which permeate their communal life. The prevalence of an unofficial unwritten “Code” of social rules which governs the students’ social relations and character-formation is outlined, as is their characteristic moral lexicon. The social and moral importance of “sport” which seems to play an important part in many students’ lives, and the masculine values it seems to enshrine, are also described and discussed.

Chapter 7 turns from the students’ perceptions of their social world to examine their individual autobiographies. The concern of the chapter is to compare the students’ autobiographies to see, despite their individual nature, how far they provide evidence of shared characteristics. The extent to which the immediate social environment of the school and its distinctive “Code” feature in the individual autobiographies is examined, and evidence for the influence of wider social, cultural and economic influences are also sought. The stories’ characteristic forms and contents are discussed, as are the distinctive patterns of social relationships, particularly in the importance given to family and close friends. The importance given to emotional learning in the autobiographies is commented on, as is the distinctive construction of gender in the majority of stories.

Chapter 8 begins to address the study’s principal research question by presenting a detailed analysis of the individual autobiographies which draws attention to some of the ways in which the life stories achieve unity. The students’ own views about their multiple social selves, as well as their theories about the underlying sources of personal unity are first described and illustrated. Following this, a variety of intellectual issues surrounding the way students present and unify their multiple social (synchronic) and historical (diachronic) selves are discussed. With these preliminary
matters out of the way, the main body of the chapter presents an analysis of the wide variety of specific narrative techniques and methods which have a **unifying effect** on the students’ life stories. These unifying narrative patterns are isolated, illustrated, discussed and then summarized in the form of a *Taxonomy of unifying patterns*.

Chapter 9 turns to the most important aspect of the study’s principal research question; **uniqueness**. The chapter presents a detailed analysis of the individual autobiographies which draws attention to some of the many ways in which the stories are **differentiated** from each other. Before the details of the analysis are outlined, a number of intellectual issues which cluster around the concept of “uniqueness” are discussed, and students’ *own* theories about the sources of personal uniqueness are also outlined and illustrated. The unique features of the autobiographies are then displayed in two different ways. First, a number of common *themes* appearing in the autobiographies (such as birth stories, high points and low points) are illustrated by extended extracts drawn from a number of autobiographies. Secondly, the chapter concludes with a detailed *Taxonomy of narrative differences* which analyses, discusses and displays more than sixty different types of difference to be observed in the autobiographies. The astronomical number of permutations which this taxonomy permits, it is argued, is capable of generating an infinite number of different possible life stories, and thereby guarantees the *life story model* of identity’s extensive capacity to represent unique identities.

Having presented the study’s principal findings in the previous four chapters, Chapter 10 offers a brief preliminary summary of the study’s findings as a prelude to a *critical discussion* of the work of those theorists who have influenced the study’s development most closely. The chapter begins with a discussion of Goffman’s (1961) work on total institutions and their effects on personal identity. The next section discusses claims by Gergen (1993b) and Denzin (1989) about the existence of a distinctive “Western” autobiographical genre, and, by presenting additional evidence of a variety of autobiographical genres extant within the research school, suggests that autobiographical genres may be both more various and more ineluctably *local* than these theorists have suggested. Erikson’s (1968) work on adolescent identity
formation and *moratorium* is then considered, before McAdams' (1985, 1987, 1993) narrative model of identity is also critically reviewed. After this, the two penultimate sections of the chapter discuss theories about the prevalence of specific *types of story* (for instance, Frye, 1957; Campbell, 1968 and Hanskiss, 1981), and also discuss the place of the *body* in identity formation. The latter section allows the philosophical accounts of Harré (1998) and Strawson (1959) regarding the place of the body in personal identity to be interrogated by some empirical evidence. The chapter concludes by discussing Jarvis’ account of biographically-situated experiential learning in the light of the study’s findings.

As the study draws to a close, Chapter 11 deals with four distinct areas of concern. The major part of the chapter embarks on a critical evaluation of the study as a whole. The second part summarizes briefly the principal findings of the study. Thirdly, in the light of the study’s findings, the chapter goes on to suggest one or two areas of school life which might fruitfully offer opportunities for reflection and professional development amongst those who work in the school. Finally, the chapter indicates some possible directions for future further research.

With this brief outline of the study’s chapters completed, the next chapter explores the conception of *identity* introduced in the present chapter. Having outlined an Eriksonian conception of identity in the present chapter, it remains to discuss this conception critically: *How best can a person’s sense of self be conceived or represented?*
CHAPTER 2

MAKING LIVES INTO STORIES: EXPLORING McADAMS' LIFE STORY MODEL OF IDENTITY

This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story.

Jean-Paul Sartre

2.1 “Each of us is a biography, a story”

In the course of discussing the disintegrating identities of some of his Korsakoff’s syndrome patients, Sacks (1985), as was seen in the previous chapter, concludes that the patients’ radical memory loss prevents the sufferer from constructing a coherent and continuous life story, with a consequent partial or total loss of identity:-

We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative - whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative’, and that this narrative is us, our identities.

If we wish to know about a man, we ask ‘what is his story - his real, inmost story?’ - for each of us is a biography, a story. Each of us is a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us - through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives - we are each of us unique. (Sacks 1985:105)

The previous chapter ended with a question: How best can a person’s unique sense of self be conceived or represented? The answer explored in the present chapter is that identity is best conceived of in narrative terms. If we wish to know a person’s unique sense of themselves, then, as Sacks (1985) suggests in the quotation above, we ask for their life story. Sacks argues that each person “constructs and lives a ‘narrative’, and that “this narrative is us, our identities…” In his view, the unique and unified sense of self is narratively constructed and maintained; each person’s identity is constituted by, and enshrined in their “biography”, their unique “life story”.

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This quotation presents, therefore, the distinctive “narrative” model of identity, along with a narrative account of both their uniqueness and unity. It is this narrative model of identity which, as was seen in the previous chapter, is developed by McAdams (1989:161, 1993:12) when he suggests “Identity is a life story”. Harré describes McAdams’ life story model of identity as “the most systematic attempt to develop a narration-based psychology of persons.” (Harré, 1998:142), and so it is the origins and characteristics of McAdams’ narrative model of identity which are critically examined in the present chapter.

The principal aim of the chapter is to provide a critical examination of McAdams’ life story model of identity, and to assess its appropriateness for the purposes of the present study. The chapter falls into two distinct halves. The first half of the chapter begins by reviewing the widespread “narrative turn” (Bruner, 1990) within the social sciences, which has subsequently percolated psychologists’ speculations about the construction of personal identity. This is followed by a brief survey of the particular strand of psychological enquiry - the “personological tradition” - in which McAdams’ own work is to be located, and some of whose earlier practitioners (such as Murray and Erikson) have been of particular importance for the development of McAdams’ own work on identity. With these surveys completed, the first half of the chapter concludes with a brief exposition of McAdams’ life story model of identity, which serves to specify and operationalise the notion of “identity” for the purposes of the present research.

The second half of the chapter offers a critique of McAdams’ life story model of identity from two different perspectives. The first perspective is philosophical, and considers some of the limitations and lacunae of McAdams’ model, as well as discussing how some of these omissions might be addressed through insights derived from Ricoeur’s (1992/1994) analysis of the narrative construction of personal identity. The second critical perspective is psychological, returning to a long-standing bifurcation in the social sciences between nomothetic and idiographic approaches to researching and representing human beings’ differences. The adequacy and distinctiveness of McAdams’ (1985/1988) idiographic narrative conceptualisation of
identity is probed by comparing it with a widely-acclaimed nomothetic non-narrative approach, McCrae and Costa's (1987) "five factor" model.

The present chapter focuses entirely on the way in which identity can be conceptualised, rather than the process by which this may occur. Contrasting his work with that of Marcia (1966, 1980), McAdams (1987) is clear that the primary emphasis of his work is on the "product" rather than the "process" of identity formation:

While Marcia's research has investigated the process of identity formation in late adolescence and young adulthood, the life story approach centers on the product of the process...Thus the foci of inquiry for the present approach are the structure and content of identity – what identity "looks like" rather than how it comes to be. The main thesis is that identity looks like a story and that, like all stories in literature and in life, identity can be understood in terms of setting, scene, character, plot and theme. (McAdams, 1987:15-16)

In accord with this distinction, the present chapter is concerned entirely with the "product", the conceptualisation of identity, rather than the process. Reflections on the latter issue are reserved for the next chapter.

2.2 Narrative identity: Freud's prophetic compulsion

As early as 1893 when he was writing his "Studies in Hysteria", Freud found himself prey to a strange, disquieting urge. He realised that in spite of himself, he laboured uneasily under a compulsion. Freud had been trained as a doctor, according to the most exacting and scientific standards of his day. He had a further specialist training as a neurologist which was equally rigorous and disciplined, and yet he noticed that when he tried to write up the case-notes for each of his patients, something happened which puzzled and disturbed him:-

Like other neuropathologists I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me as strange that the case histories I write should read like "short stories" and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science ...(Freud, 1893: 160, in Freeman, 1993: 231)

Trained as a scientist, with a scientist's ideals of impersonal objectivity and analysis, he was embarrassed to find that he had become, in effect, a writer of short stories. It is a matter which clearly weighed heavily upon him, and he gnawed at himself with
the implicit accusation that such stories lacked "the serious stamp of science". He tried to console himself with two considerations:–

I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own ...

and

... a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the work of imaginative writers ... resulted in ... at least some kind of insight ..(ibid.)

His shame-faced self-justification is revealing; he claims that not only did narrative exploration seem required by his subject matter, but that such narrative explorations were fruitfully insightful in a way that his "scientific" methods were not.

The heavy reliance of Freud's work on such individual narrative case studies, and his consequent turning away from the standard positivist scientific rhetoric of repeatable experiment, controlled study and valid statistical generalisation lead, as he feared, to accusations of being "unscientific" from many scientists, as was later to be famously the case at the hands of Eysenck (1965) and many others.

Freud's anxious ambivalence about his narrative compulsion can be read as a prophetic insight into some of the perturbing intellectual questions which would later divide psychology. In the first instance, his anxieties represent his intuitive perception of the dichotomy between what would later be seen (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105) as the positivist and interpretivist paradigms of research in the social sciences. Secondly, his narrative urge draws him towards an idiographic or individual-centered approach to personality description, rather than a nomothetic or collectivistically comparative approach. It may even be suggested that Freud's ambivalence anticipates the development of two correspondingly different approaches to the representation of personality differences. Contemplating a momentous divide in the methodological road, he might see a procession of nomothetically-inclined personality psychologists such as Cattell (1965), Eysenck (1975) and Kelly (1955) streaming down one fork, whilst the more idiographically inclined such as Murray (1938), Allport (1937, 1942), Erikson (1958, 1969) and McAdams (1985, 1993/1997) stumble down the other.

Perhaps, even more speculatively still, he glimpses for a moment the possibility that
human beings may possess two entirely distinct "cognitive modes" by which they make sense of the world, such as would later be proposed by Bruner (1986).

Whatever Freud’s intuitions in 1893, his momentous decision to follow his idiographic and narrative hunch meant that as, Bruner (1990) acknowledges, the psychoanalytical tradition, was about the first scientific discipline to attend both to the nature of human uniqueness, and also to explore the use of narrative in representing it. In this way, Freud and his followers were an important formative influence on Murray’s “personological” tradition of research into the study of human uniqueness, and this provided the nursery in which McAdams developed his own ideas on the life story model of identity.

PART 1: TOWARDS A NARRATIVE MODEL OF IDENTITY

2.3 Narrative: Everybody’s doing it

After the dawn of the twentieth century, it seems that the use of narrative assumed an increasingly important place in the social sciences. Earlier in the century, narrative was used mainly as a methodology for collecting data. After the middle of the century it was increasingly used as an explanatory metaphor, and finally, during the century’s last three decades, the general “narrative turn” in the social sciences ensured that it began to be used explicitly as a model of identity. This three-phase thumbnail sketch which traces the orderly progression of narrative from research method, to general explanatory metaphor until it finds its eventual place as model of identity, though subject to the ifs and buts of all compendious generalisations, will nonetheless serve the purpose of structuring a rapid review of the general intellectual context in which McAdams’ work can be situated.

In the earlier part of the century, those who began to use narrative methods of data collection hailed primarily from the fields of sociology and anthropology. Smith (1994) suggests that anthropologists have had a long association with biographical methods of investigation, and singles out the early work of Redfield (1930) and Lewis
(1951) with the Tepoztlan for special mention. Much later, Geertz (1973) made highly influential use of narrative methods in his highly autobiographical account of his personal experiences with Balinese cock-fighting, and combined these with his theoretical reflections on the process of anthropological writing. Other writers, such as Rabinow (1977) and Crapanzano (1980) similarly combined “life writing” with cultural analysis.

Amongst sociologists, writing “life histories” was pioneered in the 1920s and 1930s by the Chicago school of sociology with the publication of Shaw’s *The Jack Roller* (1930) and Thomas and Znaniecki and their study of Polish peasants (1918-1920). Important work by Park (1952), Blumer (1939) and C. Wright Mills (1959) followed. Denzin (1989) argues that such theorists developed considerable expertise in narrative methods of data collection, which later, however, during the middle of the century, fell out of fashion as being insufficiently “scientific”.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, argues Bruner (1990:111), the idea that narrative was of fundamental importance in understanding the world of human meanings and behaviour had become increasingly common in psychology. The idea that “narrative” functions as a pervasive and constitutive element in human life and cognition had earlier attracted anthropologists such as Levy-Strauss (1969) who suggested that a society’s myths mirror the salient issues with which a society is preoccupied and thereby assure its continuity, whilst Campbell (1962, 1964, 1968, 1970) had argued that such myths captured in narrative form what a given society considered to be its basic psychological, cosmological and metaphysical truths.

As early as 1968, Hardy had pointed out how widely and deeply narrative permeated human life, arguing that

...we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. (Hardy, 1968:5)

The comprehensive cognitive possibilities of narrative were well explored by Mink’s *History and fiction as modes of comprehension* (1978) which suggested that the story is a “primary and irreducible form of human comprehension.” (Mink, 1978:132)
Influenced by what Bruner (1990) has called the “new interpretivism”, social scientists found themselves attending more acutely to the ways in which human experience was rendered meaningful through narrative interpretive methods, and works such as Lakoff and Johnson’s influential *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) demonstrated how deeply metaphors affected the way human beings construct their understanding of the world and themselves.

By the early 1980s, “story” had become a pervasive and popular metaphor in the social sciences. Gergen and Gergen (1983) noted that “formal as well as naïve theorists have made use of the metaphor of the storyteller” (Gergen and Gergen, 1983:237). This idea that the individual person might be thought of as a story-teller, with their sense of identity as the resultant story, appeared in well-known works such as Mitchell’s *On Narrative* (1981), Geertz’ *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) Rabinow and Sullivan’s *Interpretive Social Science* (1979) and Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980), as well as MacIntyre’s influential reconstruction of moral philosophy in narrative terms, *After Virtue* (1981/1985).

In psychology, Sarbin’s seminal paper (1986) “The narrative as root metaphor for psychology”, classically encapsulated the new insight that narrative provided a foundational metaphor for understanding human conduct. Drawing on the work of Pepper (1942), Sarbin argued that narrative operated as a “root metaphor” for understanding the human world. The title of the collection in which that paper appeared, *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (1986), advertised the nature of this new direction in psychological understanding which Geertz (1983), a few years previously, had summarized as “the broadest and most recent refiguration of social thought.” (Geertz, 1983:22). This burgeoning interest in narrative within the social sciences was reinforced by renewed interest in language and discourse, particularly within French post-structuralist philosophy (Derrida, 1976; 1978, Foucault, 1980; Barthes, 1957/1972).

Amongst social scientists, few advocated the constitutive role of narrative in human life and identity more consistently, persuasively and influentially than Bruner (1986,
1990). His work made use of narrative research *methodologies*, saw narrative as a fundamental *mode of cognition*, and also advocated a narrative *model of identity*. His *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986) suggests that we may be disposed towards narrative modes of understanding by both genetic and cultural factors, and it argues that there are two completely *different* and mutually irreducible “modes of thought” by which we understand and structure our experience, one of which is narrative in form:-

Let me begin by setting out my argument as baldly as possible, better to examine its basis and its consequences. It is this. There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. (Bruner, 1986:11)

Bruner describes first of all the "paradigmatic" or *logico-scientific* mode of cognitive functioning which is pre-eminently seen in scientific works as well as other discourses which aspire to "objectivity", and which have no place for the "subjective" world of *intentionality* (such as beliefs, desires, intentions, feelings). These latter subjective things, however, are easily accommodated by the contrasting second mode of cognition which he calls the "narrative mode". It is in this latter form of discourse, he argues, that we naturally represent “the vicissitudes of human intention and meaning” (1986:17).

Bruner also attributes to *culture* an additional narrative role in shaping individual human lives, arguing that “the mythologically instructed community provides its members with a library of scripts” against which individuals may interpret and construct their own “internal drama”, so that “life, then, produces myth and finally imitates it.” (Bruner, 1960: 281, 283).

*Identity as Narrative; Convergent Perspectives*

If narrative has been widely being accepted as both a research *methodology*, and also as a fundamental *explanatory metaphor* in the social sciences at large, it is also clear
that narrative has also been widely applied to the more specific issue of providing a
model for the formation and presentation of personal identity.

In 1987, Bruner tentatively began a paper called *Life as Narrative* with the words “I
want to try out an idea that may not be quite ready, indeed may not be quite
possible...” The “impossible” idea explored by his paper is that the autobiographical
narratives we tell about our lives come, in the end, to constitute and shape our
*identities*; “we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our
lives.”:

The heart of my argument is this: eventually the culturally shaped and
linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the
power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment
and purpose-build the very “events” of a life. In the end, we become the
autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives. (Bruner, 1987:15)

By 1991, Bruner had consolidated his position and produced what Harré (1998: 142)
has called the “strong thesis” of narratological identity:

Lives are lived in according to the same conventions in accordance with which

In fact, Bruner’s “impossible idea” of 1987, had, of course, already been
foreshadowed by a number of thinkers. Five years earlier, Cohler (1982), for instance,
had argued that:

Lives are organised in the same manner as other narratives, including
historical interpretations, and are understandable according to the same
socially shared definition of a sensible or followable presentation. (Cohler,
1982: 207).

The following year Sarbin and Scheibe (1983) had argued strongly that psychologists
should give much greater attention to the issue of *identity* than had hitherto been the
case:

We hold to the premise that the problem of identity is one of the great and
central problems of human psychology, although it has not commonly been
recognised as such. (Sarbin and Scheibe, 1983: vii).

However, whilst Sarbin and Scheibe (1983) and Bruner (1987) were advocating the
importance of narrative in the construction of personal identity, McAdams (1985) had
been actively *researching* it empirically in his major study, published two years before Bruner’s paper. That a scholar of Bruner’s stature at the forefront of the narrative field should see his own tentative narrative model as ground-breaking when the ground was already well-broken elsewhere (McAdams, 1985) reinforces McAdams’ leadership in the field.

By the early 1990s, this narratological model of the self had wide currency, and a single example from two very distinguished psychologists must serve as a representative token of its dissemination in a much wider literature:-

Not only do we tell our lives in stories, but there is a significant sense in which our relationships with each other are lived out in narrative form....this is not to say, then, that life copies art, but rather, that art becomes the vehicle through which the reality of life is generated. In a significant sense, then, we live by stories – both in the telling and doing of self. (Gergen and Gergen, 1993:202)

Even in the world of *Artificial Intelligence*, the idea that our identity was constituted by narrative was taken up vigorously by Dennett:-

Beavers make dams, spiders spin webs...and male Australian Bower birds make astonishing architectural constructions decorated with brightly coloured objects. Mother Nature has equipped these small brains with the necessary routines for carrying out these biologically essential tasks of engineering ... But the strangest and most wonderful constructions in the whole animal world are the amazing, intricate constructions made by the primate *homo sapiens*. Each normal individual makes a *self*. Out of its brain it spins a web of words and deeds ... weaving them like spider webs into self-protective strings of *narrative*. ... self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories ...Dennett, (1993: 415)

By the end of the twentieth century, therefore, it was possible to look back and, in retrospect, to see *narrative* used as a *research methodology*, as an *explanatory metaphor* in the social sciences, and also, more specifically, as a *model of personal identity*.

However, amongst those social scientists who have made use of a narrative *model of identity*, a further distinction needs to be made. Although a wide variety of social scientists may employ some sort of a narrative model of identity, many social scientists have no specific interest in the uniqueness and individuality of *particular* individuals *per se*. Bruner (1986, 1990) and Gergen (1985, 1993), for instance, use a
narrative model of identity, but do so to focus the attention of their analyses on the shared social and discursive features which individual life stories may reveal; the individual is studied as an exemplar of the social.

Two examples of this difference in emphasis on the social rather than the individual may illustrate the tendency. Whilst Bruner advocates a narrative conception of identity, close inspection of a quotation from his Life As Narrative (1987) reveals that the primary focus of his interest is on cultural and linguistic processes that transcend the individuals whose autobiographies he collects. In Bruner’s view, the individual is merely a “variant” of the culture’s “canonical forms”:-

The heart of my argument is this: eventually the culturally shaped and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variants of the culture’s canonical forms. (Bruner, 1987:15).

In similar vein, Gergen and Gergen (1993), whilst admitting that “we live by stories”, go on to argue that “by the end of our story we shall find that the individual self has all but vanished into the world of relationship” (Gergen and Gergen, 1993: 202), and that “…we view self-narratives as properties of social accounts or discourse. Narratives are, in effect, social constructions…” (1993: 203, researcher’s italics).

In both of these examples, the researchers investigate the lives of particular individuals, but do so only insofar as these individuals typify or illuminate social phenomena. The primary emphasis in such approaches is thus not upon the unique individuality of particular persons, but on “cultural shaping”, “canonical forms”, “discourse” and other commonalities and not on the subject’s own active and idiosyncratic shaping of their own sense of identity. The present study, in contrast, though wishing to retain a keen awareness of the effects of a particular social context, aims to focus primarily on the uniquenesses and unity of individuals themselves. At this point, therefore, the present study must leave aside such socially orientated research and seek the more specific individually-orientated approaches that have been McAdams’ guiding lights.
2.4 Personologists do it individualistically: Murray and the personological tradition

McAdams (1985, 1989) identifies himself with a long-standing and distinctive tradition of research which has, from its outset, specialised in an individually-orientated approach to personality research, which McAdams commonly calls “personological”:-

My own research and theorizing over the past ten years may be situated within that maverick tradition in the social sciences called “the study of lives” or “the personological tradition” – historically associated with the approaches advanced by Murray (1938), White (1966, 1981) and Tomkins (1987), among others. (McAdams, 1989:160).

According to Anderson’s personal memoir (Anderson, 1990: 304), Murray (1893 – 1988) was originally trained as a biochemist, but two experiences, of primary significance to both Murray and the life story model of identity alike, revolutionised his life. Both experiences involved contact with those who made a penetrating use of narrative in exploring the idiosyncratic features of particular personalities. The first was Murray’s reading of Melville’s Moby Dick (ever afterwards he wore a lapel badge in the shape of a whale), and the other was his first encounter with the psychodynamic tradition in the shape of Jung’s book on personality theory, Psychological Types (1923). Two further experiences, falling in love with a Jungian analyst, and meeting Jung himself, consolidated a radical change in the direction of both his academic career and his personal life. Appointed as Morton Prince’s assistant at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in 1927, he began to pursue his aim to devise a systematic method for investigating individual personality.

The deep and detailed knowledge that psychoanalysts gained about individual patients, knowledge that included even their unconscious processes and motivations, seemed to Murray, to offer a strong critique of the banality of contemporary nomothetic and “scientific” approaches to personality. Compared with the insights of a Melville or a Jung, he argued that academic psychology was unduly narrow, mechanical and biologically reductionistic; “a mountain of ritual bringing forth a
mouse of fact more dead than alive.” (Murray, 1967:305). His task, as he saw it, was to study the whole person and to try to understand the structure and content of their personality within the specific context of their individual socio-historical context, and in ways which included their motivations and biographies.

His response to the challenge of Melville and the psychoanalysts was his major study, *Explorations in Personality* (1938), which later became the model for McAdams’ (1985) own major study. Based on a study of 51 college-aged men, Murray and his research team aimed to create a system of analysis which could deal adequately with the complexity of the individual personality. His approach, he believed, called for “biographical studies” (Murray, 1938: 39). His early commitment to autobiographical research is recorded by White (1981), a former student. Murray envisioned a time when scientific psychology would be able to write biographies which were as penetrating and perceptive as Melville’s character sketches of individuals, though underpinned by a more systematic analytical framework.

In addition to modelling the design of his own large-scale study empirical study (1985) on Murray’s (1938) work, McAdams (1990: 149) has also traced the origins of his life story model of identity to a remark of Murray’s:-

*The history of the organism is the organism.* (Murray, 1938: 39)

Later theorists within the personological tradition included Dollard (1935), Frenkel (1936) and Allport (1937) were also committed to the biographical study of human behaviour. Allport (1937, 1942, 1965) in particular produced a series of original books which used biographical and autobiographical material with the aim of illuminating individual lives. Like Murray, he was acutely aware of the limitations of much contemporary academic psychology, and took seriously Stefan Zweig’s ringing challenge to all psychologists. Comparing writers like Proust and Flaubert with contemporary psychologists, Zweig had said:-

*Writers like these are giants in observation and literature, whereas in psychology the field of personality is worked by lesser men, mere flies, who have the safe anchorage of a frame of science in which to place their petty platitudes and minor heresies.* (Zweig, quoted in Allport, 1960: 6).
Allport’s *Personality* (1937) was followed by the classic *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (1942), and later the highly original *Letters from Jenny* (1965), the latter of which presented and explored a collection of personal letters. White’s *Lives in Progress* (1966) along with his other work (1981) and that of Tomkins (1987) provide further examples of the approach initiated by Allport and Murray.

Another member of the personological tradition of personality research was to prove an even greater influence on the development of McAdams’ life story model of identity. Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969), originally trained as a psychoanalyst, but later became a member of Murray’s staff and found himself surrounded by the kinds of biographical research and theory outlined above. Erikson’s stage theory of psychosocial development (1968, 1980) and his account of identity formation, especially its development during adolescence (1963, 1968) are well known. The latter speculations (as will be seen below) provided the springboard for McAdams’ (1985, 1987, 1989) own speculations about the nature of identity, and these were also decisively influenced by the biographical direction which Erikson’s later work (1958, 1969) took after his contact with Murray. Erikson’s *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Gandhi’s Truth* (1969) are extensive and detailed biographical examinations of the personalities and lives of their respective subjects. Their implicit use of a life story approach to understanding personal identity became the basis for McAdams’ (1985) explicit life story model of identity.

Subsequent work has included that of Runyan (1982), Ochberg (1994) and Levinson (1978). Runyan’s *Life histories and psychobiography* (1982) and *Psychology and historical interpretation* (1988) have developed the Eriksonian approach to biographical studies in sophisticated ways, whilst Ochberg (1994), influenced by the critical theory of Geuss, Horkheimer and Wellmer has begun to examine the political implications of autobiographical stories. Like Erikson’s (1980) psychosocial theory of development, Levinson’s (1978) intensive study of forty middle-aged men, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, traces a number of specific periods of personal development through which, he believes, all human beings characteristically pass. This study appears to contradict Marcia’s assertion (1966, 1980) that identity formation is essentially

Finally, the kind of narrative approaches surveyed above have developed in several fields, with a diverse body of scholars who have made particularly effective use of biographical approaches to research. Examples of such work include a very large group of researchers within what Atkinson (1998) has called the “life story movement”, including Cohler (1988), Josselson and Lieblich (1993) and Atkinson (1998) himself. Many of these have contributed to what has now become an annual and growing series of life story publications edited by Josselson and Lieblich (Josselson, 1996; Josselson and Lieblich, 1993, 1995; Lieblich and Josselson, 1994, 1997). Within the fields of educational and sociological research, Alheit (1995, 1998, 1999) has made far-reaching and penetrating use of biographical methods of research, and the present researcher regrets that it was only in the very late stages of the preparation of his work that he came across further important examples of biographical research in the field of Adult Education. The work of Dominicié (1990), Alheit (1995) and Bron-Wojciechowska (1995), for instance, furnish examples of sophisticated theoretical advances which the researcher wishes he had encountered earlier.

The personological tradition’s importance for a full understanding of McAdams’ life story model of identity can thus be summarised as follows:-

First, Murray and his followers, inspired both by the insightful approaches of psychoanalysts and good novelists, and contrary to the practices of his contemporaries in academic psychology, chose to focus their investigations on individuals rather than social phenomena, and to do so using narrative rather than nomothetic methods. Secondly, the influence of psychoanalytical and literary models, as well as the narrative character of much of their data, lead the early personologists towards a more interpretive, rather than positivist approach to their material. Thirdly, the same psychoanalytical and literary models induced the personologists to consider carefully the importance of motivation as one of the principal organising features of personal identity. Finally, the focus on individual lives naturally lead the personological
tradition to make extensive and pioneering use of narrative and biographical methods of data collection.

Having surveyed both the broader psychological literature as well as the more specialised personological context of McAdams’ life story model of identity, the next section presents a brief exposition of his model in preparation for the later philosophical and psychological critiques which follow.

2.5 McAdams’ life story model of identity

It will be recalled that Harré (1998) applauds McAdams work as “the most systematic attempt to develop a narration-based psychology of persons.” (Harré, 1998:142), and his importance has also been acknowledged by Atkinson (1998:6). The following subsections outline McAdams position.

*Life story model*

Summarising the essence of his theoretical position in several earlier papers, McAdams (1985, 1987, 1989) explains his central proposal:-

This is the main thesis of my work: *Identity is a life story* - an internalised narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose. (McAdams, 1989: 161).

McAdams’ work thus presents a conceptual model for encapsulating a person’s identity whose guiding metaphor is that of the story:-

The central idea...is a disarmingly simple one: in the modern world in which we all live, identity is a life story. (1993/1997: 5).

“Identity”

As will be recalled from the previous chapter, McAdams borrows the term “identity” from Erikson (1959), and McAdams (1991) distinguishes between the term “identity” and “more encompassing concepts, such as personality and character” (McAdams, 1991: 134). The aim of his theory is *not*, he stresses “to seek to undermine or discredit
any of the different theories of the self...nor does it seek to offer a fully-fledged theory of the self.” (ibid.). Instead, he insists that “...identity refers to something smaller, a part of personality for sure, but not its totality.” (McAdams, 1987: 22). His suggestion is therefore that “identity” may be seen as “a grand schema of self”; it is, in other words, a set of organised ideas through which the person constructs and represents their understanding of themselves. More specifically, the concept of “identity” is seen by Erikson and McAdams as that part of the person’s conception of themselves which is concerned with their distinctive and unified “sameness and continuity” (McAdams, 1991: 134).

Basis of Theory

First, McAdams argues (1985, 1987) that his narrative model of identity is empirically grounded in a large biographical study of 90 college students and 50 middle-aged men and women, the results of which are reported in Power, intimacy and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity (McAdams, 1985). McAdams also acknowledges (1987) that his model is theoretically grounded in Erikson’s classic writings on the topic of identity (Erikson, 1958, 1959, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1980), and also acknowledges a debt to the ideas of a number of other thinkers, some from within the personological tradition, as well as others from different theoretical viewpoints. Amongst those he singles out for special discussion are Adler (1927), Bakan (1966), Fowler (1981), Hankiss (1981), Loevinger (1976), McClelland (1975), Tomkins (1979), and Winter (1973).

Secondly, McAdams takes some of Erikson’s scattered suggestions about the nature of identity and develops them into a coherent and clearly articulated narrative account of the concept. He selects two essential characteristics from Erikson’s conception of identity. The first is that identity is a kind of cognitive schema, “a grand schema of the self” (McAdams, 1987: 22). The second idea is that this cognitive schema has the function of integrating the multiplicity of a person’s social and historical selves. Central to Erikson’s conception of identity is the notion that it is a kind of schema which gives to the person’s sense of self an element of “sameness and continuity” which stabilises the ever-changing multiplicities of social and temporal selves. To
borrow Claxton's (Claxton, 1994:116) fine phrase, identity in both Erikson's and McAdams' sense of the term "accentuates the permanent".

McAdams' discussion of these two points may be briefly illustrated with reference to the appropriate sections of Erikson's work. When discussing the process of adolescent identity formation, Erikson (1959) had claimed that:

It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration... (Erikson, 1959:113, researcher's italics).

When McAdams therefore confronts the question; "What is the nature of this thing we call identity?" (1991: 17), he turns for his answer to the term "configuration" that Erikson uses in the above quotation, and notes (1987, 1991, 1993) that Erikson's account of the process of identity formation "represents an integration, a putting together of a number of different identity elements" (McAdams, 1987: 17, researcher's italics). In rather more detail, Erikson explains:

The integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is, as pointed out, more than the sum of childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate all the identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the attitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others. (Erikson, 1963: 261)

Erikson thus argues that adolescents achieve their identity through an active process of "selective repudiation and mutual assimilation" (Erikson, 1959:113) during which they integrate childhood "identifications", "the vicissitudes of the libido", the biologically-given "aptitudes developed out of endowment" and "the opportunities offered in social roles" into a "new configuration" (1959: 261).

Out of this confusing collection of identificatory processes, McAdams singles out that, for Erikson, the two principal results of the "new configuration" is that it confers on the person a sense of historical and social "sameness and continuity" because:-
In finding it, the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child and what he is about to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community's recognition of him. (Erikson, 1959:111).

McAdams draws out the implications of Erikson’s compressed statement; “identity” integrates the “inner continuity” of the young person’s different historical selves (the “child” on the one hand, and “what he is about to become” on the other), as well as an inner sense of “social sameness” which combines the different social conceptions the child and the “community” has of himself (sic). McAdams summarises this view:-

The putting together of identifications into a new configuration which provides unity and purpose for the individual’s life confers the sense of “inner sameness and continuity” that Erikson sees as the hallmark of mature identity. (McAdams, 1991: 18).

McAdams’ develops Erikson’s conception of identity

McAdams then goes on to make his own original contributions to Erikson’s initial ideas about identity by arguing that the identity “configuration” takes the form of a story. He further argues that this story not only integrates and unifies the person’s many social and historical selves, but also encapsulates their uniqueness. Both of these elements, only implicit in Erikson’s work, are thus now made explicit in McAdams’. McAdams’ puts together Erikson’s explicit suggestion that identity is some kind of “configuration” (Erikson, 1959: 261) and interprets this in the light of Erikson’s practice of exploring the unique and unified identities of a number of individuals (most notably in his Young Man Luther, 1958, and Gandhi’s Truth, 1968) through the writing of their life stories; the result is a conception of identity that is narrative in form. In the course of his research, McAdams develops in detail the three major components of his own conception of identity; the unifying and integrating function of identity, its uniqueness, and its narrative form.

Unity

McAdams offers a number of detailed discussions (McAdams, 1987, 1991) of Erikson’s important phrase “inner sameness and continuity”: “Inner sameness and continuity” are, for Erikson and McAdams, an integral part of the concept of
“identity” (McAdams, 1991: 146). McAdams argues that by “sameness” Erikson refers to the synchronic dimension of identity; in the context of their present social environment people may have a wide variety of social roles, occupations, ideological and personal commitments. They are able, nonetheless, to maintain a sense of unity, even in the midst of their multiplicity of social selves. Erikson refers to this capacity as a sense of inner “sameness” which McAdams explains as:-

- the feeling/belief that one is not a psycho-social chameleon or “phony” in Holden Caulfield’s terms, but is rather the same person, in some essential way, from one situation to another. (McAdams, 1987: 18).

McAdams also discusses the implications of Erikson’s term “continuity”, and argues that this implies a diachronic dimension of identity. Whereas “sameness” referred to the synchronic dimension of identity whereby a person’s multiple social selves were welded into a unity, the term “continuity” emphasized the integration into a single whole the different temporal elements of a person’s past, present and future selves. He suggests that the telling of a life story can assist the person in “binding our days together anew” (Langenbaum, 1982:44). Indeed, argues McAdams (1991: 138), this is precisely what one of the foundational autobiographical works in the Western tradition, Augustine’s (1992) Confessions, does. The Confessions, he suggests, was conceived as an autobiographical project which helped Augustine recover and regroup from a previously “shattered” and “disordered” state. (McAdams, 1991; Jay, 1984).

**Uniqueness**

The uniqueness of a person’s identity according to McAdams (1985, 1993), is constructed in the process of telling their life story. McAdams sometimes refers to the uniqueness of the person’s life story as their “personal myth”: “Your myth is unique to you; more than anything else it is what makes you unique.” (McAdams, 1993: 12), and “each of us creates a personal myth that in all its details is like no other story in the world.” (1993: 50):-

What is a personal myth? First and foremost, it is a special kind of story that each of us constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole...A personal myth is an act of
imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future. (McAdams, 1993: 12)

In his use of the term “personal myth”, McAdams is influenced by a number of earlier writers. The term “myth” is used by Campbell (1962, 1964) to indicate the essential formative stories of a culture which encapsulate their most essential truths and understandings. However, in forging his own distinctive understanding of the term “personal myth”, McAdams draws more especially on the work of Feinstein (1979), Edel (1978) and Pachter (1979). For these writers, the “personal myth” is the thing that “orders his subject’s experience and that offers the key to his nature.” (Pachter, 1979: 14). Influenced by Murray (1938) and McClelland (1975), McAdams also sees the “personal myth” as being strongly bound up with the person’s fundamental motivations.

The structural features of life stories

Throughout an extensive series of publications, McAdams proposes that people’s life stories are characteristically constituted by a number of commonly recurring structural features appearing in their personal narratives. In a series of works (e.g. McAdams, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993) McAdams provides a detailed analysis of these constituent structural features of life stories, and explains how the distinctiveness and uniqueness of a person’s identity are produced through these various narrative means: “like all stories, identity can be understood in terms of setting, scene, character, plot and theme.” (McAdams, 1987: 16, italics added). The precise list of basic narrative elements has developed since his early work in 1985, the list of principal elements in 1997 included:- narrative tone, imagery, theme, ideological setting, character, imago and generativity script.

Developmental stages in narrative creation

McAdams, like Erikson, espouses a developmental theory of identity formation. Erikson had suggested (1959) that there are eight psycho-social stages in each person’s life-cycle, and McAdams has argued that there are parallel stages through which a person’s life story is developed; at each stage, distinctively different elements
of the life story are added. The development of “narrative tone”, for instance, he sees as characteristic of the earliest stage of infancy when the child is learning, at a preverbal level, about whether the world is a trustworthy place or not. As a result of their experiences they come either to an optimistic or pessimistic conclusion, and this affects the overall “narrative tone” of their later life stories. In outline, the developmental stages and narrative features corresponding to them can be summarised as follows:

Figure 2.1 Main features of McAdams’ life story model (researcher’s summary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>NARRATIVE FEATURE</th>
<th>TYPES AND VARIANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Romance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Irony</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Late Childhood</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Ideology of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideology of Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Nuclear Episodes emphasizing the above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Agentic Imagoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communal Imagoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood</td>
<td>Ending</td>
<td>The Generativity Script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Adulthood</td>
<td>(Life Review)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The developmental aspect of McAdams’ work is largely beyond the scope of the present study, though details of the adolescent and mid-life sections of the schema are discussed critically in later chapters when this study’s findings have been presented. A more detailed summary and discussion of the stages of his developmental schema, and the narrative features associated with it, are provided in the Appendix B (“McAdams’ narrative components and their related developmental stages”).

This developmental perspective on autobiographical narration distinguishes his work from that, say, of Bruner (1986, 1990) and Ricoeur (1992) who, although they may
adopt the idea that narrative may be a “privileged form of mediation” for configuring personal identity, do not consider the developmental context and its implications for such narration. With this brief outline of McAdams’ conception of identity completed, the first part of the chapter concludes. In Part 2, the chapter moves on to offer first a philosophical, and then a comparative psychological critique of his life story model of identity.

PART 2: NARRATIVE IDENTITY: A CRITIQUE

2.6 Philosophical critique of McAdams’ model

The philosophical critique of McAdams’ life story model of identity offered in the present section falls into three distinct sections. The first sub-section briefly outlines a cluster of general epistemological problems which affect McAdams’ model. The section argues that similar problems afflict all attempts at theorising in the social sciences, and so, in these respects, McAdams’ model is no more inadequate than other comparable theoretical enterprises. The second sub-section briefly raises questions about the ontological status of McAdams’ conception of identity, and, in comparison with the attention that this issue has received from many other researchers in the field, notes McAdams apparent reluctance to clarify his own position. In a more constructive enterprise, the third sub-section discusses how Ricoeur’s important and detailed philosophical analysis of the narrative construction of personal identity might be used to complement certain omissions detectable in McAdams’ model.

How far can “identity” be represented adequately?

This section deals with an epistemological question that might be put simply:-

How far can an intellectual concept like “identity”- whichever specific model be adopted - claim to represent adequately the human reality which it purports to describe?

The present brief discussion of this issue recognises the severe limitations of any attempt to represent the identities of individual human beings adequately. A full
discussion of the wide range of the epistemological issues raised exceeds the scope of the present study, but some of the main issues can, at the very least, be outlined and briefly discussed. Two separate epistemological issues would seem to be of particular importance. The first concerns the necessary limitations of any representation of human experience. The second concerns the transparency and honesty of an individual’s conscious awareness of themselves, and the consequences this has for the truth-status of their reports of their life story and identity.

As poets, philosophers and scientists have long recognised, the inadequacy of human attempts to represent their experience of the world and themselves is inescapable, and Oakeshott (1933) famously described “experience” as one of the most difficult words in the philosophical vocabulary. The great Isaac Newton saw his scientific work as being only like that of a child playing on the sea shore, Thomas Aquinas died saying that the whole magnificent edifice of his philosophy was “so much straw”, and T.S. Eliot (1944/1959) said “Humankind cannot bear very much reality.” As Claxton comments:

People cannot bear very much Reality because the complexity, slipperiness and inscrutability of Reality constantly remind us how inadequate our theories about it really are. (Claxton, 1984:19).

People are rich, complex, fathomless, mysterious, elusive and ever-changing, whilst verbal accounts are limited, partial, fixed and approximate. Bruner puts this fact succinctly when he says: “Life experience is richer than discourse” (Bruner, E., 1986:143), whilst Korzybski’s maxim is equally clear: “the map is not the territory” (in Epston and White, 1990: 2). The radical implication of this insight is that all claims to truth are incomplete, corrigible, approximate and provisional. A considerable philosophical literature has built up on this subject over the last three thousand years, and, during the later part of the twentieth century, scientists have joined the debate too (see, for instance, the work of Bateson, 1972, 1979 and Bandler and Grinder, 1975a, 1975b for two recent and influential perspectives).

Taken seriously, such insights have profound epistemological implications which require an appropriate humility from any researcher. If the Korzybskian perspective is accepted, it follows that all conceptualisations of “experience” or “reality” have the
epistemological status of being incomplete, approximate and provisional personal interpretations rather than objective truths, and this must therefore be true of any attempts to represent a person’s identity in words and concepts.

An additional temporal factor compounds the epistemological problem; the act of understanding is always a kind of bolting of the stable door after the horse of experience has already gone. As Jarvis argues, all knowledge is ultimately history (Jarvis, 2001a). The appropriate response to these epistemological charges can only be an appropriately judicious and reflective humility; any researcher’s theories have the status of being snapshots, momentary impressions, taken at a particular time and place, of particular people. Once the snapshot has been taken, time and people continue to move on. Despite these considerable limitations however, snapshots can nevertheless be informative, revealing, entertaining or interesting, and so, despite their inescapable general epistemological limitations, they may still be worth taking.

A second general area of epistemological difficulty also affects any discipline which relies for its data on the testimony of human beings. The value and reliability of such testimonies varies according to the degree of honesty, openness and insightfulness of those making them. There are degrees of openness, insight, integrity, self-deception and honesty in different people’s knowledge about themselves and their experiences. The oaths administered in court-rooms, for instance, address issues of basic truth-telling and honesty, whilst Existentialist notions of “bad faith” (pretending to ourselves that things could not be otherwise). The psychoanalytical understanding of “denial” address more complex issues of integrity and self-awareness. To make matters more complex still, if Freud and others are correct, there may be large areas of awareness that may be as unconscious to one person as they are obvious to his neighbour. In the case of “self-knowledge”, for instance, it is easy to conceive of a “Johari window” which describes four distinctive epistemic conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things I know about myself that others don’t know</th>
<th>Things that others know and that I also know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Things that others don’t know but that I know</td>
<td>Things that others know but I don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72
Such considerations must qualify any simplistic claims to certain knowledge in the social sciences, particularly those based on biographical data, and, whilst researchers can never overcome the two epistemological challenges outlined in this first subsection, they may somewhat ameliorate its force through their carefulness, competence, well-winnowed research designs and continuous self-criticism. Within the context of the present study, such issues are discussed more specifically later.

**Ontological issues**

Even when the previous limitations of human cognition have been recognised, a further epistemological question arises: *How far does the act of knowing actually discover, create, or even falsify the objects of its scrutiny?* In the case of the present study, this general question resolves into a more specific question regarding the nature and ontological status of the “identity” or “self” that is represented by a theorist’s conception of it. It is clear that a wide range of views are possible. At the realist end of the spectrum, Descartes (1985) seems to believe in some kind of a real substantial self that may be discovered through a process of systematic doubt, whilst at the opposite end of the spectrum, Vonnegut’s remark: “We are what we pretend to be - so take care what you pretend to be” (quoted in Claxton, 1994), suggests a more radically constructivist view.

With regard to any autobiographical account which purports to reveal the “identity” and nature of its writer, a wide variety of epistemological positions are possible. Denzin (1989) accuses his earlier work (1970, 1978) of a somewhat naïve realism that assumed that there was a fixed and stable “subject” who was a fixed reality “out there”, irrespective of the researcher’s investigations. Freud seems to make similar assumptions in his own practice of psychoanalysis; Bettelheim (1989) points out the archaeological metaphor which permeates the former’s work, suggesting that Freud saw his analytical task in terms of uncovering something that was there, but simply hidden by obfuscating layers.

Later psychoanalytical theorists - though still in advance of theorists in most of the other social sciences - have questioned Freud’s naïve realism. For instance, Spence’s
(1982), *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* questioned whether the patient in analysis ever truly *recovered* the past through the exercise of memory. It may be more accurate, he suggested, to see the process of analysis as enabling the patient to create a *new* narrative rather than recover an old "real" one. Spence’s position is ambivalent, however; a belief in the *reality* of this self is coupled with a despair about its discovery. In contrast, however, Schaffer (1981) was prepared to dispense with both Freud’s archaeological metaphor and any residual idea of a realist self altogether, and to re-configure the whole psychoanalytical endeavour in a more radical way, and a way which elevated still further the importance of *narrative* as constitutive of personal identity. In Schaffer’s view, therapy is essentially a process of creative autobiographical *construction*. The role of the analyst is not that of an archaeologist, but instead, more akin to that of an editor, proof-reader, co-scriptwriter, who assists the patient in the critical and creative act of re-writing or re-telling the story of who they are in such a way that they find it easier and more creative to live with. In similar vein, Polonoff’s paper *Self Deception* (1987), much more explicitly, argued in a way similar to Vonnegut (in Claxton, 1994) that the self was a *product* of a patient’s narratives, rather than a hidden object. Psychoanalytical theory has thus attributed to the “self” a variety of ontological statuses, ranging from Freud’s *real* but hidden object, to Schafer’s invented story that makes daily life more comfortable.

A parallel debate may be observed in social theory influenced by (predominantly) French post-structuralist thought. Many post-structuralist thinkers have rejected entirely the “reality” of the self and its representations, proclaiming instead such phenomena as the “death of the author” and the “biographical illusion”. Barthes, for instance, announces that: “it is language which speaks, not the author” (Barthes, 1977:143), whilst Bourdieu (1986), Bertaux (1987), and Roos (1987), have, in their different ways, advanced the view that any coherence that an individual’s life story may seem to have is largely a *socially* constructed *illusion* resulting from the imposition of culturally-given beliefs upon the flux of personal experience. Consequently, the telling of a life story always results in a “biographical illusion”, since, they argue, these socially-derived beliefs impart to biographies a coherence and connectedness which *real* life lacks. In a slightly more *individual* vein, Bruner (1991), as was seen earlier, believes that “lives are lived according to the same conventions in
accordance with which they are told", and is happy to articulate the constructivist ontology which this pre-supposes:-

Philosophically speaking, the approach I shall take to narrative is a constructivist one – a view that takes as its central premise that "world making" is the principal function of the mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts. (Bruner, 1987: 11).

In between Freud’s and Descartes’ realist end of the spectrum and Bourdieu’s and Bruner’s more radically constructivist end, may be found a number of intermediate positions, such as those of Plath (1987) and Ricoeur (1992/1994). Plath (1987), in a detailed analysis of Montaigne’s Essays (1572-1588/1958), argues that the autobiographical meanings of the self are fundamentally unstable and only realised through a continuing series of successive temporal productions; Montaigne’s “self” is “consubstantial” with his writings. Commenting on this, Denzin suggests:-

He is who he writes, and who he writes keeps changing. His self is a temporal production. He is not a biographical illusion but a biographical production. (Denzin, 1989:63)

Though its ontology is not entirely clear (a reader familiar with early Christianity’s Arian controversy, for which the notoriously ambiguous theological term “consubstantial” was originally invented, will see irony heaped upon confusion here), Plath’s view may have some similarities with the hermeneutical position of Ricoeur who argues that:-

As for the notion of the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organise life retrospectively... (Ricoeur, 1992/1994:162).

Although tedious to some temperaments, debates about the ontological status of the self and its identity have featured prominently in recent work in the social sciences, as even a cursory examination of basic methodological texts, such as those of Denzin (1989), Denzin and Lincoln, (1994), Richardson (1996) and Cresswell (1998) would indicate.

In contrast, McAdams’ work demonstrates a reluctance to engage with the issues of ontology and representation, and is sometimes seemingly inaccurate in its reading of
some of the literature which discusses such issues. For instance, in a discussion of
their work, he seems not to notice the significant major conflict between Spence’s
(1982) and Schafer’s (1981) views, when he likens both to Sartre in his brief
discussion of Sartre’s “true novels”. McAdams seems to maintain a non-committal
agnosticism on the issue:—

Should the stories forged in the psychoanalytic hour bear a direct relation to
reality? The problem of truth is a thorny one, with some scholars maintaining
that story and reality are two different realms and that it, therefore, makes no
sense to speak of “narrative truth”. On the other hand, some maintain that
stories may provide a “deeper” truth... (McAdams, 1991: 140)

Although the summary is a judicious one, there seems a reluctance here to engage in
some of the difficult issues of epistemology and representation which Denzin and
Lincoln (1994:9) have gone so far as to describe as the “crisis of representation”
which dominates the social sciences.

To reinforce the impression of reluctance, it is also instructive, for instance, to
compare McAdams’ (1991: 140) discussion of Sartre’s “true novels” (Baudelaire,
1950; Genet, 1963 and Flaubert, 1981) with Denzin’s (1989: 64ff) discussion of the
same works; the latter demonstrates a keener sense of the ontological and
epistemological issues. Denzin, in contrast to McAdams, characterises Sartre as
representing the kind of pre-critical view which also permeated early twentieth
century sociology; a belief in “a real subject who is present in the world” (Denzin,
1989:14). In contrast, Denzin himself, instructed by Derrida (1976, 1978) claims that:-

...there is no clear window on to the inner life of a person, for any window is
always filtered through the glaze of language, signs and the process of

Overall, McAdams’ work is less articulate about the philosophical underpinnings of
his work than most other major scholars in the field.

The avoidance of philosophical discussion in McAdams’ work is not only unusual,
but, in another sense, surprising, since a philosopher of considerable eminence exists
whose life’s work has revolved around the exploration of the use of narrative in
McAdams’ life story model of identity with a philosophical rationale of considerable sophistication and appropriateness. An overview of the contributions which Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical account of the narrative construction of personal identity might make occupies the final part of the chapter’s philosophical critique.

**A speculative meeting; What Paul Ricoeur could say to Dan McAdams**

De Botton (1997) records an extraordinary meeting-that-never-was between Marcel Proust and Samuel Beckett. Returning from a celebratory dinner, these two revolutionary literary giants were obliged to share a carriage home - and sat in silence all the way to their respective residences; one assumes the world is a poorer place for their avoidance of what might have been a fascinating exchange of views. In a similar way, the potential value of a detailed and deep conversation between Ricoeur and McAdams on the subject of narrative identity would seem to be considerable. In their respective philosophical and psychological fields, both are the undisputed masters of the narrative conception of identity. In this section, the conversation must, perforce, be somewhat one-sided, with Ricoeur’s perspectives on narrative identity taking the floor. The conversation, however, has, unlike the case of Proust and Beckett, at least begun. In one or two footnotes, and in the text of *The Stories We Live By* (1993/1997), the introductions are made:-

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes that “time becomes human time to the extent it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent it portrays the features of temporal existence. What Ricoeur means is that human being tend to comprehend time in terms of stories. (McAdams, 1993/1997:30).

A number of philosophers have made important contributions to the development of narrative conceptions of identity, and the work of Dilthey (1910/1976), Sartre (1981; 1964) and MacIntyre (1981/1985) might receive especial mention in this regard. However, Bruner (1990) offers to Ricoeur the accolade of being “perhaps the deepest and most indefatigable student of narrative” (Bruner, 1990: 46), a strong recommendation from one who might have competed for the accolade himself.
It is difficult to do justice to the subtlety, range and complexity of Ricoeur’s thought in a brief review, but his importance cannot be underestimated. The principal contribution he makes to the debate about the narrative conception of identity is a detailed and sustained analysis of his proposal that a person creates their sense of identity through conferring a *narrative* a form onto the multiplicity of their life’s experiences. The effect of this “transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment” (Ricoeur, 1992/1994: 143) is the creation of one’s *identity* as a kind of “character” in the story so created. The use of narrative, so to speak, becomes the glue or starch by which our multiple, labile and ambivalent experiences are given *distinctive* shape and *unity*.

The use of *narrative* in understanding the human world has been a major interest of this hermeneutical philosopher throughout the greater part of his philosophical career. His substantial three volume work *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988) and his more recent *Oneself as Another* (1992) demonstrate his commitment to the subject. His interest in narrative has been long-standing, going back to his intellectual engagement with the work of Dilthey (1910/1976), and it certainly pre-dates the more recent enthusiasm for “narrative” which has swept the social sciences.

In the numbered sections which follow, it is argued that Ricoeur’s work can complement McAdams’ life story model of identity in six important ways:–

1. “*Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative.*”

First, Ricoeur argues that the *temporal* dimension of human existence is not only an indispensable feature of human life, but that it only becomes *comprehensible* as distinctively *human* when represented in *narrative* form. *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988) deals mainly with the role of narrative in historical writing and literature. In volume I he announces the major theme of his work which McAdams quoted above:–
Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative. (Ricoeur, 1984:3).

He argues for a meaning-creating hermeneutical "healthy circle" between human beings' temporal experience and narrative, suggesting that time is humanized to the extent that it is expressed in narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays human experience. This thoroughly hermeneutical perspective could offer McAdams a distinctive philosophical position which provides a rationale for explaining the necessarily inter-dependent interpretive relationship between human experience and life stories.

2. The importance of subjectivity

Secondly, Ricoeur offers vigorous support for the subject-centred conception of identity that both McAdams (1985, 1989, 1993) and Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969) share. The centrality of the meaning-making subject is basic to Ricoeur's whole project, and this is complemented by the sustained critique which he offers of those parts of the influential English-speaking philosophical tradition which have traditionally been hostile to this. Ricoeur subjects the various accounts of identity and action offered by representative British analytical philosophers to extensive criticism and argues that their accounts are incomplete precisely because they omit the unique subjectivities particular persons, in some cases preferring to view persons either impersonally (Parfitt, 1984), or primarily as spatio-temporal objects (Strawson, 1959). For instance, in the course of developing his distinctive "hermeneutics of the self" in Oneself as Another (1992), he examines the idea of identity construed as "reference" to third person predicates, classically put forward in Strawson's influential book Individuals (1959). Strawson argues that unless there is an assumed spatio-temporal matrix against which or within which all "definite descriptions" are located, and to which they can be referred, then no personal terms can have meaning. Strawson rejects consciousness and other mental events as "properly basic"; for him, mental events and experiences can only be secondary predicates of physical bodies. In contrast, Ricoeur argues that Strawson's omission or elision of subjectivity has the undesirable consequence of thereby viewing individuals primarily as objects. Personal
identity, he concludes, is not reducible to third person predicates without remainder in
the way that Strawson proposes.

From here, Ricoeur moves on to similar analyses of Austin’s (1961), and of Searle’s
(1969) “Speech Act Theory” which has been so influential on subsequent discursive
psychology and Discourse Analysis, and then to a lengthy analysis of Theory of Action
- such as that found in Anscombe’s Intention (1957/1979) and Hampshire’s Thought
and Action (1959). He then concludes that the self and its subjectivity is still
substantially left out of all such accounts. Moreover, the temporal dimension has also
been omitted, leaving the self as a punctiliar, a-temporal and de-contextualised thing.

3. Narrative as a “privileged form of mediation”

Thirdly, however, Ricoeur argues that the omission of both temporality and
subjectivity from much British philosophical analysis of human experience and
identity can be remedied through the re-valuation of narrative. He argues that whether
reporting human history, constructing fictional literature or autobiography, narrative is
a “privileged medium” (1992/1994:114) for encapsulating and representing the
temporal subjectivities and intentions of particular persons. He further argues that
personal identity has a necessarily temporal dimension, and in order to address the
omissions of British analytical philosophy, he proposes to extend the arguments
already begun in Time and Narrative: “In order to fill this major lacuna I propose to
reconstruct here a theory of narrative…from the perspective of…its contribution to

In Time and Narrative he had discussed the place of narrative in the writing of history
and literature; his later work extends this analysis to the self, and, in Oneself As
Another (1992) he outlines his proposal like this:-

Following the intuitive pre-understanding we have of these things, do we not
consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in
terms of the stories that people tell about them? And are not these life stories
in turn made more intelligible when the narrative models of plots - borrowed
from history or from fiction (drama or novel) - are applied to them? It therefore
seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-
understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction... (1992:114).

Here, in a highly compressed form, Ricoeur sketches the outline of his theory about the place of narrative in the constitution of the self. It is perhaps useful to dwell a little on his statement, the better to appreciate the way it might usefully complement and support McAdams’ empirically grounded life story model of identity. Ricoeur’s hermeneutical account of identity highlights the extent to which narrative identity formation is an interpretive and creative act by which a person’s disparate experiences are given meaning, unity and coherence; it is centrally concerned with individuals actively seeking meaning in their personal experiences. This understanding is in accord with McAdams’ view that the individual who tells their life story is engaging in an interpretive act in which they construct a unique “personal myth”, which is “an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future.” (McAdams, 1993:12)

Ricoeur argues that narrative also has the capacity to incorporate many of the functions of reference, indexicality and action-description which British analytical philosophers were making central to their accounts of personal identity. To make his point clear, Ricoeur (1992/1994) contrasts his own narrative account of the self with Parfitt’s (1984) resolutely non-narrative account offered in the latter’s influential Reasons and Persons (1984). The details of their arguments are beyond the scope of this review, but the essence of Parfitt’s project might be summarised thus:-

My claim is that we could describe our lives in an impersonal way. (Parfitt, 1984:217).

Ricoeur suggests that as long as such a policy permeates the philosophical project of English-speaking philosophers, it will result in the loss of whole realms of what constitutes characteristically human existence. Personal subjectivity, the temporal, social and geographical contexts of human life, as well as ethical dimensions of human existence would all be excluded from such an “impersonal” account. Such losses, he suggests, would be as considerable as they are insupportable.
Fourthly, Ricoeur argues that the use of autobiographical narrative provides a tool by which individual subjects may unify and harmonise the disparate contingent events and occurrences of their lives into an ordered, unified and meaningful whole. We construct the meaning of our personal experiences by interpreting ourselves as being a certain kind of character in the ongoing story of our lives:

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her 'experiences'. Quite the opposite; the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. (1992:147)

This corresponds well with McAdams’ own account of the life story as “a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole.” (McAdams, 1993:12).


Through the use of such narrative devices, the unstable and isolated fragmentary moments of people’s lives, Ricoeur argues, are configured into stable and coherent narratives; instabilities are given order and meaning, and contingency is turned into the effect of narrative necessity through the paradoxical poesis of the story-telling.

Ricoeur also addresses the issue of the singularity and unity of the sense of self which Harré’s recent work (1998) has raised, and suggests that these things can also be accomplished by narrative means:

...the character draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others. (Ricoeur, 1992:146).
5. Stories provide detailed social, temporal and moral contexts

Fifthly, Ricoeur argues that the use of autobiographical narrative furnishes its author and protagonist with a richly detailed set of contexts in which the protagonist can explore and display their sense of their life’s meanings. Such stories’ protagonists are characteristically situated in richly detailed social, geographical, temporal and moral landscapes. Not only does narrative enable a person to give meaning, order, unity, singularity and coherence to their lives, but it also incorporates the temporal dimensions of the past and the future, the protagonist’s world of social relationships, and incorporates all these things within the bounds of an ethical horizon:-

...there is no ethically neutral narrative. Literature is a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgements of approval. (Ricoeur, 1992:115).


In his discussion of Nietzsche’s attack on the stability and substantiality of the Cartesian and Modernist self, Ricoeur (1992/1994:16) laments the polarising tendency of subsequent philosophical and psychological debates about the human “subject”; Cartesian metaphysics and modernism, he argues, over-inflate the subject’s autonomy and independence, whilst post-modernism and constructivism deflate and dissolve it in an almost vandalistic way:

Exalted subject, humiliated subject: it seems that it is always through a complete reversal of this sort that one approaches the subject. (Ricoeur, 1992/1994:16).

Ricoeur’s own characteristically hermeneutic approach, in contrast, has been to take a more moderate middle way which recognises both the culturally and discursively saturated condition of human life, as well recognising that the individual subject has a real degree of interpretive autonomy, a view entirely compatible with that of McAdams who seems to describe the process of identity formation in the same kind of interpretive and integrative way as Ricoeur:-

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We each seek to provide our scattered and confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and meaningful in life. (McAdams, 1993/1997:11).

Such a stance would seem perfectly aligned with Ricoeur’s position, which, as was described earlier, describes the process of making sense of life as being a dialectical engagement between a person’s experiences and the capacity for story-telling “fiction”:-

As for the notion of the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively. (Ricoeur, 1992/1994: 162)

The adoption of such a stance would also provide McAdams with his own distinctive contribution to the ontological debate mentioned in the earlier discussion of Bourdieu (1986), Derrida (1976, 1978), and Denzin (1989).

Summary and Conclusions

The principal strengths of Ricoeur’s work for both McAdams’ life story model of identity, and for the present research lies in the sustained and sophisticated philosophical underpinning he is able to provide for both. Ricoeur’s philosophical account of the narrative construction of personal identity complements and reinforces McAdams’ empirical and analytical work on narrative identity. Ricoeur’s account suggests that identity-formation is an inherently interpretive process of meaning-making, and it validates the importance of both experience and narrative in the construction of a person’s subjective sense of their identity. Through the use of narrative, the myriad intentions, events, experiences, changes and chances of a life can be integrated and ordered into a unique, unified and singular meaningful whole.

For all these reasons, Ricoeur makes a strong case that narrative is indeed “among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation” for conceiving and recounting individual lives, and in doing so, reinforces the philosophical plausibility of McAdams’ particular account.
There are many ways in which the unique identity of an individual might be represented. McAdams’ life story model of identity is not the only conceptual tool available by which the differentiating characteristics of an individual might be represented. Although McAdams’ “life story” model of identity offers one of the most extensive and richly-contextualised models, the history of twentieth psychology, however, has witnessed a number of other approaches to the description of the differences between persons. Many of these approaches have been nomothetic, non-narrative and subject to mathematical analysis. Such approaches include Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory (1955), Rogers’ “Self Concept” Theory (1951), Cattell’s “Trait” Theory (1965) and Eysenck’s “Type” Theory (1975). Unlike McAdams’ model, most of these other models have asked subjects to indicate responses to standardised tests, usually in the form of selecting single words from a limited number of alternative words that the subject believes represent particular personal attributes or qualities. The subject’s responses to such personality measures are then characteristically analysed mathematically and the person’s characteristics are expressed in terms of a standardised measuring scale, in terms of a limited number of personality factors, or in terms of psychological “type”. In recent years, McCrae and Costa’s (1985, 1987) “five factor” model has gained credence as the foremost non-narrative approach to the description of individual difference.

In a chapter of this scale, an exhaustive review of all the possible approaches to the description of individual difference is beyond the scope of the research. Nonetheless, to complete the critical examination of McAdams’ distinctive life story model as a tool for encapsulating a person’s unique differences, it is important to consider a major alternative, and to discuss whether there are reasons for preferring a McAdams’ narrative model over an important and influential non-narrative model, such as that of McCrae and Costa (1985,1987). Although the merits of McAdams’ model have been advocated by Harré (1998:87,142), Harré (1998:94) concedes Lamiell’s (1997) point that in practice, personal uniqueness might be represented by a much smaller number of features than an autobiography is able to supply:-
Uniqueness can be expressed in the concepts of the recently revived trait theory, in that any individual could have a unique position in the 'space' defined by the Big Five dimensions of the current version of the theory. (Harré, 1998: 94)

It may be, therefore, that the five-factor model might provide an adequate tool for the representation of people’s unique and unified identities.

To explore this argument, the present section describes McCrae and Costa’s (1985, 1987) “five-factor” model briefly, and, having outlined the characteristic differences that exist between these models, suggests reasons for preferring McAdams’ life story model of identity for the purposes of the present study. Considerations of space preclude a detailed critical discussion of the construction, nature, empirical support and limitations of the “five factor” theory, or a parallel comparative critique of McAdams’ life story model in the main body of the present report; a detailed critique of these things is, however, provided later in Appendix C (“Two alternative models of unique identity; a critical comparison of McAdams’ narrative and McCrae and Costa’s ‘Big Five’ models”).

The “five-factor” or “Big Five” model of personality is associated with McCrae and Costa (1984, 1985, 1987), Costa and McCrae (1985, 1988), McCrae (1989) and others. Although, as mentioned earlier, “trait” theories of personality have had a long history, their limitations made them unpopular for many years amongst the mainstream of personality psychologists (so, Christie and Lindauer, 1963; Edwards, 1957; Argyle and Little, 1972; Mischel, 1968; Mischel and Peake, 1982). Recently, however, the development of the “five-factor” trait model has revived with considerable vigour the flagging fortunes of the trait-based approach to the description and understanding of personal identity.

Origins

The current five-factor model was first articulated in the pioneering work of Fiske (1949), Tupes and Christal (1961) and further reinforced by Norman (1963), although the idea that personality could be classified nomothetically according to a limited number of simple dimensions clearly has a much longer history. Allport and Odbert
(1936) were amongst the first theorists on the scene and produced a list of about 18,000 personality descriptors by searching an unabridged English dictionary. Using a number of complex steps, Cattell (1943) winnowed the list down to 171 terms, which he then used as the basis of an empirical study. These terms were then used by his subjects to rate other people they knew. The list of descriptors was then further reduced to between 35 or 40 clusters of related terms. These were used to construct ratings scales which, in their turn, were used by subjects to rate both themselves and others. Using factor analysis, Cattell (1947) further reduced these factors to 12, after which Fiske’s (1949) analysis advocated the even lower number of five factors.

The Five Factors

In its current form, the five factors are:— (I) Surgency (Extraversion), (II) Agreeableness (Warmth), (III) Conscientiousness (Will), (IV) Emotional Stability (Neuroticism) and (V) Culture (Intellectance, Openness to experience). The theory suggests that each person can be assessed by themselves or by others and allocated a particular score on each of these five separate scales. It is argued that the individual’s resultant profile of five scores will be distinctive, and that the individual’s portfolio of scores on the five factor scales can therefore represent that individual’s uniqueness.

Critique

A number of commentators (Revelle, 1987; Waller and Ben Porath, 1987; Goldberg, 1981) have been sceptical about the fundamental basis of the five-factor test. Leaving aside its lack of theoretical rationale, the artificiality of its construction and its reliance on the mathematical process of factor analysis, Goldberg (1981) has criticised its naïve assumption that natural language can systematically and adequately reflect psychological reality in the simplistic way which the model’s proponents assume. McCrae and Costa have conceded the point:—

No one would imagine that an analysis of common English terms for parts of the body would provide an adequate basis for the science of anatomy; why should personality be different? (McCrae and Costa, 1985:711)
Further technical criticisms of both the model’s construction and empirical grounding can be found in Appendix C. The remainder of the present section is occupied with a more general assessment of the life story and five-factor models in terms of their appropriateness for the purposes of the present study of adolescent identity formation.

One of the most important differences between the two models is that, whereas McAdams’ life story model of identity adopts a resolutely subject-centred perspective, the five-factor model implicitly adopts an observer-based stance. As Lamiell (1981) has argued in a different context, self- and peer-report trait scales implicitly force respondents to compare themselves, as an outsider would, with others. Asking someone to rate themselves with regard to a particular trait implicitly forces them to step outside themselves and compare themselves with other people. This comparative characteristic has enormous consequences for the resultant implicit model of identity. As Hogan (1987) points out, this means that the five-factor theory in effect asks the respondents to describe personality from the standpoint of an observer:

We can now specify with some confidence the structure of the vocabulary that observers use to describe actors – put another way, we have a replicable model of the structure of the personality from the point of view of the observer.” (Hogan, 1987:85).

This observer-centred perspective is quite distinct from a subject-centred perspective, and, as seen in Chapter 1, Jagose (1996) and others have argued that it is the subject’s own view of themselves which is determinative of that person’s sense of identity. This was illustrated, it may be recalled, during a discussion of the issue of identity definition in the case of a group of men who had sex with other men (Jagose, 1996). Despite their regular and often frequent sexual contacts with men which outside observers might label as “gay”, several of those interviewed did not identify themselves as “gay”; in their own eyes, they were “straight”.

A second major difference between the two models is that the five-factor model has no convenient way of addressing or describing what Maddi (1980) calls the “core” elements of personality such as needs, motivations and intentions, whereas, autobiographical narratives are easily able to accommodate such things. Indeed, as
Bruner has argued, such things are central to the structure of narratives: “Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions” (Bruner, 1986:16).

Thirdly, a person’s scores on the five scales of the five-factor model offer a much less detailed type of description of what is distinctive about a person than does an autobiographical narrative. At best, the five-factor model makes bland and general statements about people. As John (1989) argues, the five-factor theory operates at a very general level of description; trait categories are descriptive terms of very high generality or “bandwidth”. The corresponding proportionate cost of such very general descriptions is that they thereby sacrifice “fidelity” to specific details. For instance, the American Psychiatric Association publishes regularly its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, a thick volume which definitively describes in detail the main diagnostic features of the many possible types of psychiatric disorder. The contents of this compendious reference work on the variations in human emotional well-being (covering such diverse conditions as reactive depression, endogenous depression, Alzheimer’s disease, catatonic schizophrenia, mild anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and spider phobias) would be represented by a single score on Scale IV (Emotional Stability) in the five-factor model. It might plausibly be argued that Hamlet’s despairing gloom is differently communicated by Shakespeare’s richly detailed soliloquies and biographically-situated descriptions, than it is by saying that he had a low score on Scale IV (Affect, Emotional Stability). Information of this high level of generality may only with greater difficulty achieve adequate descriptions which aspire to “uniqueness”.

Fourthly, although the five-factor model is capable of making predictions about generic tendencies and patterns of behaviour (Epstein, 1984, Moscovitz, 1988), it is unable to represent an individual’s meanings and interpretations of their experience, or to articulate their explanations about the origins of their particular actions. To many psychologists, this seems a major omission.

Fifthly, the five-factor theory disregards the specific contextual and conditional nature of much human life and conduct. McCrae and Costa (1984) even decry the relevance of considering contextual factors as “the belief that individuals may be
constantly reshaped by their experiences.” (McCrae and Costa, 1984:176). Of course, this is not to deny that people may be remarkably consistent in their general traits and dispositions, a claim that McAdams concedes:-

Extraversion is extraversion, whether it’s among African-American men or German women, in 19th-century London, or among Australian aborigines last week.” (McAdams, 1992:343).

Nonetheless, although the most general traits of a person’s personality may be fairly stable, the behaviour and experience of individual people also differs enormously according to context; Attila the Hun, like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, may both have been caring parents at home, whilst also being ruthlessly efficient executives at work. Unlike the “five-factor” theory, both Erikson’s and McAdams’ conception of identity, in accord with common sense, recognises that each person has a variety of “social selves” whose manifestation is heavily dependent on the ambient social context. Without the means to represent the specificities of these varied social contexts, the five-factor model, unlike the narrative model, is unable to illuminate the diversity of a person’s social selves that constitute an important element of their identity.

Sixthly, unlike McAdams’ narrative model of identity, the five-factor model has no means by which it can represent the multiplicity of a person’s temporal selves. The static and a-temporal five factor model offers the respondent no opportunity to register their past selves, a major weakness in the opinion of many scholars who view a person’s historical dimension as importantly constitutive of personal identity. Sacks’ (1985) cases of Korsakoff’s Syndrome examined in the previous chapter indicate that the loss of contact with memories of one’s past has a dramatic and deleterious effect on identity, a dimension hardly considered by the “five-factor” model.

Finally, the five factor model is incapable of offering any kind of account of the unity and integrity of the different aspects of personal identity, whether social, temporal or characterological. By the very nature of factorial analysis, the five factors have been identified because of their mathematical separateness. The theory suggests that there is no significant mathematical association between the five factors. The five-factor model thus presents five mathematically separate characteristics which a person may
manifest, and has no means of either representing or accounting for the apparent unity and integrity of the disparate factors in a single personality. The paradoxical temporal and social unities which are characteristic of Erikson’s and McAdams’ conceptions of identity are thus completely omitted from representation, consideration or explanation by the “five-factor” model.

In summary, the five-factor model of personality provides an undetailed and de-contextualised perspective on personal identity (what Geertz might call an “experience-distant” and “thin description”) rather than the richly detailed and contextualised type of account characteristically given by personal narrative (what Geertz might call an “experience-near” and “thick description”). It offers an observer-centered view rather than the subject’s own perspective. It is unable to represent either a person’s various social selves or their different past selves, and is thereby unable to represent or account for the paradoxical unity and integrity of most people’s complex identities. It is characterised by a nomothetic rather than an idiographic approach. McAdams, drawing on an insight of Goldberg’s (1981), summarises the significance of the five-factor approach to describing individual persons:–

The Big Five constitute a psychology about the observations of strangers. They encapsulate those most general and encompassing attributions ...that we might wish to know when we know virtually nothing else about a person. (McAdams, 1992:353)

He concludes that the five-factor model of personality is essentially a “psychology of the stranger”. Although it may therefore be viewed as one possible model available for use in personality studies, it is too limited in scope, depth, contextual detail and subjective richness to serve as the integrative model of personality or identity for either the whole field of personality studies, or, indeed, the present research.

All these reasons suggest that the “five-factor” model, whatever scientific pedigree it may have, and whatever efficacy it may have in encapsulating an observer’s perspective of some of the most general and stable traits of an individual’s personality, is unable to displace McAdams’ narrative model of identity as an appropriate heuristic tool for the purposes of the present study. The narrative model’s
subject-centered (rather than observer-centered) perspective, its richly detailed and highly contextualised descriptions of personal meaning, and its capacity to represent and integrate the subject’s different social and temporal worlds, make it an altogether superior tool for representing the individual uniquenesses of particular people.

Having described and established a case for the suitability of McAdams’ life story model of identity for the purposes of the present research, the next chapter seeks a theoretical perspective on the process by which an individual comes to produce their life story. If a life story is the “product” as McAdams (1987:16) puts it, what is the “process” by which such a narrative identity is produced? Answering this question will provide the theoretical perspective necessary to connect McAdams’ model of identity with a particular vision of the process of identity formation. Only when this has been done can the appropriate research methodology for the study be selected. The next chapter therefore turns to the search for a suitable theoretical perspective which is capable of accommodating both the idiosyncratic individual as well as the shared social experiences of the study’s Public Schoolboy autobiographers as they construct their individual senses of personal identity.
CHAPTER 3

LIVE AND LEARN: TOWARDS A LEARNING PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY FORMATION

When we first filmed the live tiger I was concerned about the safety of the crew and asked the handler how we should behave. He said we should all keep close together and not straggle. I asked what would happen if the tiger went for one of us. He said the tiger would probably knock us down and lie on us. The danger was that the tiger becomes possessive at that stage and thinks that another animal might steal his meat – one of us. I asked him what one should do in the circumstances. He answered that one should hit the tiger across the nose, hard. Asked what this would do, the handler replied, "make his eyes water".

You live and learn in the tiger business. (“Esso” Magazine)

3.1 Aims and outline of the chapter

From what theoretical perspective should the present study’s investigation of its subjects proceed? In order to provide a theoretical perspective from which to conduct the study, this chapter surveys a range of possible perspectives on identity formation. In Classical art, the soul - the essence of a person’s identity - was often represented as a butterfly. If the soul had literally been a butterfly, the would-be lepidopteral researcher would have to consider what visual instruments and perspectives (telescope?, hand lens?, microscope?) would best serve the needs of research best. The researcher’s selection of telescope, hand lens or microscope would each result in different accounts of the fluttering object under scrutiny. In just the same way, there are many theoretical perspectives through which the formation of a person’s identity might be examined, and the theoretical framework chosen will have a strong bearing on what it is possible to discover. A theoretical perspective is, thus potentially either the magnifying glass or the blinkers (necessarily both, argues Gadamer, as discussed in the next chapter) through which the study’s subjects are examined, so the selection of such a perspective must not, in the words of Archbishop Cranmer’s Marriage Service (Book of Common Prayer, 1662), be “taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly”, but “reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly”. Since the framework
directs (and potentially limits) what can be investigated, *caveat emptor* is the watchword for the potential lepidopterist and researcher alike. Since the present study’s “butterflies” are the unique identities of a group of adolescent boys who live in the enclosed and unusual world of an English Public School, it is important to select a theoretical perspective which not only does justice to their *individual* uniquenesses, but also to their perceptions of their unusual *social* world.

There are very many possible perspectives that might be adopted on the process of identity formation, and the present chapter explores some of those that were considered before the practicalities of the study’s design and methods were selected. The study’s first chapter discussed the concept which stands at the center of the present study; *identity*. This was followed by a chapter which went on to explain more precisely how that concept might be effectively interpreted and operationalised through the use of McAdams’ *life story model of identity*. The two chapters which *follow* the present chapter outline the *methodology* and *design* of the present study. The task of the present chapter, therefore, is to expedite the harmonious joining together of the earlier *conceptual* chapters with the more *practical* chapters which are to follow.

It is crucial that whichever theoretical perspective is adopted, it is able to accommodate not only the specific characteristics of McAdams’ *life story model of identity*, which is the primary conceptual tool in terms of which the study’s principal research question is articulated and operationalised, but also encompass both the students’ perceptions of themselves, as well as their perceptions of the unusual social context in which they find themselves for most of the year. Unlike many other autobiographical studies, the present study’s adolescent participants were all members of the same English Public School “total institution” (Goffman, 1961). This distinctive shared environment enables the researcher to explore in some detail the possible influence which this environment may have on the boys’ identities, a consideration which requires from the study’s design a greater attentiveness to possible *social* influences, than might be the case if the study were to be collecting autobiographies from subjects who shared no such distinctive social environment. In addition, therefore, to satisfying the requirements of McAdams’ particular model of identity,
the study’s theoretical perspective must also be able to accommodate not only the individual and social aspects of their distinctive situation, but also the dynamic relationship between them.

In surveying the range of possible perspectives on identity formation, the first part of the present chapter draws attention briefly to the very wide range of different accounts of what Burkitt (1991) calls “the social formation of the personality”. Although a detailed discussion of these is impossible within the limited scope of the present chapter, it is argued that many types of theory can be ruled out for the purposes of the present research because, whatever truths they may represent, they are unable to accommodate sufficiently both the students’ perspectives on their own individual characteristics, as well as the students’ perspectives on their shared social world and its characteristics. Theories which fail to recognize sufficiently the socially-constructed and discursive nature of identity are rejected along with those, at the other extreme, that present an “oversocialized” account of identity and thereby ignore the complex dynamics and interpretive autonomy of individual cognition.

In the second part of the chapter, a number of the more promising and plausible perspectives on identity formation, such as those of Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969), Stern (1985), Bruner (1986, 1990), Harré (1998) and G.H.Mead (1934) are discussed, and their utility for the purposes of the present study assessed. The final section of the chapter goes on to argue that the search for a suitably balanced theory which can do justice to both the socially and individually constructed nature of identity, thereby conveniently accommodating both the students’ views of themselves, and of their distinctive school social world, requires a learning perspective. The formation of a sense of who one is, and the sense of what one’s social world is like, are alike to be seen as things that are learned by the individual as a result of their own particular experiences. After briefly examining a number of specific theories of “experiential learning” it is argued, finally, that Jarvis’ theory of biographically-situated learning has, for the specific purposes of the present study, many features which specially commend it.
The title of a recent book by Jarvis, "The Practitioner Researcher; Developing Theory from Practice" (Jarvis, 1999) might provide the basis for a rough and ready metaphor which can indicate the direction of this chapter. A practitioner researcher, Jarvis explains, is someone engaged in some field of practice, who, as a reflective participant, aims to gain greater understanding of that field. Practitioners, crucially, are people who are learning from their experiences. The present chapter will conclude that, metaphorically at least, adolescents are "practitioner researchers", who are learning about themselves and their social world from the ongoing experiences of their lives. Unlike the academic post-graduate practitioner researcher who produces an academic thesis, however, one of the products of adolescent learning is the development of a sense of self, an identity.

3.2 Social cipher or splendid isolation? : Classifying theories of the social formation of identity

The aim of this section is to outline briefly the range of theories which purport to give accounts of the social formation of the personality. During the course of the following schematic summary of such theories, it is argued that, for the purposes of the present research, some types of theory are to be preferred to others, and that amongst those theories which have an adequate account of the social foundations of mind, only those theories which focus primarily on individuals (rather than the various shared social, political and discursive constraints acting upon them), and which also attribute to those individuals an adequate degree of interpretive autonomy, are capable of matching adequately both the requirements of McAdams’ model of identity and also the study’s social dimension.

Within the restricted scope of the present chapter, Burkitt’s (1991) analysis of the wide range of theories can provide a convenient way of providing a schematic summary of the wide range of what he calls “theories of the social formation of the personality.” His analysis suggests that theories may be divided into two broad categories, each of which may be further sub-divided. The first of Burkitt’s categories would include those theories of self-formation in which human beings are viewed as existing in “splendid isolation” from society; individuals may be depicted as self-
contained and isolated “monads” who exist separately from, and even in opposition to the social world in which they live. This conception of the individual Burkitt (1991) characterizes as monadistic and dualistic.

In Burkitt’s second category we find those more holistic and socially-derived theories of self-formation in which “individuals derive their identity from their place within social relations and interdependencies.” (Burkitt, 1991:25). We might characterize this category of theories as dialectical theories of identity formation; at its extreme end are those theories which depict the individual as a social cipher.

An implicit suggestion behind Burkitt’s two-fold classification is that the two major categories of theory also reflect two distinct phases in the evolution of social theory. Dialectical theories, he would argue, reflect a more sophisticated, as well as a more recent understanding of social processes, and one which develops and goes beyond the earlier monadistic and dualistic theories. He explains the basis for the two-fold distinction as follows:-

The idea that there is a basic division between society and the individual is a nonsense. All efforts to find the ‘relationship’ between the ‘two’ are wasted, for when we look at society and the individual we are viewing exactly the same thing - social being - from two different angles. Any understanding of the social nature of the self must therefore be a dialectical understanding. By this I do not mean a circular mode of theorizing, wherein society affects the individual in some respects while the individual affects society in others. A dialectical relationship is one in which a new dimension is created by the reciprocal relations and effects of objects or humans....The state of self-conscious 'individuality', where each individual takes on their own identity, is not innate or prior to society but only comes into existence through social relations. It is only in the social relations and objective activities between human beings, and between humans and their environment, that we find the birth and sustenance of the self. (Burkitt, 1991:188-9)

The following table displays Burkitt’s two main categories and their four constituent sub-categories, along with a few illustrative names to provide a thumbnail sketch of his analytical scheme:-
It is unnecessary to discuss the *details* of the sub-types of theory or any *particular* theorists here. Within the limited scope of the present chapter it is sufficient to explore the significance of his two main *categories:*-

1. **Dualistic Theories**

Burkitt suggests that this type of theory is characterized by a

...view of human beings as self-contained unitary individuals who carry their uniqueness deep inside themselves, like pearls hidden in their shells. It is a vision captured in the idea of the person as a monad — that is, a solitary individual divided from human beings by deep walls and barriers: a self-contained being whose social bonds are not primary in its existence, but only of secondary importance. (Burkitt, 1991:1)

Tracing the development of this model in the work of rationalist philosophers from the time of the Renaissance, Burkitt specially notes the dualistic and monadistic tendencies in the work of Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. Social theorists to be included within this category might include Simmel (1971), Durkheim (1938) and Weber
(1968, 1985), as well as aspects of Marx’s earlier thought (1973, 1977). These theories, in different ways and in different degrees, separate or oppose the individual to their social context. The accusation of “Leibnizian monadology” is also levelled by Burkitt at Allport’s (1937) genetically based “trait theory” explanation of human individuality, Eysenck’s (1975) similarly genetically-based theory of personality “types”, as well as Cattell’s (1965) more sophisticated, but, he believes, still equally isolationist and individualist account of personality formation. According to Burkitt, Freud (1900/1976, 1930), Kelly (1955), and Behaviourists such as Pavlov (1927), Watson (1919, 1924) and Skinner (1953, 1971), are also to be included in the same broad category since each, in their own distinctive ways, assumes a dualistic and isolationist separation between the individual organism and their environment.

It is at this point that Burkitt draws a distinction between two sub-types that exist within this first dualistic category; there are, he suggests, both active and passive types of dualistic theory, or, to change the terminology, those which prefer an idealist philosophy to a materialist one. In the former category we might include Kelly’s personal construct theory (1955) in which people are constantly and actively interpreting and re-interpreting their environment, building up mental maps. Within this system, both the world and the personality at any one time are seen as the sum total of the individual’s construct systems or ideas. The opposite type of theory is represented by Skinner’s version of Behaviourism, in which behaviour is passively conditioned through stimuli ultimately derived from the material environment and the reinforcements it returns to our actions upon it. Burkitt argues that the monadism and dualism of these theories have now been superceded by more sophisticated and dialectical understandings of the relationships between individuals and society.

It would be possible to quibble with aspects of Burkitt’s categorization, but the general outlines of his scheme also seem to highlight both some genuine trends, as well as some genuine advances in social theory. Most of the theories in this first category fail to recognize the fundamental importance of the social world for identity formation, which renders them unsuited as potential theoretical frameworks for the purposes of the present socially-situated autobiographical study. For this reason, none of the theories in this first category is further discussed here.
2. Dialectical Theories

Burkitt’s second category includes those theorists who incorporate into their work a more thoroughly dialectical understanding of the social formation of personality. He sub-divides this category into two sections. Into the first sub-division he places “those who see the social formation of identity as closely bound up with discourse and language” (Burkitt, 1991; italics added), whilst into the second sub-division he places those theorists who see the basis of identity as located in the social, political and economic relations between individuals, and which argue that it is these interdependencies which structure their action and communication.

Into the former category he places the work of G.H.Mead (1934), whose importance he believes is very undervalued. He also places alongside Mead the work of social psychologists belonging to the ethogenic school who take their lead from the sociological work of Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1961, 1963). The category would include the work of Harré (1983, 1998) and Shotter (1984, 1989). Into this first sub-category he would also place the work of those theorists influenced by the new linguistic turn of French philosophy dating from the 1960s; Althusser (1971), Lacan (1977) and Foucault (1970, 1977, 1979, 1986).

Karl Marx might be considered the presiding spirit over Burkitt’s second subdivision of his “dialectical” category of theories. Like Marx, Sève (1978), for instance, argues that social relations are primary in the development of individuals. Other kindred spirits might include members of the Russian cultural-historical school, exemplified by Vygotsky (1962, 1978), who emphasize the importance of social relations in the extension of previous learning and innate capacities. Finally, the work of the Frankfurt School (e.g. Fromm, 1956/1991, 1962; Habermas, 1972, and of Norbert Elias, 1978, 1982) argues that “humans can never be considered as separate from the figuration of social relations they form between themselves.” (Burkitt, 1991:163).

Although all the theories mentioned in both of these “dialectical” sub-categories recognize the fundamental importance of the social world for identity formation,
many of them, it is argued, tend to present an "over-socialized" (so, Wrong, 1961) account of human beings, and one which does insufficient justice to the interpretive autonomy and dynamic qualities of the individual. The more extreme Marxist and post-structuralist theories may present individuals as social, economic or discursive ciphers. It is also argued here that many of the "dialectical" theorists mentioned in this category, with the possible exception of Harré (1983, 1998), focus their attention and explanations at the level of the society, rather than that of the individual. Rather than being "local" and subject-centered theories, many of the theories in these last two sub-categories thus tend to be both macro-social theories of individual identity, as well as being "objective" or observer-centered theories.

Whatever their merits may be as exercises in social theory, therefore, since they are neither sufficiently individually nor locally focused, such theories are unsuited to the requirements of the present study. Moreover, almost all of these theorists, with the exception of Harré (1998) fail to consider the phenomenon of personal uniqueness and unity. Thus, though interesting and valid in their own sphere, most of these "dialectical" theories are insufficiently attentive to the specificities of individual identity to provide the kind of theoretical perspective necessary and appropriate for the purposes of the present research.

3.3 Re-valuing individuality: the socialized yet unique individual

Burkitt's bi-polar categorization, however, is vulnerable to precisely the kind of deconstructive criticism that Derrida (1976) both advocates and practices in his Of Grammatology. The bi-polar fracture of Burkitt's scheme seems to be driven by a vigorous desire to reverse the individualistic values and perspectives of the previous "monadistic" order of social theory. In consequence, the individuality of particular individuals therefore seems to be less highly valued in much recent social theory than the social and discursive constraints in which they are enmeshed. As was mentioned earlier, the implicit suggestion behind Burkitt's two-fold classification is that the two major categories of theory also reflect two distinct phases in the evolution of social theory, and that dialectical theories reflect a more sophisticated, as well as a more recent understanding of social processes. Behind the two categories, it is suggested,
lies the pervasive “critique of the human subject” (Madan, 1993) which has
classified post-structuralism’s critique of Modernism. In particular, the movements
in the social sciences which Burkitt describes reflect a change from one model of the
human agent to another. The older model (variously labelled as “Renaissance”,
“humanist”, “Cartesian” or “Modernist”) represents an individualistic and autonomous
conception of the person as “a free intellectual agent” whose “thinking processes are
not coerced by historical or cultural circumstances.” (Madan, 1993: 1). The newer
model, in contrast, can be glimpsed in what is negated in the previous quotation; the
“subject” is seen as very much “coerced by historical or cultural circumstances.” In
this second model, the “subject” is seen as a product of a variety of cultural, political
and discursive forces, many of which are beyond control and consciousness, with a
consequent radical reduction or removal of personal autonomy.

Burkitt’s own sympathies, it would seem, lie with the latter model, particularly as
described by those theorists, such as Elias (1978, 1982), whose “political” account of
self-formation emphasizes strongly the priority of the power relations and
interdependencies current in particular societies. It is suggested here that, whilst the
Cartesian picture of the human agent has rightly been criticised for its dualism, as well
as for its excessively optimistic conception of individual autonomy and independence,
the unconscious tendency of many of the alternative theories have suffered from the
opposite vices. Post-structuralist thought has seemed at times to be immoderately
hostile to any shreds of individuality and autonomy. Levy-Strauss’s vituperations
about the “spoiled brat of philosophy” have already been mentioned, as has his
assertion that the ultimate goal of the human sciences “is not to constitute man but to
dissolve him.” (in Madan, 1993:1). From a Marxist background, Althusser (1971) has
frankly espoused a theoretical “anti-humanism”.

The present writer has no wish to deny or undermine the genuine insights and
discoveries of the social sciences during the twentieth century about the complex web of
social, cultural, discursive and political constraints which constitute what can now
only ironically be described as “human nature”, nor to return to a naïve and pre-
critical modernist conception of the human agent. It is suggested, however, that many
of the more recent “dialectical” theories have themselves been guilty of bias and
excess. In particular, two points are made. First, that the mainstream of social science
has, in its attentiveness to the shared and constraining *commonalities* of social
phenomena, been insufficiently attentive to the *uniqueness* of particular individuals.
Secondly, as Murdoch (1992) argues, an implicit, if unconscious tendency towards
determinism has seeped into many social and political theories. The influential
Derrida, for instance, is criticised by Murdoch as a “Linguistic Determinist”
(Murdoch, 1992: 185).

A parallel argument is advanced by Wrong in a famous paper entitled *The Oversocialised Conception of Man*, originally published in 1961. Wrong argued that
contemporary sociology had assumed a model of human beings (the “*homo sociologicus*”, after Veblen’s *homo economicus*) which was “oversocialised”. Too
simplistic a use, he argued, was made of notions such as the internalisation of social
norms and the human need for social acceptance. The result was a model of man (sic)
which was *conformist* and *passive* in the face of social pressures. Such a view, he
claimed, was at odds with the more dynamic and conflictual accounts of human beings
given by Freud (1930), Hobbes (1651/1914), as well as common experience. We are
social, he argued, but not entirely socialised. Giddens (1973) made a point similar to
that of Wrong (1961):-

The leading forms of social theory, it is asserted, have treated man a *homo sociologicus*, the creature rather than the creator of society, as a passive
recipient of social influences rather than as an active, willing agent who injects
meaning into an otherwise featureless moral universe. (Giddens, 1973: 15).

It is perhaps significant that Burkitt’s analysis omits entirely any discussion of the
work of those theorists who, whilst accepting the ineluctably social nature of identity
formation, have tried to consider the *individual* and *personal* nature of identity, and
have attributed to the *individual* the capacity interpret their experiences in
idiosyncratic ways which are not necessarily *determined* by social, discursive or
political influences. In addition to certain specific social psychologists such as Bruner
(1986, 1990) and Harré (1998), such thinkers might include a number of post-
Freudian and “Object Relations” psychoanalytical theorists such as Winnicott (1964,
1965, 1974), Fairbairn (1952) and Klein (1975) who have contributed insights on the
process of identity development. Combining both a psychoanalytical and a
developmental perspective, the distinctive and important work of Stern (1985) has made a special study of infant identity development. Burkitt also neglects the personological tradition associated with the work of Murray (1938), White, (1966, 1981), Tomkins (1987), Erikson (1959, 1963) and McAdams (1985, 1993) which has, particularly in the case of the latter two scholars, made a very significant contribution to the exploration of the process of identity formation. It is proposed that these disparate theorists have an emphasis and approach quite distinct from those envisaged by Burkitt’s two principal categories, and could plausibly be seen to constitute a separate category of their own. Such a category might gather together a number of theories which, on the far side of the old dualistic opposition between individual and society, affirms both the ineluctably social and discursive formation of persons, as well as their individual capacities for a degree of autonomous interpretation and creative agency. Some of the thinkers mentioned above have demonstrated that it is possible to conceive of approaches to the social sciences which do justice to both social and individual aspects of identity formation.

Limitations of space in a brief review of this scope preclude further discussion of the academic issues raised in the previous paragraphs. The necessity for the foregoing critique, however, has a stringent practical dimension; the present study is forced to confront the knotty problem of the dialectic of individual interpretive autonomy with social and cultural determinism in a very direct way. The present study of the autobiographies of a group of adolescent boys who live for the majority of the year within the confines of a highly structured residential school, raises the question of how these boys achieve a unique, unified and singular sense of themselves, despite the powerful social pressures to which they are subject. If Burkitt’s argument that “the state of self-conscious ‘individuality’...only comes into existence through social relations” (1991:189), then boys who live in an environment which approximates closely to what Goffman described as a “total institution” (Goffman, 1961) may have a particular problem; how can personal uniqueness, unity and singularity be achieved and maintained in the face of considerable social pressure to conform to official and unofficial group roles and norms? The dialectic of personal uniqueness with social sameness thus lies at the heart of this study and so the researcher is compelled to find a theoretical perspective which does not rule either out of court.
The practical conclusion of this analysis is that none of the theories which Burkitt offers are entirely suited to the needs of the present study, which is obliged, therefore, to look further afield for an appropriate theoretical perspective.

3.4 Criteria for selecting a perspective for the study

The arguments of the previous section have indicated that any theoretical framework which is to be adequate for the purposes of the present study must have at least two characteristics. The first is that such a perspective must, whilst being sensitive to the social constraints acting upon individuals, also be capable of giving sufficient and detailed attention to particular individuals in their own right. The second requirement is that such a perspective must accord the individual sufficient interpretive autonomy and thereby avoid the implication that individuals are merely social ciphers or discursively determined dolts. A perspective which met both these criteria would enable the study to consider in an open-minded way the subsidiary question of how far the individuality of the adolescent participants are influenced or determined by their common membership of a “total institution”. These two requirements may be expressed by saying that an adequate theoretical perspective will:

- Recognize the fundamental importance of the social world for the identity formation of the individual, but also see the individual as an active and potent creator of personal meanings.
- Focus at the very “local” level of the specific individual, rather than on the more general macro level of society whilst also recognizing the dialectical relationship between them.

As was suggested above, most of the “dialectical” theories included in Burkitt’s (1991) analysis fail to provide an adequate treatment of either or both of these criteria, and are consequently rejected from further consideration. The most fertile field of possible theoretical approaches would seem to lie in the direction of those theories individually-focused and often biographical theories which, for the most part, Burkitt’s analysis fails entirely to mention.
An adequate perspective, moreover, must also be able to do justice to the particular model of identity - McAdams’ life story model of identity - through which the study’s principal research question has been operationalised. It is suggested that McAdams’ model proposes that “identity” is:-

- **Cognitive** - It is primarily, but not exclusively, a cognitive concept; the person produces a “mini-theory” about “me”.
- **Subject-centered** - It is concerned with identity from the perspective of the individual’s own point of view; it is a subject-centered rather than an observer-centered perspective.
- **Interpretive** - The life story model acknowledges the individual as a creator of their own meanings; identity formation is thus a fundamentally interpretive, imaginative and selective process, the result of which is the person’s current understanding of themselves.
- **Biographical** - It has the form and content of a life story.
- **Experiential** - The content of the biographical account is principally constructed from the person’s personal experiences.
- **Unique** - The person’s life story presents their “personal myth” which encapsulates their unique experiential learnings and selective life history.
- **Unified and Stable** - The life story confers upon the multiplicity of the person’s social and temporal selves the effect of stability, permanence and unity which the person might otherwise lack.

It cannot be hoped that any single perspective will meet all of these criteria, but it is to be hoped that an adequate theoretical framework for the study would be able to do justice to most. In the final section of the chapter, it will be argued that a learning perspective, in particular the biographically-situated experiential learning approach associated with the work of Jarvis (1987, 1992, 1999) will meet most of these requirements very well, and can therefore be adopted as a useful theoretical perspective for the study.

The following section outlines briefly some of the alternative theoretical perspectives considered, but not eventually adopted. Restrictions of space preclude detailed
discussions of these “roads not taken” (Frost, 1973:77), though Harré’s “Standard Model”, which served as a putative framework during an early phase of the study is discussed later, as well as more fully in Appendix D (“Harré’s ‘Standard Model’ and its account of personal unity and identity.”).

3.5 Possible perspectives : roads not traveled

This section consists of a number of brief sections, each devoted to a theoretical perspective which was considered during the study’s search for a framework which could encompass insights about the process of identity formation as well as accommodate McAdams’ life story model. Each of these perspectives had much to commend them and many were capable of meeting several of the criteria enumerated in the last section. They were not, however, for reasons which will be advanced below, selected as the study’s principal theoretical framework. In a work of this scope, the discussions in this section do not and cannot claim to offer a full and detailed discussion or refutation of the several perspectives mentioned, but only an estimation of their usefulness for the limited perspectives of the present study.

Post-structuralist and post-feminist perspectives on identity formation

Post-structuralist approaches to the concept of “identity” were considered in Chapter 1. A number of post-structuralist perspectives on the process of identity formation were also considered at an early stage of the research. As has already been seen, there can be no doubting that the post-structuralist tradition of thinking has made the examination and critique of the human “subject” a central part of its project. Indeed, in a summary of the principal features of the movement, Sarup (1993) places the “critique of the human subject” as its first obvious characteristic. Post-structuralism’s interest in the nature of the “subject”, however, is frequently combative, and often organised around attempts to destroy, dissolve or discredit the independent Cartesian self of modernism (Sarup, 1993:1-2). Post-structuralism’s hostility is not new, argues Ricoeur, who traces it back to Nietzsche. Discussing Nietzsche’s late fragments, Ricoeur suggests:-

Prophetically, Nietzsche’s work also ventures a number of ideas which are both germane to the question of identity formation, and also widely explored in succeeding generations of post-structuralist thinkers. Nietzsche, for instance, raises the issue of the *multiplicity* of an individual’s possible selves in his aphorism: “my hypothesis, the subject as multiplicity.” (Nietzsche, 1968:270). Tantalizingly too, Nietzsche also anticipates Harré’s (1998) “indexical hypothesis” of identity formation; Nietzsche suggests that the phenomenon of believing in a *substantial* subject behind every thought and action “is simply a grammatical habit, that of connecting an agent to every action” (Nietzsche, in Ricoeur, 1992/1994:15). The Nietzschean hostility to the integrity and stability of the individual subject, however, has more recently been developed in the work of influential French post-structuralist thinkers such as Foucault (1973), Derrida (1976) and Barthes (1972, 1975). Foucault’s argument (1973) is that there is no essential subject behind each action, just as there is no essential order to history. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Foucault, 1973) famously speaks of the person, the actor, being erased “like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.” (1973:387). Foucault argues that “the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.” (Foucault, 1977:138), whilst, in similar vein, Barthes suggests that the author of a text “is a product of our society” (Barthes, 1977:142) and that “it is language that speaks, not the author.” (Barthes, 1977:143).

The present study has not adopted a post-structuralist perspective for four principal reasons:-

First, its characteristic interests and emphases are not easily compatible with the intellectual traditions of those scholars such as Bruner, Harré, Claxton, G.H. Mead, Erikson, and McAdams who have been the study’s principal influences.

Secondly, the conception of “identity” as conceived by Erikson (1958, 1959, 1963), McAdams (1985, 1993/1997) and Ricoeur (1992/1994) is rarely, if ever, discussed in the post-structuralist literature. This literature has, in the main, given its attention to
the *deconstruction* and *dissolution* of the “subject”, rather than discussing the means by which the individual’s identity is constructed, integrated and *stabilised*.

Thirdly, as several of the brief quotations given above indicate, the tenor of much post-structuralist thought has a *determinist* tone which displaces or dissolves the interpretive autonomy and agency of the individual, who, in consequence, is seen as a “product” or a “variable function of discourse.” Such a passive and determinist conception is inimical to the more actively autonomous interpretive conception which underlies the hermeneutical perspective of McAdams (1985, 1993/1997), Ricoeur (1992/1994) and Jarvis (1987, 1992).

Finally, the brief quotations given above also indicate that the primary focus for much post-structuralist thought resides in the analysis of the *communal* phenomena of “discourse”, “society” or “language”, rather than the exploration of the uniquenesses of *particular individuals*, and so treats as *peripheral* subject-matter which is *central* to the present study, rendering the post-structuralist tradition poorly adapted to the study’s needs.

However, although much post-structuralist thought does not offer a perspective which is immediately attractive for the present research, one *particular* post-feminist and post-structuralist perspective was explored in some detail. *Queer Theory*, developed predominantly by gay and lesbian theorists from insights derived from post-structuralist thinkers such as Foucault (1973, 1977, 1979, 1980) and lesbian feminist thinkers such as Butler (1990), has promoted a very radical critique of both post-structuralist and feminist thought, attacking the older traditions for their implicit collusion in the *subjugation* of individuals’ *self-interpretive autonomy*. This critique, fuelled by what they argue is the hegemonic and collectivist tendency of much “identity politics”, has lead a number of Queer Theorists such as Halperin (1995), Cohen (1993), Jagose (1996) and Butler (1990) to develop a more *individually*-focused account of identity formation. Nonetheless, despite being more sympathetic to the kinds of individual interpretive autonomy central to the present study, Queer Theory’s primarily *sexual* focus, as well as its currently inchoate state render it, though interesting, less than ideal for the present study.
Erik Erikson’s developmental perspective on identity formation

Amongst the extensive literature on identity development, the work of Erik Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969) is acknowledged as being of seminal importance. The currency and meanings of the terms “identity”, “identity crisis” and “identity moratorium” in popular culture are testimony to the formative influence of his work. As mentioned in the first chapter, Erikson’s work proposes that identity formation is a developmental task particularly characteristic of adolescence, the fifth of his eight psycho-social stages of development (Erikson, 1959, 1968). Within this psycho-social perspective, identity formation involves the leaving behind of childhood identifications and the adoption of the social roles of the adult world. He also, as McAdams (1985, 1989, 1991, 1993) has argued, began to consider the nature of identity, seeing it as a unifying “configuration” (Erikson, 1959), and, in one or two places (Erikson, 1963), speculates about the processes through which this “configuration” is constituted.

At first sight, therefore, the work of Erikson might seem to offer considerable promise as a theoretical framework for the present research; he focuses on the central issue of identity formation, he considers adolescence a specially important period in the formation of identity, and he acknowledges the importance of the adolescent adjusting to the adult social world. However, as was seen in Chapter 1, for the purposes of the present study, his work also has a number of disadvantages which render it unsuited to act as a theoretical framework. First, it is ironic that although Erikson discusses the formation of an individual’s identity during adolescence, his principal interest as a theorist lies in the delineation of universal developmental stages, rather than in the depiction of individual uniqueness. It is only in his later biographical studies of particular individuals, such Young Man Luther (1958) and Gandhi’s Truth (1969) - works that adopt a narrative approach - that he discusses specific individual uniquenesses in their social context. Secondly, Erikson’s work tends to operate with an insufficiently differentiated concept of “society” - a feature that Wrong (1961) might characterize as being “over-homogenous”. Although Erikson sometimes recognizes the existence of sub-cultures, his treatment of their importance, particularly during adolescence, is undetailed, and even disparaging:-
Thus in the later school years young people, beset with the physiological revolution of their genital maturation and the uncertainty of the adult roles ahead, seem much more concerned with faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture... (Erikson, 1968:128).

Thirdly, the quotation above also suggests that Erikson’s conception of identity-formation was often construed in rather limited terms as progressive and passive conformity to the roles offered by the adult social world. This perspective would seem to have more in common with social theory which pre-dates G.H. Mead’s work, such as that of Parsons (1962, 1964) and Durkheim (1938, 1951). To construe identity formation mainly in terms of conformity to social role, job and ideology, eliminates many other potential ingredients of an adolescent’s identity, such as their wide variety of personal experiences with close friends and peers.

In summary, Erikson’s work has weaknesses in its account of the social context of the development process, and a somewhat passive and narrow account of the individual’s relationship to the social world and their consequent acquisition of their sense of who they are. For these reasons, Erikson’s work is not adopted as a theoretical framework here.

**Stern and the psychoanalytical perspective**

As was seen in the previous chapter, Freud and some of his followers had considerable influence on the early development of the biographical tradition of research into the uniqueness of individual persons. Both Murray (1938) and Erikson (1959), for instance, in their attempts to explore the unique identities of particular people, acknowledge his influence. Later theorists, particularly members of the British “Object Relations” school of psychodynamic thought such as Winnicott (1964, 1965, 1974), Fairbairn (1952), Guntrip (1961) and Klein (1975), not only used biographical approaches when describing their patients, but also explored some of the ways in which the personal relationships and experiences of early childhood constituted the developing personality. Such thinkers offer an account of personality formation which focuses on the individual, as well as the individual’s own particular social world, in some ways a more satisfactorily local level of social analysis than that provided by
Erikson or much post-structuralist literature, whose accounts are more frequently satisfied with *generalized* accounts of the social world.

However, there are difficulties in using such psychodynamic theorists as the theoretical basis for the present study. Although the intimate childhood world of family relationships is fully acknowledged by psychoanalytical theory, wider and later social relationships are not always so easily admitted or accommodated as formative (Bowlby, 1946, 1969, 1973). Some commentators (see Eysenck and Wilson, 1973) have famously questioned both the empirical basis and the status of psychoanalytical theory and practice.

A number of these difficulties have been overcome in the work of psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist Daniel Stern (1985) who has brought together new evidence from clinical practice with that of experimental science. His work provides new insights about identity formation in infants, and has done so in a way that challenges some of the assumptions about attachment, dependency and trust, as well as the *sequences* of some previous developmental schemes. The emphasis of Stern’s work has tended to concentrate on the first three years of life, describing a progressive development of emergent, core, interpersonal and verbal selves, with language being seen as “something to be negotiated between parent and child.” (Stern, 1985: 170). In a manner akin to that of James (1977) and Harré (1998), the infant’s developing senses of self are body-centred, and, like many other post-Freudians and Object Relations theorists, personality is seen as *constituted* by the personal relationships of early childhood, though not necessarily in a fixed and final way: “an event occurring early will have a greater impact and its influence will be more difficult to reverse than an event occurring later.” (Stern, 1985:32).

There would seem to be room for considerable dialogue between Stern’s and McAdams’ developmental schemas; Stern’s work on identity development in infancy clearly overlaps the earlier stages in McAdams’ schema, especially the two earliest in which “narrative tone” and “imagery” are developed. Both thinkers also challenge the idea that identity is fixed and finalized at an early stage, arguing for the possibility of many later revisions. Important though Stern’s work is, however, its intensive and
specialized focus on the period of infancy and early childhood, place it beyond the direct scrutiny of the present study, which has no direct observational access to the infancies and early childhoods of the study’s adolescent participants. Nor, moreover, does the subject-centered perspective of the present study always overlap appropriately with the experimental and observer-centered perspective of Stern’s work.

The very distinctiveness and complexity of psychodynamic theory, as well as the concern with developmental stages which are so central to Stern’s work, are peripheral to the concerns of the present study. For all these reasons, Stern’s work is not employed as a theoretical perspective for the present study.

*Story and self in the work of Bruner*

Bruner is an important figure in post-Piagetian cognitive psychology, as well as a seminal thinker in what he describes as the two “revolutions” that have taken place in academic psychology during the second half of the twentieth century. He names the first of these revolutions “the cognitive revolution”, which he describes as

...an all-out effort to establish meaning as the central concept of psychology - not stimuli and responses, not overtly observable behaviour, not biological drives and their transformation, but meaning.” (Bruner, 1990:2).

He also sees himself as an advocate for a second revolution (which he terms “transactional contextualism”), a perspective which argues for a socially-rooted and thoroughly dialectical understanding of human psychology. His cognitive, meaning-centered and dialectical perspective therefore overlaps with at least three of the principal characteristics of McAdams’ life story model of identity, which makes Bruner’s work of considerable potential relevance to the present research. His value and importance for the present study is considerably enhanced because some of his more recent work has given attention to the place of narrative in the formation of the sense of self. There are four main features of his recent work which commend him as a possible framework for the present study:
First, his theoretical perspective recognizes the fundamental formative importance of the social context for the process of identity formation (Bruner, 1990:105). The perspective which Bruner calls “transactional contextualism” - of which Mead (1934) may be considered a founding father - is clearly one which recognizes the inescapably social nature of human beings.

Secondly, by emphasizing that the person’s sense of self is a cognitive construction, he implies that the process of identity formation is to be viewed as a learning process, and that it is centrally about meanings. He argues that the cognitive revolution, of which he has been a seminal advocate, has transformed the way psychologists approach personality theory: “…with the advent of the cognitive revolution, emphasis in personality theory also shifted to more cognitive matters - for example, what kind of ‘personal constructs’ people used for making sense of their worlds and of themselves.” (Bruner, 1990:105). This view opens the way to a perspective which places people’s interpretations at the centre of psychology.

Thirdly, Bruner argues that narration is a basic “cognitive mode” by which we understand each other and also shape ourselves. As was seen in the previous chapter, Bruner (1986) has advocated that, in addition to a “logico-scientific” form of cognition, all human beings are also equipped with a second “narrative” mode of thought. His work (1986, 1990) has argued that, in a variety of ways, these narratives can be fundamentally constitutive of individual, as well as shared social life.

Fourthly, he has developed and articulated an influential narrative model of personal identity, arguing that the use of narrative constitutes the sense of self:-

Lives are lived according to the same conventions in accordance with which lives are told. (Bruner, 1991; in Harré, 1998: 142).

Finally, his own research, particularly in the last twenty years, has made increasing use of autobiographical material as a research methodology. (1990, and ongoing current research).
Despite these several arguments, as well as the very considerable influence which Bruner's work has exerted over the present researcher, Bruner's particular perspective is not adopted for the purposes of the study. There are three main areas in which his perspective and that of the present research do not sufficiently overlap. First, he provides no developed account of how uniqueness, unity and continuity are constructed by the socially-situated individual, though his work on narrative and the self (1986, 1990) provides many suggestive possibilities.

Secondly, the main focus of Bruner's autobiographical work is directed towards the exploration and analysis of society, rather than on the unique identity of the individual. Moreover, Bruner's main interests (1990) seem to lie on the social constraints which form the language and meanings of individuals, rather than on the interpretive capacities of individuals. A representative quotation may illustrate Bruner's characteristically social emphasis, as well as the implicitly passive picture of individual personality formation that permeates some of his work, both of which features are inimical to those of the present study:

The ...view that I am proposing is that it is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and the human mind, that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems - its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life. (Bruner, 1990:34).

The stress on the formative importance of social life, on the priority accorded to social meanings, even the tell-tale use of the term “imposing” which has a similar passive force to Mead’s “adaptation” (Mead, 1934), is telling. Bruner emphasizes “discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication”; it is these latter ideas that constitute the primary interest of Bruner's more recent interests in the self, and not the individuality of individuals as such.

These characteristic emphases may also be seen in his more recent use of autobiographies as a research methodology (1990, and in press). For instance, reporting (1990) on a detailed autobiographical study of a New York family called "the Goodherzes", he says that “the autobiographical texts are, as it were, as much sociological and historical documents as they are personal ones.” (Bruner, 1990:132).
In his report, it is the former sociological features which receive the bulk of his attention.

Thirdly, although Bruner’s discussions of the process of self formation make extensive use of the autobiographies of particular people, his theoretical work prefers to adopt an observer-centered perspective, rather than one which has a thorough-going “subject-centered” one; the personal experiences and interpretations of particular persons are, to him, of secondary interest in comparison with the investigation of the generic social and discursive constraints. Therefore, although Bruner’s work on both the narrative mode of cognition, and the narrative nature of identity have exerted considerable influence on the eventual theoretical framework adopted for this research, his lack of explicit interest in particular individuals and their personal uniqueness and unity, make his perspective insufficiently focused on individuals and their personal meanings for the purposes of the present research.

Social Constructionist perspectives on identity formation

Though considered by the present researcher, the Social Constructionist perspective of scholars such as Gergen (1985a), has also been set aside for similar reasons to those given in the previous section; it seems to be more interested in the shared social formative influences acting upon individuals, rather than on particular individuals’ unique identities.

In his The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology (1985a), Kenneth Gergen, a formative figure in the movement’s development, argued that “discourse about the world” - along with discourse about the self - is not a map or reflection of the world, but “an artefact of our communal interchange”. His earlier empirical research in social psychology dating from the early 1970’s (Gergen and Taylor, 1969; Morse and Gergen, 1970; Gergen, 1982) had reported a number of classical studies which demonstrated that people's self-esteem and self-concept changed according to social context, showing that people's self-concept was markedly altered by the positive or negative remarks that others made to them, by the relative social status of the others around them, and by the social role - even a temporary one - they were currently
playing. Gergen's more recent work (e.g. 1993a, 1993b), although it has been increasingly autobiographically and discursively focused, has not, however, been focused on the unique individuality of *particular* persons in themselves, but mainly on the *social* discursive conventions which such autobiographies instantiate and enact (see, for instance, "Narratives of the Gendered Body in Popular Autobiography", MM and KJ Gergen, in *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol I, 1993b:191ff).

Although the method of such work involves the collection of the autobiographies of particular people, the Gergens' concentration is fixed on the *social* and *discursive* constraints which transcend particular individuals, rather than on the *uniqueness* of individuals themselves. This means that the focus of the Social Constructionist approach, like that of Bruner's, is insufficiently attentive to the particularities of *individuals* to serve as a theoretical perspective for the present study.

*The "singular self" in the work of Harré*

In the first chapter it was remarked that almost alone amongst social psychologists Harré (1983, 1998) had raised fundamental questions about the uniqueness, unity and singularity of the self. Few social theorists, as the analysis offered earlier in the chapter indicated, offer detailed accounts of the construction of *unique* individuality. Harré (1998) rightly points out this astonishing omission in social theory, which he addresses by providing his own thorough and detailed analysis of the issues, as well as by proposing a number of original and suggestive hypotheses by which the uniqueness, unity and singularity of persons may be explained. As acknowledged in the first chapter, Harré's work provided the starting point for the present study, and Harré's ideas have been of considerable influence on the present researcher's own, an influence which is gratefully acknowledged.

Although a full examination of his work lie beyond the scope of the present chapter, a more detailed account of these principal ideas may be found in the *Appendix D*. In summary, however, Harré's analysis (1979/1993, 1983, 1991, 1994, 1998) offers at least five features of potential interest to the present research:-
Almost alone amongst social psychologists he has raised the question of the uniqueness, unity and singularity of the self (1998).

He has provided an analysis of the term "self" and proposed his own model for differentiating amongst several of its meanings; he calls his conceptual scheme, "The Standard Model" (1998:145). According to this model, the basic ontological reality is the person, a physical, psychological and moral existent who is always and only singular. The person encompasses a number of different aspects which Harré calls selves. He distinguishes, it will be recalled, between three distinct meanings of the term "self", which he labels as Self 1, Self 2 and Self 3. Self 1 consists of the person as a unique centre of perception and consciousness, embodied in a singular physical body which occupies a unique location in space and time. This is the "self" of William James. Self 2 — there can be many of these — are the person’s different conceptions of themselves, since a person may have, either serially or simultaneously, many different conceptions of themselves. Self 2 has some parallels with Rogers’ "self concept" and McAdams' "identity". Self 3 is the perception of a person held by other people, and which they sometimes reflect back to the person, who may then consciously modify his self-presentation in the light of such learning. This is the "self" of Goffman.

He offers a sustained and detailed account of the social (1983, 1993) and discursive (1994) formation of individual selves. His theory proposes an analytical grid composed of four quadrants formed by the intersection of two bi-polar dimensions; a public/private dimension, and a social/individual dimension. This four-fold analytical space is then able to represent the different phases of the relationship between individual persons and their ambient social matrix, phases that Harré refers to as appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalisation.

He offers a detailed analysis of the meaning of the terms "uniqueness", "unity" and "singularity" (1998). The person’s singularity and unity are ultimately shaped and guaranteed by their ontological singularity as a physically embodied consciousness with a singular location in space and time. Although this singular embodied location in space and time also confers upon the person a unique spatio-temporal trajectory, their uniqueness is also given
by their unique position within an array of additional social and moral matrices. Within this objective framework of matrices, the narrative uniqueness of a person's autobiography may additionally reinforce their objective uniqueness.

- He develops an "indexical hypothesis" for the construction of the self - an account of the way in which unique, unified and singular selves are constructed through discursive means. In particular, he proposes that the manifold perceptions, experiences, attributes and biographies of singular persons are given unity through the use of indexical pronouns such as "I" (1994, 1998).

Despite the relevance and the many strengths of Harré's work, however, his account is not adopted as an overall theoretical framework for the present research. There are a number of reasons for this:-

First, despite the sophistication and complexity of Harré's account of identity, the subject's own view of themselves ("Self 2") is subordinated to the objective physical criteria of bodily location and singularity. In the process of safeguarding the singularity of a person's multiple sense of who they are, Harré adopts the strategy (already adopted by James, 1977: 187, and Strawson, 1959:15ff) of ascribing priority to the person's bodily location as the focus of other aspects of personal identity. This body-centered move is reinforced by his further proposal that personal uniqueness is based on the person's unique position in a fourfold spatio-temporal, social and moral matrix. (1998). Harré's model of the "person" then incorporates the kind of subject-centered and biographical elements envisaged by McAdams' narrative model of identity (Harré's conception of Self 2 includes the person's attributes and autobiography), but for Harré, as for Strawson (1959), identity is ultimately stabilized through "objective" criteria of bodily location, rather than the kind of subject-centered cognitive "configuration" which defines Erikson's and McAdams' conception of identity. Harré's fundamental preference for "objective" or observer-centered criteria of person identity and uniqueness puts his model at odds with McAdams at a crucial point.
The significance of Harré's Strawsonian decision to give priority to bodily location is pointed up by the kind of arguments advocated by Feminist theory (Butler, 1990) and Queer Theory (Bartos et al., 1993; Jagose, 1996). Jagose has argued strongly that each individual subject defines their own identity, sometimes in seeming defiance of external bodily behaviour and appearances, as will be recalled from the example given in the first chapter of different individual's perceptions of their own sexual identity, often defined by the individual subject in seeming defiance of their outward bodily behaviour.

Although Harré makes the attempt to integrate observer-centered and subject-centered accounts of identity by incorporating the latter into the former, the work of Ricoeur (1983, 1984, 1985, and especially 1992) offers an alternative analysis which does the reverse. Ricoeur's account of identity prioritises the subject's own perceptions of themselves over external physical matters. In Ricoeur's analysis, the embodied person's spatio-temporal existence, perception and agency are incorporated into a narrative, subject-centered framework (1992). In a number of ways, Ricoeur's solution to the conceptual dilemma seems, for the purposes of the present study, clearer and more satisfactory than Harré's analysis, and one that is more readily compatible with the subject-centered conception of identity employed by Erikson and McAdams.

Secondly, the complexity and multi-layered nature of Hare's conception of personhood, as well as its incorporation of at least two different and unresolved accounts of identity embedded within it, make it, despite its richness, hard to operationalise for the purposes of the present research.

Thirdly, Harré's account of the unity of a person's sense of identity makes very heavy, even exclusive use of indexical pronoun devices as the primary "glue" by which all the disparate elements of a person's attributes, social selves and temporal selves are stuck together. Ricoeur, however, argues (Ricoeur, 1992:40-55) that the indexical shifter "I" is too unstable on its own to bear the burden of this unifying function, and raises the possibility of such unification of identity being assisted by a number of additional narrative devices. The manifold statements made by an "I", Ricoeur argues, can only
achieve a greater degree of stability, continuity and coherence when the individual “I” statements are “anchored” to something which is not so shifting as an indexical pronoun, such as the comparative “reality” of their “sedimented character”. Ultimately, argues Ricoeur, the requisite stability, continuity and coherence are achieved when “I” is incorporated into the plot of a continuous autobiographical narrative. (Ricoeur, 1992:140-168). The autobiographies collected during the course of the present research testify to the existence of a variety of narrative identity-unifying devices.

Finally, Harré’s account does not clarify what, for the individual concerned, the process of becoming a unique and unified individual involves. His earlier work (1983) uses an analytical grid of four “quadrants” to describe, in Meadian fashion, the process of self-formation as a varied process of relationships between the individual and society. However, this account, like Mead’s, adopts a social rather than an individual perspective. It will be argued presently that from the individual’s point of view, this process of identity formation can best be characterized as one of individual interpretation and learning, and for this reason, a learning perspective on identity formation such as Jarvis’ (1987, 1992), is to be preferred.

G.H. Mead’s theory of the social formation of selves

Burkitt (1991) argues that the work of George Herbert Mead offers the earliest, as well as one of the best theories of the social formation of personality. According to Burkitt (1991), Mead’s theory both “...refuses to see any aspect of the self as asocial, yet at the same time does not reduce the individual to the level of a cultural cipher.” (Burkitt, 1991:53). His theory therefore offers an account of how the person builds up their sense of who they are which is thoroughly social, cognitive and yet which also values the individual. It might seem, therefore, to offer a promising perspective for the present study.

Mead’s thoroughly social perspective on the nature of individual identity is set against the earlier “Modernist” or Cartesian model of human beings characterized by “separateness, autonomy and persistence” (Claxton, 1994: 117). Whilst such a model
is assumed by Weber (1985), Durkheim (1938), Talcott Parsons (1964) and others, Mead developed a conception of the self which was much more thoroughly social, whilst also retaining its individuality. Jarvis summarises Mead's position on the self: "No person is born with a self, only with the potentiality of developing one through social interaction." (Jarvis, 1987:50), whilst Mead himself says:-

A self can only arise where there is a social process within which this self has its initiative. It arises in that process. For the process, the communication and the participation...is essential. That is the way selves have arisen. (Mead, in Strauss, 1964: 42)

Building on the earlier ideas of Cooley's "Looking glass self" (1902), William James' Pragmatism and Darwin's evolutionary theory, Mead formulated a new dialectical conception of identity. Cooley (1902), it will be recalled, had proposed the memorable idea of "the looking glass self"; our sense of self, Cooley argued, was a reflection of the ways in which other people see us. From James (1912), Mead borrowed the insight that even consciousness itself was not primarily a private and pre-existing basic "given" of human life, but rather a response which human beings make to their environment as an "adaptation" to the conditions of their existence. Mead, however, went beyond James in producing a biosocial theory of the origins of both mind and self. From Darwin, Mead took the idea that mind, self and self-consciousness are "adaptations" to the social environment. Because both mind and self are adaptations to society, they need, in the first instance, to be socially meaningful. This requirement gives social meanings a definitive and formative role in the construction of the personality. Becoming aware of oneself and developing ideas about oneself therefore emerge as tools for allowing us to "adjust" to other people better; after listening to other people's descriptions of us, we may learn the skill of being able to see and describe ourselves as others see us, and thereby fine-tune our social actions and responses more effectively.

According to Mead, therefore, both "mind" and "self" are formed within the communicative activity of the social group; he is, as Burkitt (1991) argues, the first Western theorist to develop the idea that personality develops through social discourse. Like Wittgenstein (1953), he believed that discourse and language are social activities which precede the existence of any single individual.
For Mead, therefore, the socially-adaptive development of *mind* and *self* are mediated pre-eminently through the *symbolic* means of “gesture” and language, both of which are ways in which we can communicate our subjective meanings to other people. Mead maintains, as Jarvis points out (1987:51), that no “self” can develop prior to the development of language, since only the capacity to use language will give us the tools of a consciousness sufficiently developed to become objects to ourselves. In a different context, Claxton (1994) explains the general idea with admirable clarity:

When two beings talk to each other about how they see each other, as objects, they have to begin to develop the capacity to see themselves in the same way. They begin to develop a new minitheory, a concept of 'self', which represents 'me as seen by others', 'me as a thing with features'... (Claxton, 1994:84)

As a result of this unquestionably social process, Mead argues that we learn to “step back” and see ourselves as others might see us; we learn to become an *object* to ourselves. When this is done, the “self” is thereby produced. Mead himself says:-

The self which consciously stands over against other selves thus becomes an object, an other to himself, through the very fact that he hears himself talk, and replies. (Mead 1913/1964: 146)

Mead distinguishes between two different parts of the self, which, borrowing terms from James, he calls the “I” and the “me”. In the process of acquiring the skill of developing what Claxton (1994) calls a “minitheory” about ourselves (seeing ourselves as an object with certain characteristics), we develop two distinct sides to the social self; the “I” and the “Me”. “I” is our ongoing moment by moment consciousness, the response of the organism to the attitudes of others, whilst the “me” is a set of *ideas* about who “I” am. “Me” is the cognitive “object” formed when “I” am able to step back and look at “myself” as if I were another person or object in the world. Roughly speaking, “I” is the self as subjectivity; “me” is the self as object. Hans Joas (1985:83) puts it well:-

...the 'me' is the individual as an object of consciousness, while the 'I' is the individual as having consciousness.

This distinction is later adopted by McAdams in his own conception of identity (McAdams, 1991:134).
Finally, Mead suggests that the individual’s sense of self is acquired principally as people identify themselves and are identified by others by the roles that they assume in the process of social living. Children begin learning their roles both with ‘significant others” and in the play activity and the games they enjoy with other children. The roles and rules of their unique and specific early experiences become part of the sense of self. People, he argues, learn to be themselves, and do so in the context of their evolving social lives.

Critique of Mead’s account of the social formation of the self

Mead’s original and innovative theory has been of considerable influence on some of those theorists, such as Harré and Jarvis, whose work has shaped the present study. His far-sighted recognition of the ineluctably social and language-mediated nature of the development of human consciousness is clearly of ground-breaking importance. For the purposes of the present chapter which seeks a theoretical perspective on the process by which a person’s unique sense of identity is formed, Mead’s theory, however, raises a number of difficulties.

First, Mead’s account of the process by which the sense of self is formed tends to operate with a somewhat passive and “oversocialised” (so, Wrong, 1961) conception of the individual human subject. The influence of Darwin’s evolutionary perspective on Mead’s work means that he chooses to characterize the process of self-formation as that of an individual’s “adaptation” to the social environment. As Claxton’s account of learning makes clear, the principal aim of much learning and theory-generation is “survival”, at least in the early stages of an individual’s life (Claxton, 1984:15). However, as Claxton also points out, the theories human beings generate about the world and themselves often take on a life of their own, often to the detriment of life and learning (Claxton, 1984, 1994).

Secondly, although Mead recognises the fundamental importance of the social world for identity formation, his account of “society” lacks appropriate complexity. Jarvis (1987) is critical of Mead’s rather undifferentiated conception of “society”. Although
Mead alludes to the existence of sub-cultures, Jarvis argues that Mead "possibly assumed a greater homogeneity and cohesion in the wider society than there is in reality - society is more pluralist than totalitarian." (Jarvis, 1987:52). If this is so, then each individual is likely to belong to several sub-cultures, serially as well as simultaneously, and it will be from this idiosyncratic and unique mixture of social environments that they will learn their sense of self. Human experience will remain social and relational, but the distinctive nature of a person's sense of self will be a result of the individual's unique and highly differentiated social experience, an implication more clearly brought out in Jarvis' work, and of primary significance to the present research.

Thirdly, Mead's account offers no real account of the uniqueness of personal identity. When faced with the kind of questions that Harré (1983, 1998) poses about accounting for the uniqueness, unity and singularity of individuals' senses of self, Mead's theory seems rudimentary. Such issues are hardly discussed, since the focus of Mead's work is characteristically more social than individual.

Fourthly, Mead's account raises serious problems for the unity and continuity of personal identity. It can be argued that since Mead construes the individual's sense of self in a way which is heavily socially dependent, then the sense of identity (the "me") which is formed through the ingestion and identification with one's social roles and others' perceptions of oneself, will tend to exist largely as a piece of individual flotsam blown about an ever-changing social sea. On this understanding, identity can change radically with every change in social role, which, in a society where one occupies many different social roles, could compromise the unity, continuity and coherence of the sense of self. Mead's answer to this potential profusion and confusion of social selves is to argue that at least the socialisation process itself is constant; this, as Harré (1998) has argued, is an inadequate response to the problem.

Finally, Mead's account ignores the rich and complex web of private personal experiences, personal history and "inner life" which are also resources out of which people commonly construct their unique and idiosyncratic sense of identity. For example, although it is common for people to identify with their social roles and jobs,
this is by no means *inevitable*. For instance, when Alec Douglas Home accepted the job of being Prime Minister in the 1960s, his mother is reported to have written a letter to a friend giving the news in a telling way; “Alec is going to *do* Prime Minister for a little while.” (Tucker, 1996). There was no chance that any of the aristocratic Douglas Homes would ever invest their sense of selfhood in any thing so small as the *social* role of being Prime Minister. In similar vein, and despite the role-based theories of personal identity favoured by sociologists, in British law courts, barristers sometimes use the legal maxim *cuculum non fecit monacum*; wearing a monk’s habit does not make you a monk. This maxim, against Mead, recognizes that there is more to personal identity than the assumption of social roles.

Whilst recognizing the considerable strengths of Mead’s perspective on identity formation, therefore, the arguments advanced above preclude the use of Mead’s account as the principal theoretical perspective for the present study.

### 3.6 Live and learn: towards a learning perspective on identity formation

During the course of the previous discussion of Mead, the voices of Claxton (1984, 1994) and Jarvis (1987, 1992, 1999) made brief appearances in the critical dialogue. Their perspectives share a number of the obvious strengths of Mead’s analysis, and Jarvis (1987:40ff) explicitly acknowledges a debt to Mead’s work. Both recognize explicitly the fundamental importance of the *social* world for the identity formation of the individual, and also see the *individual* as an intelligent agent who interprets their personal experiences and formulates their understandings of these experiences in idiosyncratic ways.

Claxton (1984) has expressed a preference for Kelly’s (1955) “Constructive Alternativism” as the unifying perspective through which many types of learning, including the person’s “theory about ourselves-in-the-world” (Claxton, 1984:127) are to be viewed, whilst Jarvis (1987, 1992, 2001a), on the other hand, commends his own empirically-researched model of experiential learning, aspects of which, he acknowledges (Jarvis, 1987:35), relate closely to both Kelly’s and Mead’s accounts. Central to the perspective of both scholars is the insight that the development of a
sense of who one is should appropriately be viewed as a learning process. It is proposed here that this learning perspective should be adopted as being most appropriate for the purposes of the present research; people learn who they are through a process of reflecting on their unique personal experiences. The purpose of the succeeding final sections of this chapter are therefore to examine in more detail this learning perspective on identity formation, the essence of which is captured with admirable brevity in the title of Claxton’s (1984) account of learning: Live and Learn. As this final phase of the chapter unfolds, it is argued that an ideal perspective for the study would be one that not only viewed the acquisition of identity as something which a person learns as a result of their personal experiences, but also (in deference to McAdams’ life story model of identity) which recognizes the place of narrative in the construction of a person’s sense of personal identity.

Since McAdams’ work (see especially 1987: 15-16), in contrast to that of Marcia (1966, 1980), focuses on the narrative product of identity formation rather than the process, explicit discussions of learning are not common in McAdams’ work. Nonetheless, despite the comparative brevity of McAdams’ discussions of the process of identity formation, it is clear that he regards it as a fundamentally reflective and interpretive one, and that his account of the process accords a central place to reflective experiential learning in identity formation. For him, the essence of the process involves the person reflecting on their experiences (characteristically the memories of past experiences), and, through the processes of reflection, selection and narrative organization, finding their own distinctive meaning in them:-

We are tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. (McAdams, 1993/1997:11).

The sense of this quotation is to emphasize the reflective and interpretive nature of identity formation through narration, a process through which the individual comes to understand the meaning of their experiences:-
Stories are not merely "chronicles", like a secretary's minutes of a meeting, written to report exactly what transpired and at what time. Stories are less about facts and more about meanings. (McAdams, 1993/1997:28).

McAdams (1991) suggests, therefore, that "identity" is an essentially cognitive "product", and that, correspondingly, the "process" by which it is produced involves reflecting on, and interpreting personal experiences. His cognitive conception sees identity as "a grand schema of self" (1987:22), and, more specifically, as that aspect of a person's ideas about themselves which encapsulates "the quality of sameness and continuity of the Me" (1991:134). The logic of adopting a learning perspective is also reinforced by a wide variety of other scholars' work, such as Bruner (1986, 1990), who recognize that the development of a sense of identity is not only an instance of learning, but also one which is characteristically narratively mediated. Freeman (1993) also emphasizes the importance of autobiographical reflection in the construction of identity, which is:-

an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self. (Freeman, 1993:29, researcher's italics).

Such ideas clearly overlap considerably with Claxton's conception of the self as a "minitheory" (Claxton, 1994:84). The adoption of a cognitive conception of identity, therefore, would seem naturally to demand a corresponding learning perspective on the part of those who, like the present researcher, would explore it further.

3.7 Learning through reflection on experience: some theories

Having argued that a learning perspective is appropriate for the present autobiographical study of adolescent identity formation, it remains to outline a number of the many specific learning theories available so that the eventual selection of Jarvis' theory may be justified and placed in its rightful context.

The range of possible "learning theories" developed during the course of the twentieth century has been very extensive. The various laboratory-based theories of the earlier part of the century such as Behaviourist Learning Theory (Thorndike, 1898; Pavlov, 1927; Skinner, 1950, 1953), Cognitive Behaviourism (Tolman, 1948), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1974, 1977) and Insight Learning (Kohler, 1925) have not taken a
significant interest in the meanings and biographical interpretations of particular individuals. Within the Cognitive tradition, more sophisticated accounts of human learning have had to wait for theorists such as Kelly (1955) and Bruner (1966, 1986, 1990). For the purposes of the present research, some of the most wide-ranging and fruitful accounts of learning have come from educational psychologists, more often than not those concerned specifically with theories about adult learning.

Dewey's (1938) *Experience and Education*, with its emphasis on “learning by doing” had begun the move away from narrowly formal and exclusively cognitivist conceptions of learning and towards a more experimental conception of learning. These insights were not widely taken up until the publication of Knowles' seminal work in 1970. The emphasis on learning from personal experience formed one of Knowles’s five principles of learner-centered “andragogy’. Whereas much early research and theory about learning had tended to be concerned with the developmental and biological characteristics of children and animals in response to the initiatives of their educators and trainers, Knowles’s (1970) seminal study of adult education, in addition to drawing an important distinction between “andragogy” (“the art and science of helping adults learn”, 1980:43) and “pedagogy” (“the art and science of teaching children”), effectively catalysed a general feeling that previous accounts of learning had been too restrictive in scope. In particular, it was argued that earlier perspectives had not given sufficient attention and value to the “informal” and “incidental” learning which many adults gained outside the walls of the schoolroom and other “formal” educational settings. The field of non-formal types of learning was seen as being very wide, incorporating the “informal” and “incidental” learning already mentioned, as well as “lifelong learning” and “situated learning”. (These many types of non-formal learning have, subsequently, been commonly subsumed under the label of “experiential learning” (Fenwick, undated: 3). According to Fenwick (undated: 4) these experiential learning perspectives “became popular to celebrate and legitimate people’s own experience in their knowledge development.”

Experiential learning also lay at the heart of Kolb’s (1984) influential account of the experiential learning, and Mezirow’s (1981) *theory of transformative learning* also includes critical reflection on personal experience. From a more politically-nuanced
Critical Theory background, Freire’s (1972, 1974) theory of “conscientization” and
“praxis” sees learning as a process of critical reflection on current practice that may
result in radical action, whilst Boud et al. (1985, 1991) have written extensively on
experiential learning and its *phenomenological* characteristics.

The researcher is painfully aware that only very late in the research process did he
come across some of the recent work in biographical approaches to adult education
currently being undertaken by members of the European Society for research in the
Education of Adults (ESREA), such as Alheit, Bron-Wojciechowska, Dominice and
Schuller. Biographical research has played a prominent role in this large body of
scholarship, and Alheit (1995) in particular has developed a sophisticated
“biographical” approach to learning which rejects both older normative “academic”
and newer “therapeutic” models of education. He proposes a provocative and
emancipatory new model of adult education which insists upon the primacy of the
individual learner’s perspective and experience, and affirms the learner’s potential
both to learn from, and to transform the specific biographical circumstances of their
own life situations. Alheit’s *dialectical* account of the process of learning envisages a
dynamic relationship between the given “structural” constraints of the learner’s social
world, and the subject’s own “biographical” perspective. Alheit’s account of
learning therefore shares with Jarvis’ account a common *subject-centered*, *experiential*
and *biographical* focus, as well as a socially *dialectical* understanding of the
individual. The researcher regrets that he had come across this work before he
designed and completed his field-work so that it might have received fuller
consideration; the implications of its emancipatory emphasis might have proved very
fruitful for some of the students who experienced school life as particularly
oppressive.

Jarvis’ model of experiential learning (1987, 1992, 1999, 2001), which has several
points of contact with Alheit’s theory, arises from a research project in which adults
analysed their own learning experiences. The complex and sophisticated model of
learning which emerged from this empirical study has a number of features which
make it particularly well suited for the purposes of the present study, and which make
Jarvis’ model more useful than the alternative models previously mentioned. Jarvis’
model meets almost all the criteria outlined in the earlier section (see 3.4 above) of the present chapter. In particular, Jarvis’ model not only gives due consideration to both the social and ineluctably biographical context of learning, but his model also gives detailed attention to the inter-related processes of memorization, evaluation and (particularly) reflection. If, as Erikson (1959), McAdams (1991, 1993/1997), James (1977), Mead (1934) and Ricoeur (1992/1994) have all argued, reflection is central to the process by which the identity of “Me” is produced, then Jarvis’ model is particularly well suited to serve as a theoretical framework for the present study.

Jarvis is not alone in offering an account of the centrally important process of reflection on experience and memory, but it is argued that his account is one of the most detailed, sophisticated, empirically-grounded and wide-ranging currently available, and for these reasons his model is to be preferred over other accounts. Jarvis’ work offers a particularly strong and acute account of the reflective aspect of the learning process, in addition to the already-mentioned biographical emphasis which Jarvis’ and Alheit’s work shares. Jarvis acknowledges (1987) that his model has many areas of overlap with those of other theorists. “Reflection”, for instance, is a common term in Freire’s writing (1972, 1974), but its import within the specialized political context of Freire’s work has often been seen as that of acting as the handmaid to active political criticism and revolutionary action. Although the term need not always bear this meaning in his work, Jarvis argues (1987) that Freire’s work contains no clearly developed theory of reflectivity in the more cognitive sense. Mezirow’s theory of Transformative Learning (1977, 1981, 1991) has given particular attention to the ways in which people learn when confronted with a “disorienting dilemma” (1981:6ff) with which their previous experiences and biography have not equipped them to deal. Mezirow has argued that such dilemmas may induce the learner to reflect in one of three ways; on the content, the process or the premises of the disorientating experience. Each of the three bases of reflection represents an opportunity for an increasingly radical “transformation” in learning. Jarvis (1987:92) argues that whilst Mezirow’s account of reflectivity is valuable, it does not in itself constitute a theory of learning, and, to that extent, is radically incomplete. Moreover, Mezirow’s theory, unlike that of Jarvis, largely excludes an acute awareness of the social context of learning.
At the opposite extreme, Lave and Wenger’s *Situated Learning* (1991) adopts a resolutely social account of learning which argues that each of us belongs to a number of “communities of practice” which are an integral part of our lives. These (largely informal) “communities of practice” are constituted by their shared “practice” in such a way that both the practice and the network of social relations are inextricably interconnected. Learning takes place by a kind of “apprenticeship” (they discuss the induction of Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters and meat-cutters, for instance) leading to eventual full membership of the community of practice, by which stage the individual had identified with both the practice and the community which embodies and enacts it. Lave and Wenger’s popular work might be seen as a form of Bandura’s (1974, 1977) Social Learning Theory, with its center of gravity and attention transposed from the individual to the social. Their almost exclusively practice-centered conception of learning would appear ill-suited to offer an analysis of more reflective forms of cognition, and the implicitly passive and socially-malleable model of the human agent with which their theory operates would seem not only prone to Wrong’s (1961) charge of being “oversocialised”, but also in danger of reducing the individual learner to a social cipher. Although the model envisages the individual belonging to a variety of “communities of practice”, the notions of both a private life, as well as the possibility of the individual’s idiosyncratic interpretive autonomy, seem largely displaced or eradicated by their analysis. As a result, it is hard to see Lave and Wenger’s account of identity formation as much more than the individual’s supine absorption or capitulation to a network of “communities” of practice.

Argyris’ work (1982), though it acknowledges (at least in a simple way) the social context of learning, produces an account which approximates to a problem-solving cycle and does not offer a more general account of the wider processes or reasoning and reflection. Schon’s theory of reflection-in-action (1983, 1987), on the other hand, emphasizes critical reflection on types of action that are characteristically more instrumental than interpretively reflective. Of the many accounts of experiential learning considered, that of Boud et al. (1991) is perhaps closest to Jarvis’ account. Unlike Kolb (1984), Boud and Walker (1991) consider carefully the contexts of
learning, particularly people’s past histories, learning strategies and emotions. Their account, however, is neither as detailed and sophisticated as Jarvis’ analysis of the reflective process, nor does it make the unique biography of the learner so central to their account. For all the reasons discussed above, Jarvis’ account of reflective learning is preferred as a theoretical perspective for the present study, and the final section of the chapter now outlines some of the main features of his account and explores its advantages.

3.8 Learning to be “Me”: Jarvis’ theory of “biographical” learning

Important features of Jarvis’ work for the present study

Six aspects of Jarvis’ work are of particular interest for the purposes of the present study:

1. His balanced account of the inescapably social context of human learning, which also recognizes the individual learner’s autonomous capacity to form their own idiosyncratic interpretations.

2. His model of experiential learning which provides a detailed analysis of the co-ordinated cognitive activities of reflection, memorization and evaluation (“Contemplation”) which may be held to represent McAdams’ conception of the process of identity formation.

3. His insistence that the fundamental and inescapable context of all learning is the biography of the individual learner, and that the selfhood of the learner is therefore always implicated in the process of learning.

4. His “Heraclitan” argument that, in a continuously and rapidly changing world where nothing ever stays the same, each person’s biography and learning is consequently unique and ever-changing.

5. His suggestion that disjuncture or discontinuity between a person’s biography and their previous learning is a fundamental condition of human learning.

6. His useful classification of six different types of social context in which learning can occur.
Definitions of learning

Like Claxton’s admirably broad conception in *Live and Learn* (1984), Jarvis’ conception of learning avoids the narrowness of many earlier twentieth century theories. “At the heart of life itself is the process of learning”, says Jarvis at the start of his *Adult Learning in the Social Context* (Jarvis, 1987:1), and although he argues that the two are not entirely synonymous, he suggests that: “Nevertheless, they are very close to one another and constantly overlap.” (Jarvis, 1987:1). Defining more closely what the process of learning involves has been a fundamental part of Jarvis’ work. He rejects behaviourist learning theories, such as those of Skinner (1950, 1953), Watson (1919, 1924) and Thorndike (1898), not just because of their narrow behavioural emphasis, but because such accounts “did not seek to discover the thought processes that the learner went through in the process of learning” (1987:20). For this reason, typically behaviouristic definitions of learning such as Borger and Seaborne’s “any more or less permanent change in behaviour which is the result of experience” (Borger and Seaborne, 1966 : 14, researcher’s italics) are rejected in favour of a wider conception of learning. Jarvis suggests that Kolb’s (1984) contrasting account of *experiential* learning offers a much broader definition of learning as:

...the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. (Kolb, 1984:41).

However, as a result of his own work, Jarvis argues that an even *broader* conception of learning is required by the evidence, and, in 1987 suggests the following extension of Kolb’s definition:

Learning is the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to recognize that this occurs through a variety of processes. (Jarvis, 1987:8).

As a result of further work, by 1999, Jarvis had extended this definition further still:

Learning is, therefore, the process of creating and transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, senses and beliefs. (Jarvis, 1999: 40).
Influenced by Mead’s (1934) ineluctably social account of the origins of mind and self, Jarvis (1987) argues for a conception of learning which is resolutely social rather than monadistically individual. He says that:

...learning is not just a psychological process that happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but that it is intimately related to the world and affected by it.” (Jarvis 1987: 11)

He recognizes that this social perspective has profound consequences for the way the self and its identity is seen:

As the individual grows and matures within the context of social living, the person becomes, in part, a reflection of the sum total of experiences that the individual has in society...Hence, every aspect of the person is social; even the language a person acquires is social. (Jarvis 1987: 13)

However, unlike many of the “dialectical” theorists commended by Burkitt (1991) in the earlier part of the present chapter, Jarvis does not allow the Meadian insight about the social foundations of mind and self to be interpreted in a simplistically determinist way that undermines the interpretive autonomy of the individual learner. Such an inference is explicitly denied:

Human beings are not passive recipients of their cultural heritage, they do not have it imprinted upon a tabula rasa type of mind, but they receive, process and externalize it. (1983/1995:7)

The “objectified culture” which transcends the existence of the single individual is itself subject to change from individuals who “do not merely mirror what they receive, but process and change it”, which is “part of the process of cultural change itself.” (Jarvis, 1983/1995:8).

Jarvis’ model of Experiential Learning

Jarvis’ own distinctive model of learning has two immediate sources, the first of which is theoretical and the second, empirical. The first source lies in Jarvis’ critique (1987) of Kolb’s (1984) account of the process of experiential learning. The second
source lies in Jarvis’ research project in which adults analysed their own learning experiences. According to Kolb’s *Experiential Learning* (1984), the process of experiential learning is *cyclical* and *iterative*, and is characterized by four principal activities. The diagram below summarises the cyclical process:

**Figure 3.2** Kolb’s learning cycle (cited from Jarvis, 1987: 17)

![Kolb's learning cycle diagram](image-url)

Jarvis argues that this model of experiential learning has several advantages over previous accounts; it connects the learning process to the acquisition of *knowledge*; it is based on *experience*; it includes *cognition*, not just emotion; it emphasizes the role of *reflection* in learning, and it is very clear and *testable*.

On the other hand, Jarvis argues that Kolb’s model is too simple to account for the variety and complexity of processes which occur in everyday learning. For instance, Kolb’s model excludes a number of common forms of learning, examples of which might include purely *abstract* cognitive learning (such as sitting in a chair and doing maths) where there is little “concrete experience”, or the acquisition of *practical* skills such as tap dancing and typing, which may involve little “abstract conceptualization”.

Jarvis’ own research was conducted over the course of a year with a wide variety of adults involved in education. Participants reflected on a particular personal learning experience, and then analysed the *process* by which they had learned from the experience. Pair and group discussions allowed the participants opportunities for
further reflection and clarification. An analysis of the participants' responses produced a complex model of experiential learning in which experience, memorization, evaluation, reasoning, reflection and experimentation all played their potential parts. The diagram below outlines the relationships between these elements:

**Figure 3.3** Jarvis' Model of the Learning Process (cited from Jarvis, 1992:71)

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**Jarvis' model of experiential learning: three important features**

Many of the details of Jarvis' model need not concern us here, and rather than repeat his lucid and brief explanation of its features, the reader is referred to Jarvis' own account (1987:16ff) for an exposition. Nonetheless, three features of his model are of central relevance for the present study and need comment here.

The first of these concerns the light that Jarvis' model of learning is able to throw on the process of autobiographical reflection which underlies McAdams' life story model of identity. From explanations and quotations already given in this and previous chapters, it is clear that McAdams envisages the process of autobiographical
construction as an essentially reflective one which involves the person finding or constructing the unique meanings that "bring together the different parts of ourselves into a purposeful and convincing whole." (McAdams, 1993/1997:12). The constituent activities of reflection, memory and imaginative and evaluative interpretation seem persistent and recurrent features of the process of narrative identity construction as conceived, not only by McAdams, but by many other theorists considered in this and previous chapters. As the first chapter outlined, these features are characteristic of Augustine's account of identity construction in the West's prototypical autobiography, the Confessions, just as they are also characteristic features of Sacks' account (1985) of identity problems in neurologically-damaged Korsakoff's syndrome patients. Similar features of reflection, memory and imaginative evaluation recur in Freeman's (1993) account of narrative identity, in Ricoeur's (1992/1994) influential account, as well as the work of Gusdorf (1980) and many others.

It might be suggested, therefore, that not only does Jarvis' model of learning identify some of the important constituent elements of the reflective process by which a sense of personal identity is formed, but that the process as a whole is very plausibly described by one of the nine particular learning pathways which the model accommodates. The relevant pathway or "response to a potential learning situation" (Jarvis, 1987:28) would seem to be what Jarvis calls "contemplation" (1987:33), a type of reflective and introspective learning in which the learner reflects on (box 7), interprets and evaluates (box 8) previous experiences and memories (box 6). Learning who you are through "contemplation" on the personal and social experiences that occur in the course of your life would seem to be a persuasive instance of this type of learning.

Secondly, a constant theme throughout Jarvis' work is that all learning is inextricably bound up with the particular biography of the individual learner:-

Throughout my own research into human learning, I have always argued that individual learning constitutes the basis of human biography, and that every learning event is biographical. (1999:76).

The implication of this belief is that if all learning reflects its context in the life story of the individual learner, then the person's sense of who they are will similarly be
biographical, and as the person’s experiences change, they will learn different things about themselves, and their identity may change accordingly. Jarvis expresses this change in identity through the use of the term “self concept”:-

The model connects the process of human learning to the person, who may grow and develop as a result of a learning experience, may remain virtually unaltered, or may actually be harmed as a result of a learning experience..... It will be noted that one of the outcomes of learning is a more experienced person, who might have new knowledge, a new skill, a different attitude, a changed self-concept, or any combination of these. (1987:24, researcher’s italics)

Thirdly, Jarvis’ biographical conception of learning also has implications which suggest that each person’s learning is unique, with parallel consequences for the uniqueness of their sense of identity. Jarvis recaptures (1999) an insight first recorded by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, that since everything is always in flux, everything is unique and unrepeatable. The implications of this “Heraclitan insight” are profound; it means that every situation is unique, always changing and unrepeatable, and this must mean that each person’s biography is similarly unique. These theoretical insights about the unavoidability of uniqueness require, for their study, a biographical perspective. In turn, this requires from the researcher an appropriately individualistically-focused methodology, which provides a rationale for the case study design and autobiographical methods employed by the present study, since only such methods are well-suited to the documentation of unique individual cases.

In addition to the above features, Jarvis’ model of learning has at least two other features which commend its utility for the present study. The first is that Jarvis (1999:38), in common with Mezirow et al (1990), argues that “if there is a disjuncture between my biography (the sum of my experiences, both conscious and unconscious) and a particular experience” this cognitive mismatch will stimulate learning :-

Disjuncture, or discontinuity, between biography and experience of the wider world is a fundamental condition of human learning. (Jarvis, 1987:80).

The present study found many examples which would illustrate this claim, and these, particularly those involving emotional learning, are discussed below in Chapter 7. the
second additional feature that Jarvis’ theory provides is a very useful set of categories for differentiating six distinct types of social situation in which learning can occur (Jarvis 2001a:21). The two sets of categories intended/unintended learning, and formal/non-formal/informal learning situations, when combined, yield an analytical grid with six types of social situation in which learning occurs. This analytical schema was found helpful in reflecting on the data collected during the course of the present study.

Whilst Jarvis’ account of learning gives a full account of the social construction of the person through their socially- and biographically-situated learning experiences (1987:37ff), its account of the more specific area of personal identity is less detailed. When discussing this area Jarvis (1987) has used the term “self-concept”:-

There are three main elements in this developing phenomenon; self-image, self-esteem and the ideal self...Clearly the self-concept depends to a great extent upon the understanding that people gain from (sic) others about themselves. (Jarvis, 1987:58)

As Ricoeur has argued in a powerful and sustained way (1984, 1985, 1988, and especially 1992/1994), such non-narrative conceptions of identity as the Rogerian “self-concept” lack the capacity to represent the intentional, temporal, and social context of human identity, and are also without the means to explain its constructed unities. In this respect, there may be room for a felicitous marriage between McAdams’ life story model of identity which is well-equipped to represent all of these things, and Jarvis’ model of learning which can supply a general account of the underlying learning process through which such narratives are created.

In conclusion, Jarvis’ model of learning can supply a perspective which recognizes the fundamental importance of the social world for the identity formation of the individual, whilst also seeing the individual as an active and potent creator of personal meanings in a balanced way. Jarvis’ more specific account of reflective learning (“contemplation”) can also provide a theoretical framework which accommodates almost all of the principal features of McAdams’ life story model of identity. The cognitive, interpretive, individual learner-centered, biographical,
experiential and unique features of McAdams’ life story model of identity are frictionlessly accommodated into Jarvis’ account of reflective learning.

Jarvis’ work on experiential learning therefore offers an appropriate general theoretical framework for the present research, and so is adopted here. However, because the main focus of Jarvis’ work has been on experiential learning as a whole, rather than on experiential learning about the self, his account of the cognitive form of a person’s identity may, for the purposes of the present research, be usefully complemented and developed through the use of insights borrowed from McAdams’ life story model of identity.

Having selected McAdams’ life story model and Jarvis’ learning perspective to assist the study’s exploration of adolescent identity formation, the next chapter moves on to discuss the methodological issues and implications of these conceptual choices. In undertaking the study, what practical and ethical problems needed to be addressed? Leaving the armchair world of the academy behind, the researcher became, for a while, a teacher of adolescent boys in a residential school. What problems and issues did this role pose for the design and conduct of the research? What ethical issues were raised, and how were they resolved? In practical terms, how was the McAdamite conception of identity turned into a specific research tool that could be used by a temporary teacher in an English Public School? How did he come to choose the particular methods and research design which eventually emerged? The first of the next chapter’s two main sections deals with just such ethical and practical methodological issues. The second part of the chapter’s extensive third section then discusses the philosophical implications of the study’s main methodological features.
CHAPTER 4

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE:
ETHICAL, PRACTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES INVOLVED
IN RESEARCHING IDENTITY AT A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

“All my methods are rational, said Captain Ahab. “Only my ends are insane”

(Captain Ahab speaks of his strategy for catching the great white whale in Melville’s Moby Dick.)

4.1 Introduction: practical and theoretical aspects of “methodology”

The earliest phases of the present study, as reflected in the two proceeding chapters, were almost exclusively theoretical in emphasis; finding an appropriate and clear concept upon which to base the research, and clarifying the theoretical perspective which would serve to direct the direction and scope of the investigation. Only when equipped with these essential theoretical tools could the study’s practical dimensions be explored.

The present “methodological” chapter traces the researcher’s journey from the theoretical considerations of previous chapters to the eventual conduct of a practical school-based study aimed at answering a schoolboy’s question about the uniqueness of personal identity. The term “methodological” is a little slippery, having both practical and philosophical surfaces. In the present chapter, both aspects are explored. The chapter thus aims to provide two distinct types of answer to a basic methodological question that the researcher put to himself: Why did you do what you did? The first part of the chapter deals with two distinct but inescapably inter-related types of problem: the ethical issues raised by the conduct of the research, and the practical methods to be used to gather relevant data. In this first part of the chapter, the researcher explains what he saw as the principal ethical and practical problems involved in undertaking his school-based study of adolescent identity formation, and he outlines some of the ways in which he endeavoured to solve these problems. In the second part of the chapter, the study’s design and principal methodological features
receive more general theoretical and philosophical discussion. The two parts of the chapter thus deal with both the practical and theoretical aspects of the study's "methodology".

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the researcher found himself presented with the opportunity to spend a period of eight months working in a residential school in the capacity of a teacher, personal tutor and general participant in school life. Whatever research opportunities such a placement might provide, it was clear that careful consideration would have to be given to the ethical and methodological implications of occupying simultaneously the roles of both researcher and teacher. Although the researcher's residential placement at the school might provide unrivalled opportunities for close acquaintance with the school and some of its students, this closeness would be refracted through the researcher’s (albeit temporary) occupation of a teacher’s role within the institution. The position of teacher might carry with it a variety of powers and expectations which, in the students’ eyes, might affect the researcher’s relationship with those who were both his students and his research subjects. The precise nature of this relationship would need careful consideration and management if it were not adversely to affect either the students’ education or the research.

Quite apart from the potential complications and tensions which might arise in the management of the dual roles of teacher and researcher, special consideration needed to be given to the fact that the study’s participants would be young people, whose rights, needs and vulnerabilities rightly demanded respect, and required appropriately sensitive consideration. First of all, therefore, the ethical implications of these concerns are discussed in the following section, and the researcher’s solutions to the dilemmas raised are outlined. When this has been done, the first part of the chapter turns to describe some of the problems involved in devising practical methods for investigating the students’ senses of their own identities, along with their perceptions of the unusual social world in which they were living. In order to do this, the story of the study’s evolution is briefly told, explaining how particular data collection methods came to be adopted. In the Part 2 of the chapter, the more general philosophical and theoretical implications of these particular methods and approaches are then considered.
In discussing the ethics of “personal experience” methods in qualitative research, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) rightly argue that:-

In personal experience methods the ethical dimensions of researcher-participant relationships are highlighted. When we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived and retold stories as well as our own. (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994:422)

These considerations require the researcher to take with due seriousness the moral responsibilities which are an inescapable part of the process of research, particularly when the participants of the study in question are young people, as is the case in the present research. Moreover, adolescence, the developmental phase during which identity is formed, argue Erikson (1959, 1963) and Marcia (1966), is accordingly a time of particular delicacy, as well as a time of particular theoretical interest for the student of identity formation. Aware of both the privilege which his residential placement granted, as well as the sensitivity which it required, the present researcher gave considerable care to reflecting on the ethical issues involved in the conduct of his study at every stage.

All research using human subjects needs to be governed by sound ethical principles. Principles such as those enjoining mutual respect for one another, coupled with the avoidance of behaviour which is disrespectful, exploitative or downright harmful constitute the uncontested bedrock of almost all ethical systems, just as they underlie all codes of academic and professional ethics. Such principles safeguard the quality of relationships between human beings. Quite apart from these ethical considerations, however, it is also a truism of qualitative research in the human sciences (Denzin, 1994) that the quality of the relationship between researchers and their subjects is decisive in determining the quality of the data they can obtain. In this respect, therefore, conducting research on sound ethical principles, in such a way that the quality of relationships between the researcher and the researched are good, has
important *practical* implications too. Pragmatically speaking, a good quality of human *relationships* will tend to lead to good quality *data*. There are thus both ethical and pragmatic reasons for considering the study’s ethical principles as *paramount*. For this reason, they must be considered and resolved before research begins.

The role of researcher can be a powerful one, and responsible researchers can be expected to reflect on their relative power compared with that of their subjects, as well as to refrain from using that power unfairly, coercively or exploitatively. When inequalities of power are reinforced by social circumstances, such as when the researcher is an adult and his subjects are young people, or when the researcher occupies the role of teacher and his subjects are students, then the issues of power, coercion and exploitation must be scrutinised with especial carefulness.

**Issues of role and power, and the researcher’s ethical responses**

In the present study, the majority of the subjects were young people who were *students* at a traditional English Public School, whilst the researcher, at least for the period of the research, occupied the role of *teacher* and personal tutor at the same residential school. Traditionally, the role of “teacher” confers on its occupant various types of *power* which the “student” does not have; to grade and assess work, to set tasks, and to urge, in various ways, students’ compliance. The teacher at a *residential* school is also *in loco parentis*, which may further reinforce the inequalities of power between the teacher and the taught, the researcher and the researched. For all these reasons, it was felt important that these role-orientated powers should not be used to coerce or subtly to cajole students’ participation in the study.

Like most other schools in the United Kingdom, the requirements of the law and the academic curriculum require students’ attendance at lessons, so attendance at lessons is not a matter for the individual student’s voluntary choice; students *must* attend their lessons and sit their prescribed examinations. In this respect, an important element of compulsion or coercion is a *constitutive* feature of school life, a feature which, at least since the time of Aristotle, is seen as morally acceptable, however much individual students may at times protest against it. In conducting a school-based study, the
teacher therefore, just as much as his students, will be bound by the constraints of compulsory lessons and examination syllabuses. School life, therefore, is in part *constituted* by elements of compulsion and coercion. The responsible researcher has not created these constraints, but there is no good ethical reason which obliges him to extend them still further.

After considerable reflection, the main principles which the researcher developed to address these and other ethical issues, particularly those sensitive issues of power, coercion and exploitation that might exist between teachers and students, were as follows:-

1. That the conduct of the study should aim to minimise its intrusions into the students' lives.

2. That all the tasks and exercises used as principal research tools should be designed to serve the educational requirements of the students, as well as serving the needs of the study.

3. That consent to participate in the study should be voluntary and informed.

4. That no students should, directly or indirectly, be coerced into participating in the study.

5. That the researcher should be open, honest and trustworthy in his relations with the participants.

6. That the study's boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity should be clearly explained in advance, and resolutely respected thereafter.

7. That participation in the study should bring a range of potential benefits to the students and their school.

**4.3 Ethical principles governing the research**

In the sub-sections that follow, the practical steps taken to safeguard each of the principles listed above are outlined:-
1. *The conduct of the study should aim to minimise its intrusions into the students’ lives*

In a study which undertakes to explore the personal meanings and experiences of any group of human beings, the researcher is always, to a greater or lesser extent, intruding upon the *privacy* and the *time* of the individuals concerned. Aware of these issues, the researcher made the decision to *minimise* the intrusive quality of the research as much as possible, and, as the research design evolved, this became one of the primary considerations which controlled the practical form the research eventually took.

Although a variety of individuals volunteered to contribute face-to-face interviews, video-diaries, conversations and writings to the researcher during the course of the research, in deference to the principle of minimal intrusion, the researcher decided that these types of research tool should not constitute the mainstay of the study. Instead, the researcher decided that all of the main research tools should be specially designed so that each task served a dual purpose. The first purpose was that of satisfying the *educational needs of the students*. Each research exercise was designed to fulfill a particular educational need which, whether the research took place or not, was incumbent upon the students. The second purpose of each of the dual-purpose tasks was to answer one of the needs of the *research*. This expedient lead naturally to the next general principle:-

2. *All the tasks and exercises used as principal research tools should be designed to serve the educational requirements of the students, as well as serving the needs of the study*

The researcher was offered the opportunity of teaching English to two different classes of students. He discovered that their academic courses required them to undertake a number of tasks which might, with a little ingenuity and forward planning, serve both the students’ educational needs, and the needs of the research. For instance, the autobiographical writing which eventually supplied the study’s principal data evolved by marrying conveniently McAdams’ life story protocol with a
coursework requirement for the English GCSE course that the students were studying at that time. Their syllabus required them to do some "best writing" which was of a personal rather than literary-based nature, and in which they wrote about their own experiences rather than a prescribed literary text. Having produced their written work, it would be reviewed by the teacher, whose feedback might then assist the student in producing a revised and improved version, the whole or part of which might then (at the discretion of each student) be selected by the student for inclusion in their portfolio of written work to be submitted for assessment by external examiners.

By undertaking such a piece of autobiographical writing, both the students' and the researcher's purposes could easily be accommodated in the selfsame task. In a similar way, students were also required to have opportunities to practice giving oral presentations, constructing argued essays and to practise a variety of other communication skills, all of which were utilised in the construction of other tasks which fulfilled both the educational aims of the students, and the research aims of the researcher. The construction of such dual-purpose tasks ensured that the students did not have to do anything beyond their normal academic and educational requirements if they wished, subsequently, to participate in the research.

Since the majority of the research exercises were conducted within the context of English lessons, the researcher's intentions, and the tasks he devised, were additionally discussed with, and approved by the school's Head of English.

3. No student should, directly or indirectly, be coerced into participating in the study

From the outset, the researcher was open with the students about his research work, and explained his aims. He was careful to explain both the educational and the research aims of each task separately. He made it clear to the students from the outset that his primary duty was to act as their English teacher, and that his job was to assist them in developing their skills in English; their participation in any research was an entirely subsidiary and voluntary matter. It was explained that although a number of their English activities had a dual purpose, at the end of the researcher's placement at
the school, no student would be obliged or coerced to allow their work to be used for research purposes without their consent.

The researcher explained that although their participation in school work was not voluntary, contributing their school work to the study was entirely voluntary. To ensure both a clear separation between the dual aims of English lessons and academic research, as well as to ensure, as far as was practically possible, that no pressure was put on students to participate in the study, the students were informed that they would only make their decision about whether to contribute their work to the study after it was (for teaching purposes) assessed, and after the researcher finished acting as their English teacher. By these means it was hoped that participation in the study conferred neither advantage nor disadvantage upon the students’ school progress, and that, therefore, no student felt under duress to participate in the study.

Although most students showed enthusiastic interest in participating in the study, to further ensure that no indirect peer pressure was exerted on students, at the end of the researcher’s period of placement in the school, students were asked to indicate their decision about whether or not to participate in the study privately to the researcher.

All students gave their consent; several even begged to be quoted (by name!) in any forthcoming book.

4. Consent to participate in the study should be voluntary and informed

The primary issues surrounding consent were that participation in the study should be both voluntary and informed. Because of the young age and educational context of the participants, a preliminary area of consent needed to be considered first. Since most of the study’s participants were, legally speaking, minors attending residential school whose Headmaster was, in law, acting in loco parentis, the permission of the school’s headmaster was sought. The aims and nature of the study were explained, as well as the usual procedures of supervision, examination and publication involved in the process of academic research. His full and informed consent was given, and a letter containing his written permission for the research is retained by the researcher.
The most important area of consent, however, concerned the student participants themselves. As has already been discussed, the usual issues of voluntariness are complicated in a school context where participation in lessons and school work is not voluntary, and where there is a clear disparity in the respective power accorded by their shared institutional setting to teachers and their students.

However, by ensuring that all the tasks set to students had a *dual* purpose, the principal of which was the satisfaction of one of the students’ formal educational requirements, the participation of the students in the tasks involved no more compulsion or duress than would otherwise have been the case in the normal course of their participation in the daily round of school life and lessons. As it happens, the students participated in the tasks willingly and often with considerable enthusiasm.

Having completed the various tasks and activities which fulfilled a variety of educational objectives, the students were not compelled to contribute their work to the research project. The steps taken to ensure that their choice was genuinely a voluntary one were outlined in the previous section. Ensuring that their consent was genuinely *informed*, however, imposed further obligations on the researcher in his conduct of the research.

The first aspect of informed consent involved the students *knowing* the dual purpose of the tasks *before* they participated in them, and the second aspect concerns their knowledge of what may happen to their work *after* it had been contributed to the research project.

Before students undertook each task, therefore, the researcher explained to the students the *dual* purposes of the tasks he set, explaining carefully the aims of each exercise in terms of its contribution to their English course, and also its quite distinct separate contributions to the aims of the research. In his role as a teacher, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the various exercises and tasks for their English course. Then, in the quite separate role of researcher, he explained his
research aims to the students, and what, with their permission, he would be doing with their contributions if they should later choose to participate in the study.

The researcher also explained what the process of writing a thesis involved, and outlined the various stages of supervision, examination and publication of theses, either in the form of a bound copy of the thesis sitting in a university library or wider publication in the form of books or articles. He further explained that researchers endeavour to ensure that any individuals’ contributions would be rendered anonymous.

Thus, before undertaking any activity or piece of work, students were informed about both the educational and the research aims of each task. Each set of purposes was clearly differentiated, and the students were also fully informed about likely subsequent uses to be made of their work, should they decide to contribute it to the study. At each stage, therefore, students were in a position to exercise informed consent if they chose to do so.

5. The researcher should be open, honest and trustworthy in his relations with the participants

In all his dealings with his students, the researcher aimed to be open, honest and trustworthy. From the outset, as has already been made clear, the researcher was honest with his students about the dual purpose of their English tasks, and he was clear and thorough in his explanations about the rationales which underlay these tasks, about the assessment criteria which would govern their evaluation as pieces of English coursework, and about the practical arrangements which would guarantee the clear separation of their commitment to their own studies from their commitment to the research project.

Within the intensive context of a boarding school, students’ experiences of their teachers quickly teach them who can be trusted and who not, so the researcher was punctilious about being professional, reliable and competent. He tried to be a man of his word, was reliable and dutiful in marking their work, prepared his lessons
carefully, and made a genuine effort to help all his students to develop their skills. He was also respectful to all his students. In all these ways he hoped that his integrity as both a teacher and researcher would be manifested to his students. The autobiographies which form the mainstay of the present study were produced towards the end of the researcher's period of research at the school, when it was hoped that the researcher and his students would have had the opportunity to build good relationships.

6. The study's boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity should be clearly explained in advance, and resolutely respected thereafter

One important specific aspect of the relationship of trust that needs especial care and clarity concerns the boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity that govern the relationships of those who participate in the research. The widely accepted practices and procedures of the academic world mean that, whether in publicly accessible libraries and archives, or through wider publication in the form of books and articles, the productions of academic research are not confidential. As outlined above, this was carefully explained both to the students and to their headmaster so that their consent, should it be given, would be properly informed.

Both the students' and the school's legitimate right to privacy, it was also explained, would be protected as far as possible through the excision of real names and the anonymisation of their accounts through a variety of means so that the anonymity and privacy of all parties would be respected. Within the constraints exerted by a study whose principal question sought to examine unique personal identities, specific identifying characteristics such as proper names and places would be removed and replaced by alternative names. In many cases, other alterations and substitutions would have to be made where it was felt necessary to preserve the participants' anonymity. For this reason, for instance, the school is named “Bentham's”; philosophically literate readers may pardon the Utilitarian allusion to one of the foremost proponents of the ethical principle of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”.

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With the students’ consent, the researcher retained a photocopy of their written works, and these were stored securely by the researcher. On the advice of his supervisors when the process of examination is finished, this extensive archive of material will be either destroyed, or arrangements made for its secure and ethical archivisation.

7. Participation in the study should bring a range of benefits to the students and their school

Whatever the academic value of the present study, ethical considerations required that it should also be of benefit to the study’s participants, to their school, and perhaps also to other similar schools. The researcher hopes that the following benefits resulted from the students’ participation in his study:-

First, it was hoped that the participating students would gain educational benefit. The researcher endeavoured to be an assiduous, careful, encouraging and professional teacher to all the students who participated in the study. Through the opportunities students had to practise their written and spoken skills, through his lessons and individual feed-back to students, the researcher hoped that each student’s English skills would develop as a result of their participation in the various exercises. Secondly, the researcher aimed to make the tasks as interesting and stimulating as possible for the students, so that pleasure as well as literate profit might accrue from participation in the lessons and tasks. From many of the pieces of work they produced, the researcher feels satisfied that he succeeded in these aims (the study’s data chapters contain extensive quotations which will enable the reader to make their own assessment of these claims). Thirdly, the research might offer all the study’s participants the opportunity to reflect upon, and find personal meaning in their life’s experiences, and this could be of benefit to some of the participants. The comments of several students indicated that this was so.

In addition to these benefits accruing to the students, the researcher also aimed to benefit both the school (as well as some particular groups of students within it), directly and indirectly, in a number of additional ways:-
First, the research might throw some light on the claims made by researchers such as Duffell (2000) that the experience of residential education is frequently emotionally traumatic and deleterious to personal development. Concern for students' well-being at such institutions requires investigation, and, if true, remedial action. Though not the principal aim of the study, this area of concern was explicitly addressed in the research's design, and the issue was carefully considered.

Secondly, in the process of hearing about the life stories and about the school life of the many students who participated in the study, the researcher sometimes found himself in the privileged position of being entrusted with previously untold personal stories about the difficulties of living with their sexual orientation within the confines of the school and its values. The tellers wanted their stories to be heard and acknowledged more widely, and hoped that the researcher may encourage the school to hear their voice and thereby make the lives of other students in a similar position less painful than it had been for themselves.

Finally and more generally, because of its privileged access to the students' experiences at school, the study might be able to propose ways in which the research school could develop its capacity to nurture personal development of the young people in its charge.

Having discussed the main ethical problems facing the researcher wishing to undertake a school-based study, as well as his responses to them, Part 1 of the chapter now continues by telling the story of how the study's design and practical research methods evolved. In the sections that constitute the remainder of the first part of the chapter, the researcher briefly outlines how and why he came to make his principal decisions about the design and practical methods of data collection he used in his study. The following sections each give brief answers to some of the most important "Why did you do that?" questions about the study's practical methodology. These brief sections in no way pretend to explain or describe either the study's methods or methodology fully; such discussions are reserved for later sections of this report. The theoretical and philosophical aspects of the study's design and methods are discussed in the second part of the present chapter, whilst the study's design and principal
methods of data-collection are more fully described in Chapter 5. Details of some of
the research protocols used in the study may be found in Appendix F, the study’s
Methodological Appendix. Critical discussion of the appropriateness, validity and
effectiveness of the study’s design and methods is dealt with in the final chapter.

4.4 Why does the study have a case study design and a participant researcher?

If the study is to do justice to its aim of investigating the unique identities of some of
those students who live for the greater part of the year within the confines of a
traditional English Public School, then its overall design needs to be one which is
capable of providing a close and detailed examination of a group of specific
individuals who live within the context of a single particular local context.

The study needs to collect two distinct types of data; data about the lives and identities
of the particular individuals who participate in the study, and data about the
participants’ perceptions of the values and characteristics of the unusual social world
in which they reside. A case study design would seem admirably well placed to
enable just such a specific, particular, highly contextualized and locally detailed
investigation to take place. Whatever the traditional limitations of the case study
design in terms of the potential generalizability of its results (such arguments are
discussed later), few other approaches can match the case study design for its capacity
to supply data on the specificities of a particular people living and working in a
particular place. The study’s principal requirements and the principal characteristics
of the case study design make it an obvious and appropriate choice for the present
study.

Whilst it is possible for a detached observer to conduct certain types of case study,
such an approach is not viable in the present case. Both the personal nature of the
study’s subject-matter and its unusual and enclosed social context preclude the use of
an impersonal and distant researcher. On the contrary, the personal nature of exploring
individual identities, and doing so within the confines of a “total institution” positively
require the researcher’s personal involvement. Both the study’s central concept (the
individual’s own sense of their unique personal identity) and the study’s social context
(the closed world of Public Schools) militate against adopting a case study design with the researcher adopting the role of a detached observer. Moreover, as McAdams (1992) and Hogan (1987) have argued, the personal and often private nature of an individual’s sense of themselves is unlikely to be communicated to the researcher who casts himself in the role of a “stranger” or “observer”; a more distant research relationship is likely to evoke from participants what McAdams (1992) has called the (observer-centered) “psychology of the stranger”, a concept far-removed from the (subject-centered) conception of identity developed by Erikson and McAdams.

At the practical level, it is also unreasonable to expect that students in a residential school would be likely to volunteer either their life stories or their perceptions of their “secret” unofficial social world to someone they regarded as a complete stranger. The privilege of receiving such confidences is likely to be reserved for the researcher who has earned the trust of the students as a result of his prior involvement with their lives. As in many other areas of social research - perhaps even more crucially in the present study than in other areas - the quality of the data obtained is likely to depend on the quality of the researchers’ relationship with his subjects.

Furthermore, the enclosed and idiosyncratic world of Public Schools is likely to prove both elusive and hard to understand by the casual observer. The complexities and distinctivenesses of such schools will only be understood by one who has spent sufficient time within them. A researcher who was inexperienced and unfamiliar with the Public School milieu might find it difficult to interpret the conversations and writings of the students with any degree of confidence. In particular, such a researcher would find it difficult to discern the differences between socially-shared idiosyncracies and genuinely personal uniquenesses.

For all these reasons, it is important that the researcher involves himself in the day to day life of the school, as a participant in school life and in the lives of the students, rather than as a distant observer. The closed and exclusive nature of Public Schools means that the most natural and obvious way in which an adult researcher can participate in school life is by serving, at least temporarily, as a teacher.
The position of being simultaneously both a researcher and a teacher, however, is in many ways an odd one. The researcher becomes, at the same time, both an “insider” and an “outsider”; he is both a member of the school community and therefore “one of us”, and at the same time, his age and teaching role define him as not being one of the students; “one of them”. This kind of position is, however, relatively commonplace in social and anthropological research, and the validity and success of the research does not depend on the researcher’s capacity to effect an ontological conjuring trick and transform himself into a student. As was argued earlier, the value of the research will, instead, be largely dependent on the quality of the relationship which the researcher is able to build between himself and the study’s participants. If this relationship is good, then it might be hoped that the students’ responses may well be sufficiently open, honest and sincere to justify a measure of confidence in the study’s findings.

As will be explained later, the overall structure of the study eventually evolved a three-fold layered design as a way of describing and differentiating the related social and individual aspects of identity formation. This layered arrangement, it will be argued later, facilitated both the description and the analysis of the study’s voluminous and complex data.

Having described the overall design of the study, the next two sections describe how the researcher came to devise his data collection methods. The study requires two distinct types of data; data on individuals’ views of their own unique identities, and data on their perceptions of the formative values and norms which characterise their social life together. The next section deals with the first of these.

4.5 Why does the study make extensive use of written autobiographies?

Chapter 1 argued that “identity” (as conceived by Erikson) would serve as an appropriate concept for encapsulating the substance of Ben’s question about unique personal identity. Chapter 2 further argued that McAdams’ life story model of identity offered a well-researched, flexible and sophisticated version of Erikson’s concept, which could usefully be adopted for the purposes of the present research.
Having adopted a narrative model of identity, it seemed appropriate to adopt a compatible research tool which was capable of doing justice to McAdams’ narrative conception of identity. The natural choice of research tool seemed to lie in the wide variety of biographical methods for gathering data about unique personal identity.

Given that the Eriksonian and McAdamite conception of identity was centered firmly on the person’s own view of themselves, and that it also incorporated a developmental perspective, it seemed clear that whatever biographical method of data-collection were to be eventually adopted, it must not only be subject-centered, but must also be sufficiently detailed to include the subjects’ own perceptions of their existence over time and across a number of different social contexts.

In the preparatory stages of the research, a variety of types of data collection method were considered. Fundamental decisions needed to be made about the preferred medium for data collection (such as interview, conversation, writing, tape- or video-recording) and the degree of openness or structure desirable in the chosen approach. At one end of the spectrum, a format which adopted a face-to-face unstructured and impromptu telling of the subject’s life story to a listener seemed attractively free and spontaneous, whilst at the other end of the spectrum, the use of a detailed and standardised set of “prompt questions” could give an interview a more highly structured approach. The former approach offered the subject maximum freedom of response, but also posed problems with regard to comparability with other data. The more structured approach eased the latter problems, but perhaps at the cost of restricting the very individuality which it was the study’s purpose to explore.

Atkinson’s (1998) “Life Story Interview” seemed initially to offer a respectful and sensitive compromise between the extremes of structure and openness, and was initially adopted as the preferred primary method of data collection. In essence, Atkinson’s approach (which is described and discussed in more detail later) is a loosely structured tape-recorded face-to-face interview in which the subject tells the researcher his life story, prompted when necessary by the interviewer’s pre-prepared exploratory questions. This approach seemed to meet the crucial criteria for an appropriate method of data collection; it offered data that were subject-centered, detailed, and richly...
contextualised within the historical and social dimensions of the subject’s life. An adapted version of Atkinson’s “Life Story Interview” was tried out in a brief pilot study carried out at the research school a few months before the researcher’s teaching placement began.

As a result of this trial, it was found that Atkinson’s method was ill-suited to the school context as a principal method of data-collection. The intensive face-to-face interview format seemed intrusive and very time-consuming for both student and researcher alike. The natural self-consciousness of the adolescent male seemed to be exacerbated by both the format and the subject-matter of the interview; as a data collection method it was, in the school context, nothing short of disastrous. Even had the intensive interview format been more productive, the expenditure of time and effort in both conducting and transcribing the interviews would have precluded anything larger than a small sample of subjects being studied. Feed-back from some of the pilot study’s “guinea-pigs” was illuminating, and impelled the researcher to rethink his data-collection methods radically. One boy said that face-to-face interviews felt “very awkward, particularly when the subject you’re talking about is yourself. It feels a bit weird.” Another boy said he found it very interesting to have to think about his life but that he “needed more time to think”. A third boy said “I’d find it much easier to do if I could write it all down in my own time - I’d feel I could think about what I was saying a bit more.”

These responses lead the researcher to consider some form of written approach to data-collection. Feed-back from students suggested that they would find such an approach more congenial, less intrusive, less prone to exacerbating their natural self-consciousness, as well as offering greater opportunities for reflecting on what they wanted to say and how they wanted to say it. A written form of data-collection would also be less time-consuming than interviewing for the researcher. The time saved in interview transcription would then allow the researcher to include a significantly larger number of subjects in the study.

These considerations, better for subjects and researcher alike, induced the researcher to search for a written approach to the collection of biographical data. After
considering a number of possible models (several of which are discussed later) it was decided to use a slightly modified form of McAdams' life story protocol. This protocol (which can be seen in Appendix F, the Methodological Appendix) offers subjects a small number of suggestions about aspects of their biography that they may wish to write about, without being rigidly prescriptive in any way. As such, the protocol achieves an optimal balance between structure and openness, directing subjects clearly to the central concept of identity, whilst leaving them considerable freedom in their individual responses to the protocol.

At the time the study was constructed, the researcher's reading and experience was confined mainly to American and English models of biographical study, such as those of McAdams (1985), Erikson (1958, 1968), Atkinson (1998) and Denzin (1989), all of which influenced his approach. His subsequent reading has revealed a rich and extensive tradition of biographical research methods in the field of Continental Adult Education (see, for instance, Alheit, 1995; Bron-Wojciechowska, 1995; Dominicé, 1990 and Schuller, 1995). Because of their late discovery, these latter approaches were not considered in devising the design of the present study.

The adoption of a written approach to the collection of biographical data based on McAdams' protocol proved very successful in solving all the problems associated with the earlier face-to-face interview format, and the method enabled a very extensive amount of data to be collected from the study's principal participants. The students found the protocol stimulating rather than restrictive, and they were very comfortable with the written nature of the task, which they found neither awkward nor intrusive. Many relished the greater control to decide all aspects of content and presentation which a written form of data-collection gave them. In retrospect, it seems entirely appropriate that, having chosen McAdams' life story model of identity as the study's central concept, the study should also adopt McAdams' particular approach to data collection.

The details of this method are described and discussed in greater detail later in this chapter and the next. The data generated by this biographical method of data-collection were complemented and further explored through the use of some additional methods of autobiographical data collection which were also adopted from
McAdams’ study in 1985. The first of these, a written “follow-up interview” was carried out by each student after completing their written autobiography. This reflective exercise aimed to allow each autobiographer to assess the degrees of stability and change in their identity across time and different social environments, and to reflect on particular sources of their identity and uniqueness. A third data collection exercise, also adapted from the design of McAdams’ original study was provided in the form of a “Motivational Theme Test”. The Test aimed to explore the suggestion (made by McAdams and others) that emotional and motivational factors were constitutive of a person’s sense of self and the life narratives which they constructed. These methods of data-collection are further described in the next chapter. They, and the results they generated, are critically examined in the final chapter.

The use of these written biographical methods of data collection in a school context raises two particular problems which, though discussed more fully in the final chapter, are briefly dealt with here. The first problem concerns the extent to which the written autobiography produced by the student is a problematic “objectification” of their life and identity. The second problem concerns the extent to which the production of a written autobiography by the student is just a “performance” for the benefit of the teacher, lacking any significance beyond the currying of the teacher’s favour.

Life stories as problematic “objectifications”

There can be no doubt that, at least in one sense, a person’s construction of a written “life story” is also the construction of a kind of verbal “object”. The reality of who a person is, is always changing and developing over time as a result of the continuous chain of experiences and relationships with which the person’s life is bound up. Each person has many different social and temporal selves, and the self is always being told and re-told anew as different circumstances give occasion. Insofar as each participant’s identity is a fathomless and ever-changing mystery, with different facets manifested at different times and in different social settings, then a single autobiographical narration at one particular time and place, inevitably produces an
“objectified” version of the person’s identity at that particular time. Pickled and preserved by its written words, the autobiography is both incomplete and static; the unique and ever-changing process of being who you are has already moved on. A single piece of autobiographical writing is clearly not identical with the fuller, richer living and changing process that constitutes the person. However, to the extent that the writer has been honest, sincere and serious in their reflections, the writing can offer a snapshot of the person’s sense of identity at the moment of writing. The more honest, sincere and serious the writer’s efforts, the more significant the snapshot of their identity is likely to be. Moreover, even though a piece of autobiographical writing can only provide an objectified and static glimpse of how the person saw themselves at the time of writing, such a picture may offer the researcher a richer and more detailed source of data about their current sense of identity than any other comparable form of data. The comparison of McAdams’ life story model of identity with the alternative “five-factor” model undertaken in Chapter 2 demonstrated how much richer biographical forms of data can be than other methods of data collection available.

Student autobiographies; just a “performance” for the teacher?

To the extent that all human beings are ineluctably social creatures from birth onwards, then each person’s actions and conversations, however private, are likely to have a social dimension which acknowledges the presence of other sentient beings. The most private of autobiographical “conversations” may envisage or imply the presence of a “significant other” (Mead, 1934), as Augustine’s (1992) archetypal “Confessions” testify. In this way, it is a truism that all human communications imply some type of audience, and it would be surprising if the autobiographical writings of students were exceptions to this general rule.

The suspicion that a particular piece of autobiographical writing is a “performance”, however, is a little insidious and slippery; it may imply that such a performance is, in some sense, fake or phoney, and that the autobiographical writing dissimulates or deceives. Such accusations have epistemological and moral connotations which are explored later. Furthermore, if it is suggested that this particular piece of autobiographical writing is only a “performance”, then the complementary suggestion
may also implied; that there is a "real", or at least a different self hidden elsewhere, the account of which awaits the arrival of a more fitting audience.

Leaving aside the wider epistemological and moral issues surrounding the truthfulness, validity and reliability of autobiographical writing, the prudent researcher who is interested in encouraging his subjects to be honest and sincere in their autobiographical reflections must ensure that he does not offer unwitting inducements to the contrary. Gaining higher marks, the approval of the teacher, or the approval of peers, are all possible causes of temptation, so the researcher must take care to set up the parameters of his tasks so that such temptations are impotent, leaving the student’s integrity relatively free from external inducements and sources of temptation. This was achieved in three different ways.

First, the parameters of the autobiographical task are set up so that, in terms of content and manner, the student is entirely free to write his autobiography as he chooses. Only the technical accuracy of his English - his spelling, punctuation and syntax - are subject to assessment. The student, moreover, writes within the boundaries of confidentiality previously outlined, knowing that he writes only for his own eyes and those of the teacher assisting him with the accuracy of his English; he is told that no part of his work will be read aloud or shared with anyone else in school, and that the decision about whether to include an edited portion of the autobiography in his GCSE coursework folder will be his alone. It is hoped that these parameters minimise the temptations to play to the gallery, and encourage the student to feel free to write whatever he chooses. If, within these parameters, he chooses to present himself in some ways rather than others, this choice may well be significant and revealing with respect to his sense of identity.

Secondly, the assessment arrangements for the written autobiography are, as already explained, based on linguistic criteria made clear in advance; the content and manner of the autobiography is not subject to assessment, and so the writer may freely write what he chooses without detriment to his academic progress.
Thirdly, the arrangements by which the students decide whether they will contribute their written work to the study are entirely separated from the assessment and teaching arrangements. As has already been explained in an earlier section, each student’s decision about whether to participate or not is made *privately* (to avoid the possibility of peer pressure), and only *after* the written work has been assessed, at the end of the researcher’s period of research at the school. Here again, therefore, the researcher has endeavoured to ensure that students will feel free to write what they choose, rather than writing to please the teacher.

The success of all these arrangements can be assessed by the quality and characteristics of the data produced, matters which are critically discussed in the study’s final chapter.

The first part of the chapter concludes by asking about the data-collection methods used to gather the students’ perceptions of their *social world*.

4.6 How did the researcher find out about the students’ perceptions of the rules and values of their social world?

As was mentioned earlier, the study needs to collect two distinct types of data; data about how *individuals* perceive their own unique identities, and data about how they perceive their local *social world*. The “local social world” which is the object of investigation is primarily, though not exclusively, the “*unofficial*” social world of peer relationships. The characteristics and values of the school’s “*official*” and public social world is readily seen by the outside observer. Official documents publish the prescribed “School Rules”, and a variety of official signs of merit and punishment (such as the awarding of “school colours” or “house Colours” for notable sporting or cultural achievement, or the awarding of “detentions” or “lines” for those who break the rules) demonstrate and reinforce the official rules and values.

Previous experience working in other Public schools, coupled with initial insights made during the preliminary period of observation at the research school, suggested strongly that students’ behaviour and character was influenced powerfully by
unwritten unofficial "rules" and values which permeated the students' private peer-group social world. Since this social world existed largely out of sight and out of earshot of adults, its exploration was not accessible through the use of standard observational or anthropological methods of research. More importantly, in parallel with the subject-centered perspective of the autobiographical data collected, the aim of the second type of data-collection was, similarly, to develop ways of discovering the students' perceptions of the rules, principles and values which shaped their communal lives and characters. The need to acquire the participants' own perspectives on their shared social world, coupled with the inaccessibility of that world to outsiders, suggested strongly that the only way to find out about the unofficial student world was to ask the students about it. Such an approach is central to Garfinkel's (1967) "ethnomethodological" approach to social research. His work, along with that of Harré and Secord (1972), Harré (1977a, 1977b, 1979), and Marsh et al. (1978) suggested that participants' own accounts of their social world could be sought and analysed to provide an insightful "insiders'" impression of the main features of their social world.

Having selected a loosely ethnomethodological approach to data-collection (which is discussed in more detail later) as appropriate for the needs of the present study, it was clear that such an approach would only be viable and productive if sufficiently good relationships could be built with the students so that they would feel comfortable in sharing their perceptions of their social world honestly and sincerely. Once again, a good quality of relationships between the researcher and the researched would be crucial if good quality data were to be obtained. For these reasons, the ethical principles which were outlined earlier (and which are not repeated here) were applied with equal rigour in the quest for the ethnomethodological data.

Whereas McAdams' work provided useful guidelines for structuring the various specific methods by which the researcher could collect his biographical data, the unusual idiosyncracies of Public School life, and the dearth of previous academic research, compelled the researcher to develop his own methods of data collection. The researcher allowed his previous experience in a number of other Public Schools, as
well as his experiences at Bentham’s, to suggest the most fruitful areas for investigation. The principal areas eventually investigated were as follows:

*The “unwritten” rules of school life*

During some informal conversations with students during the period of initial observation, the researcher was struck by remarks made by several boys who said it was important to learn to “fit in” when you arrived as a new boy from your previous Prep school. One boy said “You need to learn to go with the group, otherwise you won’t pull through”, though the same boy also added that “the most important thing is to be yourself.” The researcher was fascinated by the two clear (and perhaps contrary) implicit prescriptions which the boy’s remark contained: *Go with the group* and *Be yourself*. Might there be other such unwritten “rules” which governed the social lives of the students? From this question the researcher devised an exercise which asked students to imagine that they had to give some advice to a boy who was new to the school. If the new student wanted to “fit in” smoothly with the other students, what advice would they give? Analysis of more than seventy-five students’ responses to this exercise provided a remarkably consistent and coherent corpus of “rules”.

*Being of “good character”; the aspiration to be “cool”*

In the initial stages of his placement at Bentham’s, the researcher was struck by the frequency with which some boys were referred to as “cool” and others as “sad”, terms which seemed to represent polar opposites in the social evaluation of different types of *character*. Might there be an additional set of unofficial rules or a local taxonomy which delineated socially-approved types of *character*? This lead the researcher to devise a second exercise in which students were asked to become schoolboy “public relations consultants” and give the researcher some advice about how he, too, might become “cool”.

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The local moral lexicon and local stereotypes

A serendipitous lesson in a series of Religious Studies classes on the theme of prejudice generated two other valuable sources of data. During a lesson on “stereotypes”, having discussed the usual racial and gender stereotypes, the researcher asked one particular class if there were stereotypes for each of the school’s boarding houses. Whilst an outsider might have thought all the school’s boarding houses were blandly indistinguishable, in the students’ eyes, to the researcher’s surprise, each house had an entirely distinct moral character. Moreover, the evaluative language used to describe the character of a “typical” member of each of the boarding houses was also pungent with local colour. Further systematic repetitions of these exercises enabled the researcher to collect a considerable lexicon of local evaluative words (“the moral lexicon”) and a portfolio of local stereotypes, whose meanings were then clarified through discussion with students.

The local moral significance of sport

Finally, although sporting activities form an important part of the school’s official curriculum of educational activities, discussions with individual students suggested that sporting prowess, or lack of it, also carried with it a range of unofficial meanings within the student world, meanings of which the researcher was entirely unaware when he began the study. Discussions with a large number of students lead to a further written research exercise in which students described the role that sport and sporting prowess played in students’ lives. The exercise generated much fascinating data which illuminated the significance of sport in the students’ own perceptions. Details of this exercise, along with all the others, can be found in the next chapter.

Having outlined the overall design and character of the study, as well as having explained how the researcher developed the methods of data-collection, the researcher has thus briefly told the story of his journey from the theoretical considerations of previous chapters to the eventual conduct of a practical school-based study aimed at answering a schoolboy’s question about the uniqueness of personal identity. He has, at least in a practical sense, explained why he did what he did by explaining what he saw.
as the principal ethical and practical problems involved in undertaking his school-based study of adolescent identity formation, and outlining how he endeavoured to solve them. Having dealt with these practical and ethical matters, the second part of the chapter subjects the study’s principal features to more formal theoretical and philosophical discussion.

PART 2

4.7 Outline of the study’s methodological philosophy: an overview

The choice of Erikson’s (1968) and McAdams’ (1985) interpretive and subject-centered conception of personal identity, as well as Jarvis’ (1987) learning perspective have major implications for the methodology of the present study as a whole. It will be argued in the remainder of this chapter that in order to do justice to the study’s concern with the meanings and interpretations of particular participants, the present study will need to adopt a methodological approach which is not only correspondingly interpretive, since it is centered specifically on the participants’ own interpretations of their identities, and the researcher’s understanding of them. In order to construct an appropriate research design, the researcher has to make a number of specific decisions concerning the study’s “philosophical” methodology. Before they are discussed more fully below, these decisions are first presented in outline below:

- The type of research offered by the present study will be broadly qualitative, rather than quantitative in its approach.

- Of the various major types of research paradigm available, the present study will appropriately be guided by an interpretive, rather than positivist, post-positivist or Critical Theory types of research paradigm.

- Within the range of different types of interpretive paradigm, the study adopts what Schwandt (1994) calls an Interpretivist, rather than a Constructivist type of interpretivist paradigm. Of these two principal forms of the interpretivist paradigm which Schwandt labels as Constructivist and Interpretivist, reasons
will be given for finding the latter version more appropriate for the purposes of
the specific research envisaged in the present study, rather than the
Constructivist approaches commonly associated with the work of researchers
such as Gergen (1987, 1993) and Denzin (1989).

- Schwandt's (1994) analysis of what he calls the "interpretivist" form of the
  Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm admits of a further distinction. He
  suggests that there is a major difference between the philosophical and
  methodological variants of interpretivism. Reasons are given for adopting the
  former variant of interpretivism. In this respect, the study's philosophically
  interpretivist approach is strongly influenced by the hermeneutical work of
  Gadamer (1975, 1976), particularly his rejection of any formulaic "method" of
  interpretation, and his insistence that the process of interpretation depends
  upon the progressive and cumulative attempts of one person to understand the
  meaning of the texts produced by another person. The interpretive approach
  adopted by the present study is also influenced by the work of Ricoeur (1984,

- The general character of the interpretivist paradigm is capable of being
  translated into many different practical approaches to empirical research. The
  particular interpretive approach adopted by the present study is the one
  commonly known as the "personological" tradition, that maverick branch of
  psychological research which begins with the work of Murray (1938), and
  which has been developed more recently through the work of McAdams
  research has tended to prefer nomothetic approaches, Murray and his followers
  have embraced a more resolutely idiographic approach to the study of persons.
  This distinctive approach is concerned to explore the unique characteristics of
  individual persons, and this concern has lead the personological tradition to
  adopt a broadly interpretive approach, and also (frequently) biographical
  research methods. Although personologists have not been alone in their
  predilection for biographical methods of research, Murray and McAdams,
  along with other personologists, have argued that the collection and analysis of
Life story narratives should form an indispensable part of the methodology of their approach to the study of particular persons.

- Although Murray, McAdams and other personologists study the lives and identities of particular individuals, and frequently do so using autobiographical methods, their studies rarely pay systematic attention to either the influence of the social context in which those individuals find themselves, or to the nature of the process by which the sense of personal identity is constructed. For the purposes of the present research, these omissions are remedied in two ways. At the theoretical level, both the individual and social aspects of the students' learnings are accommodated within Jarvis' (1987, 1992, 1999) account of experiential learning. This account incorporates both a concern for the biographical uniqueness of each individual's experiential learning, and also an acute awareness of the necessarily social context of this learning. This perspective provides a framework within which both the students' learnings about themselves, and their learnings about their social environment can be accommodated and explored as different aspects of a common process of experiential learning.

- At the practical level of research design, adequate attention is given to the specificities of particular individuals as well as their distinctive local world through the adoption of a case study design which is capable of doing justice to both. Because the study seeks to explore the individualities of a group of particular individuals within a very particular (and some would say peculiar) social context, the overall design of the study naturally assumes the form of a case study, with the advantages which this methodology confers in terms of its capacity to provide detailed, individual and richly contextualised data.

- A further methodological consequence of selecting McAdams' life story model of identity as the study's primary conceptual tool is the need to select practical data collection methods which are capable of encapsulating it. It is argued that the most appropriate research method for studying the students' subjective senses of personal identity is through the use of a biographical method of data
collection such as that used by McAdams (1985) in his own research. Therefore, the participants' understandings of their own identities are explored through the collection of the students' autobiographical writings. As in McAdams' own study, the collection of individual written autobiographies is supported by other complementary methods of data collection adapted from McAdams' original study in 1985.

- Finally, the students' shared social context is explored through a supplementary range of "ethnomethodological" methods inspired by the work of Garfinkel (1967), but developed specifically for the present study as a result of cumulative observations carried out at the research school. So that the impact of the school environment upon the students' developing sense of personal identity might be assessed, the students' understandings of the values, meanings and norms of their immediate school environment are sought through the use of these similarly subject-centered and interpretive methods.

A full description of the sample, particular research methods employed, and overall research strategy must await the following chapter. The remainder of the present chapter is devoted to further discussion of the methodological decisions described in the outline given above.

4.8 A Qualitative type of research

The study aims to answer its primary research questions through the use of a qualitative research design.

The historical background of qualitative research

Both Richardson (1996) and Woolgar (1988) recognize that qualitative research methods were slower to achieve acceptance among the mainstream of academic psychologists, despite the early and persuasive call for methodological change urged by Harré and Secord (1972) and de Waele and Harré (1979). Within other social sciences, qualitative methods have had a much longer existence. Anthropologists
have a long tradition of qualitative study, with the researches of Boas (1927), Margaret Mead (1928, 1930), Benedict (1934), Bateson (1972), Evans-Pritchard (1974), and Geertz (1973, 1983) being merely a few of those who have successfully adopted this approach. Within sociology, the “Chicago” school of sociologists sowed qualitative seeds in the 1920s and 1930s, seeds which have, more recently, come to renewed fruition in the recent work of Denzin (1989, 1994). Amongst psychologists, a notable exception to an earlier historical resistance to qualitative methods may be seen in the work of Murray (1938) and Allport (1937), psychologists who have exerted a profound and distinctive influence on the subsequent “personological” tradition of research within which the present research locates itself, and which is exemplified today pre-eminently in the work of McAdams (1985, 1993).

Why this research counts as qualitative

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that quantitative methods emphasize the examination and measurement of their subjects in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. They argue that qualitative types of research, in contrast, are more concerned with issues of meaning and interpretation, with the personally and socially constructed nature of reality, with the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and finally, with the situational constraints of what is studied:-

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2)

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is characterised as a wide-ranging a set of interpretive practices, which privileges no single methodology over another.

Consonant with their view of interpretive research, the present study of a group of adolescent students within the confines of their residential school environment is concerned with issues of meaning and interpretation, with the personally and socially constructed nature of the students’ sense of who they are and where they are, with the
institutional constraints of their social world, and finally with the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied. *Because* the research is concerned with the exploration and analysis of its subjects' personal meanings as they endeavour to interpret both their own identity, and that of their "natural" school environment, the research may, according to Denzin and Lincoln's definition (1994) appropriately be classified as qualitative.

4.9 What methodological *paradigm* does the research adopt?

The present research adopts a broadly *interpretivist* paradigm. Such a paradigm is classically adopted by Geertz (1973) in his version of *Interpretivist Anthropology*, by Blumer (1969) in his version of Mead’s *Symbolic Interactionism*, and by Denzin (1989) in his modified version of Mead's position, which he styles *Interpretive Interactionism*. Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1975) and *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976) have been very influential on the particular form of interpretivism adopted by the present research.

*Four main Paradigms*

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggests that a paradigm is “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105). A paradigm, they argue, may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* that act as an assumed framework through which the researcher views their “world”, and their place within it. Paradigms involve assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), about the process of knowing and the relationship of the knower to the known (epistemology), and about the appropriate *methods* that can facilitate the process of knowing (methodology).

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the sciences were dominated by the perspectives of positivism and naïve realism, but the work of thinkers such as Oakeshott (1933), Wittgenstein (1953), Popper (1959, 1963) and Polanyi (1962, 1967) drew attention to a number of features of scientific knowledge which made
positivism’s previous naivety untenable. This critical thinking prompted profound changes in scientists’ perspectives on their work. As a consequence of such critical insights, knowledge, as Brownhill (1983) has argued, needed now to take much greater cognizance of its social context, which involved recognizing the role played by intellectual and professional communities, as well as by a variety of social, political and moral factors which also influenced the complex process of knowing.

As a result of the kind of epistemological sea-change described by Brownhill (1983), a number of distinct approaches to the acquisition of knowledge developed. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that, historically speaking, there are four major types of approach, or “research paradigm”. They label these respectively as Positivism, Post-positivism, Critical Theory and Constructivism. Their own preference is for the latter paradigm, which they see as being concerned with “the formation of ever more informed and sophisticated constructions via the hermeneutical dialectical process.” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 114).

Other commentators (Denzin, 1989, 1994) and Schwandt (1994) prefer to use the term “Interpretivist” in place of Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) term “Constructivism”. Some important differences underlie this debate about nomenclature, and will be discussed presently. At the outset, it is stated that the present research adopts (in Schwandt’s, and probably Denzin’s sense) an Interpretivist paradigm, rather than the philosophically different “Constructivist” paradigm as conceived by Guba and Lincoln (1994).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) characterize the Positivist paradigm by its assumption of “naïve realism”, along with a corresponding realist epistemology in which the investigator and the subject of investigation is turned into a sort of “object”. Post-positivism, they suggest, adopts a more sophisticated ontology, that of critical realism, and is more self-critical and self-aware about the possible biases and constraints which affect human knowing. They argue, however, that the epistemologies of both paradigms are similarly dualist and objectivist. (1994: 110), both of which preclude a thoroughgoing interpretivist or hermeneutical stance.
The Positivist and Post-positivist paradigms would thus seem inappropriate for the present study of identity amongst a group of students in a boarding school environment. The Positivist and Post-positivist paradigms assume an observer-centered and fixed conception of "reality", and, by viewing participants as quasi-objects, rather than active thinking and feeling subjects, effectively preclude the adequate and appropriate exploration of the principal research question whose interest centers on the subjective meanings and constructions of the participants. For these reasons, neither paradigm is appropriate for the purposes of the present study.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) trace the origins of Critical theory back to its roots in Marxist theory. The Critical paradigm, they suggest, takes a more historically and socially relative view, seeing "reality" as something that is shaped over time "by a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors" which are then "crystallized (reified) into structures that are now (inappropriately) taken as 'real'.” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110). Unlike the Positivist and Post-positivist paradigms, the epistemology of the Critical paradigm is transactional and subjectivist, and the process of research, through the process of mutual dialectical engagement between researchers and participants aims to generate a critical, increasingly well-informed and more politically expansive quality of consciousness.

Research approaches deriving from Critical Theory, whilst having the potential to offer useful insights into the possibility of institutional oppression acting on the identity formation of the student participants, is not considered an appropriate paradigm for pursuing the study’s research question. In the first instance, the thrust of analysis in Critical Theory is more concerned with characteristic social, political and communal factors which transcend the individual. The principal research question of the present study, in contrast, is much more concerned with the identities of particular individuals. Because the essentially social and economic focus of much Critical Theory privileges theorization at the macro level of social, political and historical structures rather than those at the more “local” level of particular individuals, it is not adopted the principal research paradigm for the present study, though some of its insights are borrowed towards the end of the study when reflecting on the school as an institution, and its constituent sub-cultures which have the capacity to influence
adolescent identity formation. Furthermore, the emphasis which Critical Theory places on political critique and consciousness-raising was considered inappropriately interventionist within the context of a study whose brief did not include, at least as a primary aim, the purpose of offering an uninvited critique of the institution in which the research was carried out. For these reasons, the Critical Theory paradigm was, therefore, excluded from consideration.

The remaining major research paradigm is that which is variously known as Constructivist or Interpretivist. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the Constructivist paradigm is described as being:

Socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111).

Like the Critical Theory paradigm, its epistemology might be termed “transactional” and “subjectivist”, and its characteristic methodology would be seen as hermeneutical and dialectical in nature. The features of this paradigm, therefore, suit the present study very well. The present study’s emphasis on personal experience, the importance of local meanings, the focus on the subject’s point of view, and the interpretive nature of the inquiry, all argue for the adoption of a broadly interpretivist research paradigm. Within the interpretivist tradition, however, a number of important variations may be seen, the two principal of which are, in Schwandt’s (1994) terminology, “Constructivist” and “Interpretivist”. These variants, he argues, represent related but distinguishable sub-types of interpretive research. The terminology of Schwandt’s (1994) analysis of the field is adopted in the critical discussion that follows.

Schwandt argues that both types of interpretivism believe that “to understand the world of meaning one must interpret it.” (Schwandt, 1994: 118), and thus share a common commitment to interpretation as a way of research. In the following sections, both variants of the paradigm are outlined, and reasons are given for rejecting the “Constructivist” variant and preferring the “Interpretivist” version for the purposes of the present research.
Constructivism

More Idealist than Realist in tone, Constructivist approaches to research characteristically ascribe to the human mind a much more radically creative role than is the case in other research paradigms; knowledge is created rather than discovered. Goodman’s (1984) very radical constructivist philosophy, like that or Rorty (1980), challenges traditional claims about the “reality” of the world and our capacity to discover it. Goodman’s “irrealism” adopts a very pluralistic and pragmatic attitude, notoriously summarized thus; “never mind mind, essence is not essential, and matter doesn’t matter.” (Goodman, 1984: 97). In his view, it is we who make our worlds in the process of interpreting them.

In contrast to the alternative “Interpretivist” approach, Schwandt suggests that Constructivist thinking is of more recent origin in the social sciences. Within psychology, prominent Constructivists such as Kenneth Gergen (1985) share with Interpretivists a concern with the world of experience as it is lived, felt and undergone by social actors, but Constructivists adopt a more radical epistemology; “Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind.” (Schwandt, 194: 125, researcher’s italics). Emphasis on the creation, rather than the discovery of truth is characteristic of the kind of Constructivism envisaged by Gergen. There is a suspicion and scepticism about believing in a “reality” that exists independently of our knowledge of it, a view that is well expressed by Bruner:-

...contrary to common sense, there is no unique ‘real world’ that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language. (Bruner, 1986: 95).

In social psychology perhaps the best known form of Constructivism is Gergen’s (1985) Social Constructionism. Acknowledging the influence of Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) work in the sociology of knowledge, as well as that of Schultz, Gergen argues that “the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically-situated interchanges among people.” (Gergen, 1985: 267). What we take to be “knowledge” about the world is not merely refracted through the human mind, but is actually created by the “shared system of intelligibility” (Gergen, 1991: 78) which is characteristically linguistic or discursive in form. Meanings are
made in the interactive process of languaged human relationships. Interpretation is a shared social process. More radical than von Glasersfeld, (who acknowledges that there is an ontological reality) Gergen is resolutely relativist and idealist in his stance: “there are no independently identifiable, real-world referents to which the language of social description or explanation are cemented.” (Gergen, 1986: 143). Schwandt points out that for Gergen, language is the only reality we can know; there are clear affinities here not only with the work of Fish (1989), but also the world of French post-structuralism (e.g. Barthes,1957/1972; Foucault, 1973, 1980 and Derrida, 1976, 1978).

The “Constructivist Paradigm” of Guba and Lincoln has been influential through their numerous methodological writings (1985, 1989, 1994). They too are, in the philosophical sense, idealists who believe that what is “real” is a construction in the minds of individuals. They further suggest that, in a very radical sense, the notion of “truth” is socio-historically relative; “truth” amounts to nothing more than the construction of “reality” which commands concensus at a given time.

There is, of course, a trivial and obvious sense in which all “knowledge” is a construction of the human mind. Classical Empiricists such as Locke (1894) and Transcendental Idealists like Kant (1873) all concur with common sense in agreeing that knowledge is “put together” in the minds of particular knowers. Constructivism, however, like its ancient philosophical fore-runner Idealism, is an ideology that goes considerably beyond this common sense idea, to make far-reaching metaphysical and epistemological claims.

Reasons for rejecting Gergen’s Constructivism

Constructivism is rejected as a stance for the present research because first, it describes the process of knowing in a way which minimizes or eliminates the role and responsibility of the individual knower. Knowledge is seen as a passive “product” of the commonalities of society and language, rather than the fruit of a process of active reflection. Secondly, it privileges the social commonalities of discourse over individual experience and interpretation. Thirdly, it characteristically pays insufficient
attention to the most local of “local knowledges”, the experiential knowledge of the individual. Fourthly, it minimizes the extent to which the physical world (as represented by the claims of biology, ethology, economics and politics, for instance) can act as a constraint on language on discourse, a claim that is contested strongly by the work of thinkers such as Marx (1973, 1977), Sève (1978), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), Harré (1983, 1991, 1993), Wittgenstein (1953) and others. Fifthly, it seems to operate with the falsely dichotomous reasoning that if positivism and naïve realism are not tenable, then the only other viable alternatives must be a diametrically opposed type of radical subjectivism. The possibility of intermediate epistemological and hermeneutical positions seems often to be ignored. Finally, it tends, in practice, to operate with an implicitly determinist model of human persons as passive recipients of linguistic moulding. For these reasons, all of which are inimical to the close study of the individual experiential learning of particular persons, neither Guba and Lincoln’s (1994), nor Gergen’s (1985) versions of Constructivism are adopted here.

Interpretivism

In contrast to the various types of Constructivism mentioned above, Schwandt (1994) traces an alternative second type of interpretive paradigm which he calls “Interpretivism”. He argues that this distinctive alternative evolved from the tradition of hermeneutics and Verstehen in sociology, and from the phenomenology of Schutz (1962, 1967). At least from the time of Dilthey (1910/1976), thinkers in this nascent tradition stressed the important epistemological differences between the human and the physical sciences, between the Geisteswissenschaften and the Naturwissenschaften.

The primary interest of Schwandt’s Interpretivism is in the personal meanings which people produce as a result of their experiences. According to Denzin:-

A basic question drives the interpretive project in the human disciplines: How do men and women live and give meaning to their lives and capture these meanings in written, narrative and oral forms? (Denzin, 1989: 10)

Schwandt argues that there are two further distinct sub-types of Interpretivism; a purely methodological form, and a second “philosophical” form. Schwandt traces the
methodological form back to Weber (1968, 1985), Dilthey (1910/1976), and later to Schutz (1962, 1967), as well as to neo-positivists such as Abel (1948) and Rudner (1966). Thiselton (1995), more plausibly perhaps, traces the purely "methodological" form further back still, to the work of Schleiermacher (1977). Like Schleiermacher, these thinkers saw hermeneutics primarily as a method or a tool for interpreting what someone else thought.

By getting inside the head of another, so to speak, the enquirer could hazard a guess as to the meaning of an actor's behaviour (Schwandt, 1994: 120). Hermeneutics, as classically conceived by Schleiermacher, was conceived as a two-stage process; initial historical and scholarly researches about the historical and local context of a text were succeeded by a secondary exercise of sympathetic or empathic imagination which enabled the would-be interpreter to produce a construction or interpretation of what the text or its author "really meant".

Gadamer's Hermeneutical account of Interpretation

Schleiermacher's narrowly methodological conception of hermeneutics is strongly criticised by later "philosophical" hermeneutists such as Gadamer (1975, 1976). He offers a critical re-working of what he characterizes as the earlier "Romantic" hermeneutical tradition represented by Schleiermacher (1977) and Dilthey (1910/1976), who saw it merely as a detachable "method" for finding things out about historical texts. According to Schleiermacher, the interpreter reconstructed the text's historical context through the use of the "historical-critical" method - a process of detailed historical background research. From this basis of re-constructive understanding, the sympathetic and objective interpreter could then, it was supposed, employ their imaginative and empathic capacities to enter the mind of the author. Using this method, Schleiermacher believed, the interpreter was assured of gaining privileged knowledge of an author's mind and meanings.

Against Schleiermacher, Gadamer (1975, 1976) argues that this account of the process of interpretation assumes too easy a "bracketing" of the interpreter's own beliefs, assumptions and particular historical context. Such things, Gadamer argues, cannot be
so easily shaken off. We are formed ("Bildung"), he suggests, by the historical traditions in which we grow up, and these traditions provide us with the basic assumptions - the "prejudices" - through which we are enabled to understand anything at all. Such "prejudices" constitute our minds, and without them we would understand nothing at all:

A person who does not accept that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what is shown by their light. (Gadamer, 1975: 324)

One's own consciousness, he argues, cannot therefore be so easily elided as Schleiermacher suggests, nor can one step so easily into the vacant shoes of another. The process of understanding always involves a painstaking and uncertain process of dialogue; a conversation with the person or text, each from their respective standpoints, in a careful dialogical, progressive and cumulative attempt at mutual comprehension. Gadamer thus proposes a more modest, respectful and equal meeting between text and reader than might be envisaged in any of the other major research paradigms. It is thus through the process of mutual and respectful engagement and listening that understanding may be progressively refined. In the process of entering the "hermeneutical circle", the reader, too, may be changed. Gadamer (1975, 1976), Louth (1983) and Thiselton (1995) argue that this process is applicable in our relationship with both persons and texts; a hermeneutical process of understanding is involved in each. Although each person can only offer their current interpretation of the meanings of the other, a process of continuous refinement in understanding can proceed as long as the interpretive partners are respectfully and seriously committed to the process of understanding. If this state obtains, the "hermeneutical circle" can continue to yield greater and greater levels of mutual understanding. Gadamer - particularly in Truth and Method (1975/1989) - is at pains to stress that the kind of mutual and respectful interpretive dialogue which his work envisages cannot be reduced to an off-the-peg epistemological method. There can be no formulaic method, specifiable in advance of a particular interpretive dialogue, that can guarantee the achievement of "truth".

However, Collingwood (1939), in several ways anticipating the thought of Gadamer, suggests that the process of understanding and discovery can be enhanced through the
expedient of approaching any investigation with a number of specific questions as a heuristic tool to aid the provisional process of understanding. Collingwood’s conception bears similarities to Gadamer’s notion of the succession of “rough drafts” which characterize the process of progressive understanding.

We proceed, suggests Gadamer:-

By a certain preliminary structuration which thus constitutes the groundwork for later understanding. The process is dominated by a global meaning we have in view, and is based on the relations which an earlier context affords us. (Gadamer, 1979: 146)

A little later he warns:-

One who follows this course always risks falling under the suggestion of his own rough drafts; he runs the risk that the anticipation which he has prepared may not conform to what the thing is. (Gadamer, 1979: 149)

Gadamer’s analysis, therefore, suggests that the process of interpretation might be summarized as being:-

- Interpretive, and applicable to the understanding of both persons and texts
- Intersubjective
- A process of understanding which involves a respectful interpretive dialogue in which the Other is allowed to exist over-against oneself.
- A process which precludes the existence of any formulaic method of interpretation, specifiable in advance, by which of the process of understanding advances.
- Unique, since the partners in dialogue on any interpretive occasion occupy unique spatio-temporal and epistemological positions.

All of these features would seem to be entirely appropriate for the practical, methodological and ethical purposes of the present research, and so are adopted as a research paradigm.
4.10 Meeting the methodological challenge of studying the uniquenesses of individuals

The principal research question seeks to explore the unique sense of identity which each of the study’s individual participants have formed, and yet to do so in the context of a very specific shared social environment. This choice of subject matter raises in an acute form a number of special methodological issues. The major issue to be faced lies in the contrast between nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the social sciences. Traditionally, scientific investigations, particularly within the still-dominant positivist paradigm, have sought law-like patterns and statistically-significant generalizations in their results. The notions of law and generality, however, would seem to be diametrically opposed to the notions of individuality and uniqueness. The study has, therefore, to situate itself on the horns of a methodological dilemma; how to do justice to unique human individuality whilst at the same time undertaking an activity which might still count as “scientific”.

This methodological issue was of primary concern to early personologists such as Allport (1937) and Murray (1938), both of whom criticized what they saw as the limitations of the nomothetic approach of the psychologies of their day. Murray’s early acquaintance with the approaches of Jung and Freud demonstrated to him the possibility of more intensive and individually-focussed analyses of personal characteristics and differences. His response to the methodological dilemma was the development of a “personological” approach to research which was characterized not only by the use of a multiplicity of research methods to investigate human uniqueness, but was also an approach which laid particular and innovatory emphasis on the use of biographical methods of research.

In many ways, the debate between nomothetic and idiographic approaches to research in the social sciences also overlaps with a fundamental issue regarding the design of any study; the issue of intensive against extensive research designs. Harré and De Waele (1979) raise this issue in full awareness of the logical constraints involved:-
A science of individuals raises issues of design strategy and of empirical domains. The design issues concern the logic of intensive versus extensive designs. The distinction between the intensive and the extensive designs is based on that elementary property of classes expressed in the well-known qualitative relationship: intension varies inversely as extension. The more properties that are used in the definition of a typical member of a class, the fewer individuals are likely to be found exhibiting those properties. (Harré and de Waele, 1979: 190).

"Intension varies inversely as extension"; the study of unique individuals clearly represents the extreme limit of this primary logical relationship which underlies the design of all scientific studies. The most intensive design would be to study in depth a single autobiography; such a design is likely to be well placed to do justice to the unique features of the person studied. As the number of subjects in a study is increased in the service of the search for supportable generalizations, the prospects of doing justice to the uniqueness of particular individuals recedes. The implications of this truth of logic are that the design of the present study is likely to be something of a compromise; certain generalizations about the whole sample of student autobiographers may be claimed at the cost of the detailed description of a few individuals. According to Smith (1994: 296), the personological tradition of personality research offers a "middle way" out of this dilemma.

Murray's foundational research in personology, usually known as Explorations in personality (1938), was published with a more extended title which indicated his distinctive approach; Explorations in personality: A clinical and experimental study of fifty men of college age. Murray wanted to combine the advantages of both intensive and extensive designs. His 50 subjects, despite their large number, were investigated intensively through a variety of biographical methods and psychometric tests. The thoroughness and detail of the study was made practicable through the use of a large team of investigators.

McAdams (1985), one of the figures responsible for the recent revival of the personological tradition in the social sciences, has followed in this extensive, and biographically detailed approach in his own personological studies of the biographies of 90 undergraduate college students and 50 middle-aged professionals. McAdams' work (1985) is an ambitious and large-scale study conducted over a three year period.
with the benefit of a team of co-researchers to expedite the huge volume of work involved. Without the benefit of his team of co-researchers, the present study cannot hope to emulate McAdams’ scope, so the present study’s research activities are more modestly conceived, so that they are practicable with a single researcher, a shorter time span, and less control over the subjects’ participation in the study than was available to McAdams.

McAdams summarises both the personological tradition in general, and his own approach in particular when he says that:

Personology has traditionally emphasized the study of the whole person in his or her sociohistorical context. In addition, personologists have traditionally adopted biographical approaches to the study of human lives and have often focused their inquiries upon fundamental human motives. Thus the whole person, biography and motivation are three major themes of the personological tradition in the social sciences, and each of these themes is apparent in my own inquiry into the life stories which make up human identities. (McAdams, 1985: 20)

For the present study, which also endeavours to study “human identity”, and to do so in a way which looks at the “whole person”, as well as their particular “sociohistorical context”, the personological tradition of research can be regarded as being eminently appropriate. Within the range of possible interpretive approaches to social research, it would seem to suit the aims of the present study well. However, the personological tradition, though it gives admirable attention to the distinctiveness of particular individuals, does not always focus so acutely on their social context, nor examine its possible effects on identity formation. In order to accommodate both the individual and social perspectives within a single piece of research, two additional things are needed; a theoretical perspective and a practical research methodology, both of which can accommodate the individual and social aspects of the study’s principal research question. The former is supplied by the adoption of a socially- and biographically-situated learning perspective derived from the work of Jarvis (1987), whilst the latter is supplied by the adoption of an overall case study design for the study. These two features of the study are explored in the next two sections.
4.11 Learning to me: a learning perspective on identity formation

Since the present study aims not only to study the unique identities of a group of particular adolescents, but also to explore how far the highly distinctive Public School environment which they share might affect their sense of who they are, the study requires an overall perspective which, whilst retaining a fundamental concern with the distinctivenesses of the individual, is also acutely aware of the social context in which those individuals exist. Jarvis’ (1987, 1992, 1999) work supplies both of these requirements.

As was seen in the previous chapter, Jarvis’ account of experiential learning is not only profoundly subject-centered and interpretive, but also insists on the socially and biographically situated nature of all learning. This perspective provides a framework which is able to include both the students’ learnings about themselves, as well as their learnings about their social environment. Both of these areas can be accommodated and explored as different aspects of a common process of experiential learning, and can do so from the point of view of the individual learner. Jarvis’ model of experiential learning suggests that each person acquires their identity through a reflective process of experiential learning; people learn who they are from their personal and social experiences:

The model connects the process of human learning to the person, who may grow and develop as a result of a learning experience, may remain virtually unaltered, or may actually be harmed as a result of a learning experience. It will be noted that one of the outcomes of learning is a more experienced person, who might have new knowledge, a new skill, a different attitude, a changed self-concept, or any combination of these. (Jarvis, 1987:24, researcher’s italics)

Secondly, Jarvis argues that all learning is situated within the particular life-trajectory of a particular person, so that all learning is biographical. He says:

Throughout my own research into human learning, I have always argued that individual learning constitutes the basis of human biography, and that every learning event is biographical. (Jarvis, 1999:76)

Thirdly, Jarvis argues that, since all learning is biographically situated within the ever-changing and varying circumstances of everyday life, all learning must be unique. The
implications of this are that if all learning is biographical and all learning is unique, then every biography is unique, a conclusion which reinforces McAdams' narrative model of unique identity.

These features makes the work of Jarvis very well-suited to provide a theoretical framework for the study as a whole, and also serve to shape and supplement the personological tradition of personality research for the purposes of the present study.

Adopting Jarvis' theory as a theoretical perspective has further methodological implications for the present study. He argues (1999) that since every person's situation is always unique, particular and changing, case studies are an inescapable basis for any research seeking to explore such uniquenesses:-

Practice is...a unique situation: every person's practice constitutes an individual event each time it happens. Consequently, it must be studied through individual cases. (Jarvis, 1999:75).

If each person's life experiences are unique and in a state of constant flux, and if each social situation is in a parallel state, then the only appropriate way to study these things is through the exploration of “individual cases”. This insight, as was seen earlier in the chapter, impels the study to adopt a case study design. At the level of methodology, therefore, Jarvis' theoretical perspective reinforces and complements the personological tradition's insistence on the importance and appropriateness of biographical research methods, with an insistence on the appropriateness of a case study design for the exploration of the socially- and biographically-situated learnings of particular individuals.

4.12 The appropriateness of a case study design

The literature on the case study methodology is extensive. However, despite its prevalence in social science research, it has been notoriously difficult to define precisely what a case study is. Jarvis (1999) laconically expresses the situation:-

There are probably as many definitions of case studies as there are writers about them, which is not unusual in academic debate. (Jarvis, 1999:76)
Hartley suggests the following definition:--

Case study research consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of one or more organisations, or groups within organisations, with a view to providing an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study. (Hartley, 1994: 208-209).

Yin (1994) points out that a case study is not tied to any particular methods of data collection and may incorporate any techniques of data collection that are appropriate to the research question under investigation. Moreover, the case study approach is not tied to any particular framework for understanding the world. He argues that the choice of a case study methodology, like the choice of any other research strategy, is dependent on three factors:--

a) The type of research question  
b) The extent of control the researcher has over events  
c) The extent to which the focus of the research is on contemporary events and understandings.

The case study approach is thus particularly appropriate for dealing with research questions which are tied to very specific and particular geographical and social contexts. This makes it entirely appropriate for the present research which examines the identity formation of two groups of students in the highly distinctive environment of an English boarding school. As has already been argued, detailed knowledge of this type of environment could not be gained without the researcher’s extensive presence and involvement in that environment. Detailed understanding of the students’ understanding of their life stories would not be possible with observational methods of a more old-fashioned anthropological or sociological type. Both of these major considerations indicate not only the appropriateness, but also the necessity of a case study design.

Within the context of a being a participant (albeit a temporary one) in the boarding school environment, the researcher has little control over the events and structure of the research situation. This condition meets Yin’s (1994) second criterion for the selection of a case study design, which sees case studies as particularly appropriate in
research situations where the researcher has relatively little control over the research environment.

Yin’s (1994) third criterion for the appropriateness of the case study approach, which sees the methodology as being well-suited to the exploration of contemporary events and understandings, is met by the contemporary focus of the study. The study seeks to discover what students have learned about the formative rules, values and norms of their current social world, and, more importantly, it also asks them about their current sense of their own identity. Although McAdams’ life story model of identity incorporates considerable reflection on participants’ past experiences, the selections, reflections and interpretations that go into the construction of their autobiographies represents, of course, their current self-understanding.

In summary, the specific needs of the present study make the selection of a case study design an ideal and appropriate choice of methodology for the following reasons:-

First, no other method or approach would be nearly so adequate to examine in detail a group of individuals within a specific institution. Moreover, if the researcher wishes to obtain data about the subject’s own perspectives and interpretations of themselves and their social environment, he must himself be present in that environment long enough to build up sufficient relationships of trust that will permit the collection of good quality data. Secondly, the case study method is particularly receptive to uniquenesses and particularities, which makes it specially suitable as an approach to data collection in the present study. Thirdly, the case study design enables the researcher not only to investigate a specific group of individuals, but also allows the researcher to do so in their distinctive social context, providing the basis for a fully socially contextualised autobiographical study of particular individuals. Finally, the study’s need for highly individual, subject-centred and specifically contextualised data require the ultimate in “local knowledges”; the individual’s sense of their own unique individuality. This kind of data can only come from a case study, and an autobiographical one at that. The study’s design, therefore, adopts the form of a case study.
Within the parameters of its case study design, the first part of the chapter outlined the study's need to collect two distinct types of data; data about the participants' perceptions of the values and characteristics of the unusual social world in which they reside, and data about the lives and identities of the particular individuals who participate in the study. The final two sections of the chapter discuss the theoretical background behind the data collection methods used to achieve both of these aims.

4.13 Asking the students about their unique social world

How can the students' perceptions of their unique social world best be discovered? The present study adopts an "ethnomethodological" approach to this question and asks them. The somewhat ponderous term, "ethnomethodology" is most famously associated with the work of Garfinkel (1967), and also indebted to Schutz's (1967) social phenomenology. As an approach to social science it offers not just a "phenomenological sensibility" to describe what social life is like, but it also advocates the constitutiveness of social practice. (We make our social world through our communal speech-acts or "ethnomethods"). Garfinkel (1967) suggests that the everyday social world in which people live is constructed through their active use of artful yet taken-for granted implicit rules and procedures (the "ethno-methods") commonly used by the members of the particular society. The local "moral order" is a communal social construction, whose operation and meanings is given by the participants themselves.

Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making these same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes... (Garfinkel, 1967: xii).

Unlike the structural-functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons (1964), which objectivises social norms and values as being "out there", Garfinkel sees the members of a society as active constructors of their own social and moral world. Garfinkel also assumes that the activities through which members produce and manage their organized everyday affairs, stem from the same procedures through which members account for their actions; there is a necessary connection between doing and explaining.
The ethnomethodological approach has been very influential on Harré's "ethogenic" approach to social psychology (Harré, 1979; Harré and Secord, 1972; Kroger, 1982). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), the central ethogenic hypothesis is "that people possess a store of social knowledge which enables them both to act and to give accounts such as explanations and justifications of their action." (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 57). To achieve what Harré (1972, 1979) calls "social competence", each member of a particular social group needs to acquire a sufficient working knowledge of the local rules, norms and procedures so that they can take their place smoothly within that society. Harré (1972, 1979) argues that mere observation of a society's behaviour is insufficient as a basis for understanding social practices, since the significance of even a simple physical act, such as shaking hands, depends on the meanings ascribed to the act by the people involved. The "ethnomethodological" or ethogenic approach therefore makes the perspectives and meanings of participants the primary focus of attention. Having collected accounts of participants' perspectives, the investigator can then examine them to discern any shared norms and rules which may underlie the various accounts. The specific methods of data collection used to explore this area of school life have already been mentioned in Part 1 of the present chapter, and they are discussed further in the next chapter.

4.14 Finding out about individual identities: biographical methods

As was suggested earlier, the adoption of McAdams' life-story model of identity and his personological approach, as well as Jarvis' biographically-situated experiential learning perspective, all suggest strongly the appropriateness of using biographical methods of data collection. Some of the particular approaches to collecting biographical data which the researcher considered were mentioned in Part 1 of the present chapter. The final section of this chapter considers in a little more detail the work of those researchers whose approaches to the collection of biographical data were specially considered in designing the present study. In the brief discussion which follows, the work of three influential researchers is briefly outlined, and their alternative interpretations of the biographical method are discussed and evaluated. The three theorists considered are Atkinson (1998), Denzin (1989) and McAdams (1993). Though the work of all three contain much that is of value, reasons are given for
preferring McAdams’ biographical data collection method for the purpose of the present research.

First, however, what are the advantages of biographical methods of data collection per se in the context of the present study? The advantages include the following considerations:

1. Biographical methods are well-placed to provide accounts of people’s personal experiences. As Denzin puts it: “The subject matter of the biographical method is the life experiences of a person.” (1989: 13). He, like many other commentators, adjudge stories to be a “privileged form of mediation” (Ricoeur, 1992) when it comes to communicating personal experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1994: 415) suggest that “when persons note something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, they do so…in storied form.” (1994: 415). They endorse the view of Carr (1986) and claim:

In effect, stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. (1994: 415).

2. Biographical methods are also able to supply highly-contextualised data about the life-world of the autobiographer, and are therefore more likely to be sensitive to the specificities and uniquenesses of an individual life and its circumstances. Stories characteristically provide a geographical, temporal and personal context for the tale that is told, as both Ricoeur (1992) and Harré (1998) have argued. In consequence, the provision of an adequate context for interpreting personal information supplied by a research participant is likely to make the intelligent interpretation of personal stories more secure.

3. Biographical methods, because of their idiographic character, offer a flexible tool that is capable of representing individual differences, as contrasted with nomothetic and statistical methods which elide difference in the pursuit of sameness.

4. The use of the biographical method privileges the subjective dimensions of personal experience. It ensures, as Schutz puts it, the “safeguarding of the subjective
point of view” (Schutz, 1964: 8), and that the subject’s point of view is both represented and also kept to the forefront of attention. McAdams argues that “identity” is an inherently subject-centered concept; it is “the person as seen by the person” (McAdams, 1990). Given this subject-centered definition of identity (the present study’s central concept), it is essential that the principal research method should be able to collect data that is also suitably subject-centered. As Clegg et al. (1985) argue, the biographical study of individual cases is able to do this since biographical data are produced from within the actor’s own frame of reference.

5. In his anthropological work Geertz (1973, 1983) argues persuasively for gathering research data which he calls “thick descriptions”. Such descriptions are saturated with the idiosyncratic purposes, meanings and interpretations of the persons involved, rather than the “thin descriptions” of the more “objective” and impersonal kind of description encouraged in positivist conceptions of social science which describe outward behaviour and conversation alone. It can be argued that autobiographical narratives provide excellent instances of “thick description”. Both Jankowicz (1991: 164) and Clegg (1985: 11) draw attention to the rich descriptions possible when individual cases are studied.

6. If motivation is seen as an important defining factor in human identity, then it can also be plausibly argued that life story narratives are ideally suited to encapsulating such motives. The fundamental importance of motive, need and desire in the constitution of human identity has been explored by many theorists from Augustine (O’Donnell, 1992), whose desire-structured model of narrative identity was encountered in the first chapter, through to more recent researchers such as McClelland (1984), Winter (1973), and McAdams (1985). Like Augustine, many of these commentators have argued that the identity of a particular human life is organized around the principal motivations, intentions and desires which organize it. In a parallel way, Murray (1938) also argued that motivation exercised a decisive organizing influence upon a person’s distinctive individuality, and therefore also upon their biography. Bruner has echoed this view when he writes: “Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions.” (Bruner, 1986: 16). McAdams argues that motives appear in life stories in the form of clusters of motivational “themes”.

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7. From an ethical and political perspective, both Denzin (1994) and Atkinson (1998) argue that the social scientist who listens to the life stories of his participants is, in many cases, allowing a voice to be heard that might otherwise remain silent. In this way, there is a political dimension to the use of the biographical method. This has been explored by a number of feminist writers and post-feminist writers (such as Butler, 1990 and Clausen, 1990), and its emancipatory aspect has been persuasively championed by Alheit (1995).

8. Finally, biographical stories offer both their narrator as well as the researcher a more holistic picture of a person’s identity than is easily available through other qualitative methods. Both the synchronic and the diachronic aspects of a person’s identity - their many possible social selves as well as their many older and younger selves - can all be represented and united within the constraints of a single autobiographical narrative.

If the advantages of a biographical type of research method are accepted, there remains the issue of which particular type of biographical method might best be suited to the aims of the present study of adolescent identities. From amongst the extensive literature on the biographical methodology, the work of three influential researchers, each from a different disciplinary background, are briefly compared and discussed. First, from his background within the “life story” approach to social research, the work of Atkinson (1998) is considered. Next, from his background within the interpretive tradition of sociology, the distinctive approach of Denzin (1989, 1994) is discussed. Finally, from within the personological and developmental traditions of psychological research, the work of McAdams (1985, 1991, 1993/1997) is examined, and reasons are given for preferring the latter’s version of the biographical method for use in the present study.
Atkinson's biographical method

Atkinson stands within the recent life story and life history approach to research which has developed rapidly since the late 1980s. Along with other practitioners such as Josselsson (1996), Lieblich (1994, 1997) and Alheit (1995, 1998, 1999) in adult education, Atkinson has made extensive use of biographical methods in his research. He argues:

If we want to know the unique experience and perspective of an individual, there is no better way to do this than in the person’s own voice. So I have held to a story told in the teller’s own words. (Atkinson, 1998: 5).

Atkinson suggests that his subjects try to see their lives as a whole before they begin to recount them. Atkinson, through the process of the Life Story Interview (1998), then listens attentively as they tell the story of their lives. He endeavours to hear his subjects’ own subjective interpretations of their lives as they tell them: “Storytellers are the first interpreters of the stories told.” (Atkinson, 1998: 5).

Atkinson’s work at the Centre for the Study of Lives at the University of Southern Maine acknowledges the influence of the older ethnographic approaches of oral history and life history, and it also draws upon the work of Murray (1938) and Erikson (1959, 1963) in the personological tradition. Atkinson’s own approach uses a structured interview - the “Life Story Interview” - as its principal research method. During the course of a tape-recorded interview, the interviewer assists the interviewee to tell the story of their life, and to reflect on its personal meanings. Atkinson advocates the preparation of a protocol of specific interview questions (mainly about predictable developmental stages and moments in the average life course) which the interviewer keeps in the back of their mind. The protocol’s questions, however, are not allowed to dominate or displace what the story-teller wants to say. After the interview, the researcher transcribes the tape. The transcript is then given to the respondent, who is invited to revise and comment on the transcript of the interview. Each interview may last several hours, conducted over a series of meetings. Atkinson’s approach is detailed, thorough and respectful.
As impressively respectful and careful as Atkinson’s method is, it is not adopted as
the primary biographical method in the present study, and for two principal reasons.
First, the period of preliminary observation in the research school demonstrated that
adolescent boys do not always find it very easy to *talk* about themselves in the
detailed autobiographical manner which Atkinson’s adult subjects so obviously enjoy.
Adolescent boys found it both easier and more congenial to *write* about themselves
instead, and so this preference was incorporated into the design of the research.
Secondly, the use of lengthy face-to-face interviews was considered to be both too
intrusive and too time-consuming for the participants. In the context of a very busy
and often highly pressured school day, the prospect of such lengthy interviews was
neither practicable, nor, because of its intrusiveness, ethically defensible, as was
argued in the first part of the chapter. It was felt that if a detailed autobiographical
study was to be conducted, it must be accomplished in a way which fitted more
naturally into activities to which the students were already committed.

*Denzin’s biographical method*

A different approach to biographical research is offered by Denzin (1989). More
obviously and heavily freighted with *theoretical* concerns than the work of Atkinson,
Denzin’s work is also less concerned than Atkinson’s with *individual* differences and
uniqueesses. Denzin’s sociological work since the late 1980s has made increasing
use of the biographical method, and has done so in ways which owe much to his more
recent espousal of a postmodern perspective in preference to his previous traditional
sociological one. His advocacy of a fully *interpretive* biographical methodology takes
seriously the ineluctable *subjectivity* of all human experience, as well as the existence
of multiple perspectives, and the recognition that there are no single authoritative
“presences”, not even for the researcher.

Drawing on the influences of Derrida (1976, 1978), C. Wright Mills (1959) and Sartre
(1981,1987), Denzin has developed his own influential version of biographical
research which he calls “Interpretive Biography” (1989):-
I define the biographical method as the studied use and collection of life documents, or documents of life..., which describe turning points in people’s lives. These documents will include autobiographies, biographies...diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories, and personal histories. (Denzin, 1989: 7).

The range of methods included beneath his capacious definitional umbrella of “interpretive biography” is clearly very wide, and Denzin’s own research has been correspondingly extensive. From his post-structuralist mentors, Denzin has brought to the forefront of biographical research a committed but critical appraisal of the biographical method. Although influenced in his own practice (1987a, 1987b) by Sartre’s (1981, 1987) methods of biographical study, he insists, against Sartre, that the biographical method cannot give direct and unmediated access to the inner life of the person studied. Derrida (1972), he claims,

...has contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of the person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs and the process of signification. (Denzin, 1989: 14).

Such claims raise major critical issues about the epistemic status of people’s life stories which need to be more fully examined later. It is instructive to contrast Denzin’s perspective on such difficulties with that of another prominent autobiographical researcher. McAdams, whose own approach to biographical research will be discussed presently, is also aware of epistemological difficulties:-

I ask people to tell me the stories of their lives because their verbal accounts hold outlines of internalized personal myths. I know that not everything people tell me is important, and that some of what they tell me may function merely to make them ‘look good’ in my eyes. I also know that there is much that will remain untold, no matter how successful our interview nor how successful our rapport. (McAdams, 1993: 20).

Between these two quotations lies the potential for a profound and far-reaching philosophical dialogue. The essential question to be examined is how, and in what sense, a human autobiography can be “truthful”. How far is the “glaze of language” to be read necessarily as distortion and deception? To what extent is the necessarily interpretive, language-soaked and culturally-situated nature of human understanding to be read as inherently deceptive and evasive? As Murdoch (1992) points out, the tendency of post-structuralist thought is to elide or subvert the question of a
statement’s truthfulness by suggesting that it is produced under the aegis of some particular version of linguistic or cultural determinism. Telling examples of this approach can be found in the work of Derrida (1976), Foucault (1977: 124), Barthes (1977: 143) and Bourdieu (in Roos, 1987: 17). These important philosophical issues about the epistemic status of people’s verbal statements cannot be further discussed at this point, though some aspects of the issue are discussed later in the study. For the present, it is suggested that such issues have been discussed, and partly resolved, at least in the view of the present author, in the work of Gadamer (1975, 1976, 1979), Ricoeur (1992) and Plath (1987).

Paradoxically, for all his post-structuralist protestations, Denzin shares with McAdams a common commitment to the central importance of “experience”. At the outset of his work on the Interpretive Biographical method he announces:-

The subject matter of the biographical method is the life experiences of a person. (Denzin, 1989: 13, italics added) and later:-

A person has a life or a set of life-experiences which are his or hers and no one else’s. (Denzin, 1989: 28).

Such claims sit uneasily with other strands elsewhere in Denzin’s work:-

There are no experiences, only glossed, narrative reports of them. (Denzin, 1989: 69).

How far such contrasts represent (like his French mentors) a tendency towards Gallic overstatement, and how far an unresolved contradiction in Denzin’s position, would require more detailed discussion than could be justified here. In passing, it may be noted that whilst Denzin seems, in general, keen to espouse “experience” as a basic concept in his biographical work, such a position is in diametrical conflict with the anti-experiential stance of his claimed mentor, Derrida. Close study of Derrida’s treatment of the term “experience” in De la Grammatologie (1967: 89, see especially the passage which begins: Quant au concept d’expérience, il est ici fort embarrassant…) would make the conflict between Denzin’s position and that of Derrida clear. Inconsistent or not, however, for the purposes of the present research, Denzin’s position overlaps significantly with those of Jarvis, (1987, 1992), McAdams (1985, 1993), and Merleau-Ponty (1968, 1964).
Leaving aside the philosophical issues so vigorously discussed by Denzin, his own practical approach, as befits a sociologist, uses biographical research methods in pursuit of an understanding of certain commonalities of social and discursive experience. For him, one of the primary interests in autobiographical study is to discover the socially-conditioned conventions of autobiographical writing (Denzin, 1989:17) in Western cultures. Although, as a research method, he may collect the autobiographies of individual persons, his principal research interests have been socially focused, and have not been concerned with the description and analysis of individual identity. Therefore, whilst valuing the wide range of critical issues that Denzin’s account of the biographical method has contributed to the present study, his particular version of it is not adopted here. His version of the biographical method is, first, insufficiently focussed on the individual, and secondly, insists too strongly on the existence of generic Western autobiographical conventions. A more open, and more individually focused version of the biographical method would be more suitable for the needs of the present research. Such a version of the biographical method is provided by the work of McAdams.

**McAdams’ biographical method**

McAdams’ model of identity was thoroughly explored in Chapter 2. The present sub-section considers a quite different aspect of his work; the biographical method of data collection employed in his 1985 study. Building on the personological tradition inherited from Murray (1938), White (1966) and Erikson (1958, 1969), McAdams made extensive use of the biographical method in his research on the development of personal identity. His major autobiographical study (1985) examined the identity development of two groups of people; 90 university students and 50 middle-aged adults from a variety of professional backgrounds. Respondents in this study were given a series of open-ended questions to which they responded by writing what McAdams called an “identity journal” (1985/1988: 282), a kind of autobiography in which they wrote about particular moments and episodes in their lives. Many of the participants were also given follow-up interviews in which aspects of their stories were discussed.
In the conduct of his empirical work, McAdams devised what he called an "interview protocol" (McAdams, 1993: 256) which suggested some of the main general *categories of experience* (such as "peak" and "nadir" experiences") which participants might write or talk about when they produced their life stories. The autobiographies, written by the participants or (in the case of face-to-face interviews) transcribed by the researcher, were then analysed by McAdams, using an analytical framework which looked for characteristic "key events" which McAdams believed to occur in most life stories.

On the basis of his empirical work, McAdams has theorized that people's autobiographical stories are characteristically punctuated by a number of *key events* which encapsulate special meanings for the subject. McAdams calls such episodes "nuclear episodes."

I use the term nuclear episodes to refer to key events in a person's life story. These rich descriptive accounts provide invaluable information about dominant themes in your personal myth, as well as imagery and tone. (1993: 259).

McAdams' scheme of "nuclear episodes" includes peak experiences, nadir experiences, turning points, earliest memories, important childhood memories, as well as other important adolescent and adult memories. In contrast, Denzin (1989) had discussed *one* - and only one - such particular category of key event in his discussion of what he called "epiphanies" or "turning points":-

Epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives...In them, personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life. (Denzin, 1989: 70).

Denzin's single category of *key event* is clearly much more restricted in scope than the more extensive schema produced by McAdams. Although "turning points" are of a particular importance in the context of Denzin's work (1987a, 1987b) with members of Alcoholics Anonymous (where such dramatic "turning points" may be both more decisive and more frequent features of people's life-stories), McAdams' broader analytical scheme of the key moments in people's life stories seems better suited to the less specialized sample of students at the research school.
The act of narration through which the person’s unique life story is created uses typical narrative resources such as *plot* and *character*, which have been considered basic constituents of narrative since at least the time of Aristotle. As a result of his own autobiographical research, McAdams proposes an analytical scheme more detailed than that of Aristotle’s *Plot* and *Character*. The specific details of McAdams’ narrative model have evolved over recent years, but seems to have stabilized in the form given in *Stories We Live By* (1993). In this latest version of the model discussed in Chapter 2, he suggests that the basic constituents of autobiographical narrative are:-

- **Narrative tone** (the tendencies towards optimism or pessimism which may have their roots as far back as the infant’s early experiences of attachment)
- **Imagery** (absorbed from our personal and cultural experiences from early childhood)
- **Motivational Theme** (the recurrent patterns of human intention and motivation which begin to be consolidated in mid- to late childhood and which can characteristically be classified into two major types of motivation; agency and communion)
- **Ideological Setting** (the dominant beliefs and values within which the individual frames their life’s meanings and motivations, clarified and adopted during late adolescence and early adulthood)
- **Scenes** (also called “nuclear episodes”, which encapsulate or symbolize moments of particular significance in the person’s interpretation of their life course)
- **Character** and **“Imago”** (a person’s constituent sub-selves, which are developed and integrated in middle life)
- **Ending** (also called “Generativity script”, being the way the middle-aged individual intends to shape the later stages of their lives in the directions of either generativity or despair)

This schema forms the basis for his research protocol, and, in a modified and simplified form, served as the guide issued to participants in the present autobiographical study. This protocol (“Writing your own autobiography”), along
with other research protocols, can be seen in Appendix F, the Methodological Appendix.

McAdams’ focus on the individual rather than on the features of their society, his specialized expertise in exploring personal identity, his empirically developed research protocols and, finally, his empirically-grounded analytical schema provide four strong reasons for adopting McAdams’ version of the biographical method as the starting point for the present study.

After explaining the main ethical and practical issues raised by the present study, this methodological chapter has thus argued that the present study should be regarded as a qualitative type of study. It has been further argued that an Interpretive research paradigm (rather than one which is Positivist, Neo-positivist or Critical) suits the ineluctably hermeneutical activity of interpreting autobiographical texts which lie at the heart of the study. Amongst the several varieties of the interpretivist paradigm, it was suggested that the broadly hermeneutical account of interpretivism associated with the work of Gadamer (1975, 1976) and Ricoeur (1992/1994) was to be preferred to the more radically “Constructionist” forms of interpretivism associated with the work of Gergen (1985). The influence of the “personological” tradition of research in psychology, with its triple emphasis on the whole person, biographical methods, and motivation, was acknowledged, and, within this tradition, McAdams’ specialized investigations into personal identity were recognized. To unify both the social and individual aspects of the present study, as well as to reinforce the focus of the study upon the individual interpretations and meanings of each of the study’s subjects, Jarvis’ (1987) experiential learning theory was adopted as an overall theoretical perspective. This theoretical accommodation of both the individual and social aspects of the study were reinforced through the adoption of a case study methodology for the study’s overall design. Finally, two main categories of “subject-centered” research methods, “ethnomethodological” methods and biographical methods, were selected as being particularly appropriate for the study’s need to examine both the individual identities of the research’s participants, as well as their perceptions of their immediate social environment. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion of both the origins of, as well as three influential variants of the biographical method of data collection,
and gave reasons for adopting the method associated with the work of McAdams (1985).

The next chapter outlines the design of the present study and also describes in further detail its principal methods of data collection and approach to data analysis.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t

(Hamlet, Act II:2, Shakespeare)

The present chapter presents an outline of the study’s overall design. It then presents a schematic summary of the main stages through which the study passed, before going on to describe the social context of the study, the sample of student participants, and the principal research methods employed. These sections are followed by a description of the study’s general approach to data analysis, the three principal phases of data analysis, and the analytical methods applied to the data are then discussed. Further details of many of the specific research tools employed in the study are given in Appendix F.

For the sake of simplicity and clarity, and to avoid undue repetition, many additional details of the methods of data collection and the analytical procedures applied to them are presented alongside the data which they yielded during the course of the four data chapters which follow this one. The present chapter, therefore, confines itself to presenting an outline of the study’s design, structure and methods of data collection and analysis.

5.1 The overall design of the research

Since the present study seeks to explore the possibility of the formation of unique and unified personal identities amongst a group of students who live for most of the year within the highly constrained institutional context of an English Public School, it is not merely a biographical exploration of a random and unrelated group of individuals, but is instead a study of the unique identities of a group of individuals who share the same highly distinctive and influential social context.
To allow for an appropriately detailed investigation of both the social and individual aspects of identity formation, the study is constructed in three distinct layers. The first layer of the study involves exploring what the students have learned about the influential social norms and values which impinge on them at school. Supplied with this information, the researcher will not only understand more fully the social world in which the students reside, but be also better able to assess what effects this specialized environment may have on the developing identities of the students. The second layer of the study turns to the autobiographical writings, discussions and conversations of the individual students with the aim of exploring the shared features of the individual autobiographies. Through comparing the students’ autobiographies with each other, and also with other types of indigenous autobiographical writing within the school, the researcher can begin to discern some of the distinctive shared features and similarities manifested by the individual autobiographies. Furnished with this information, the researcher can discern those features of the individual autobiographies which, although distinctive, are not in themselves unique. Having detected and “peeled away” the influences of the immediate school environment in the first layer of the study, and then discovered the more commonly shared personal characteristics revealed in the second layer of the study, the third and final phase of the study returns to the individual autobiographies, but this time with the specific aim of discovering the manifold ways in which the stories are not only unified, but also differentiated from each other in such a way that they may rightly be seen as unique.

In describing the heuristic approach of two earlier personologists (Kluckholn and Murray, 1953), McAdams says that their approach was guided by the understanding that:

...every story is (a) like all other stories, (b) like some other stories, and, finally, like no other story. (McAdams, 1989:162)

This quotation provides a convenient summary for the present study’s overall layered research strategy outlined above, which thus seeks to examine how the particular life stories collected in this study are “like all other stories, like some other stories, and, finally, like no other story”:-
The students share in the official and unofficial life of the same school, and through the formative influence of this unusual social world (which, as was discussed earlier, approximates to what Goffman, 1961, has called a “total institution”), students’ individual life stories may be “like all other stories” told by students at the same school. When the individual autobiographies are compared a little more closely, they may demonstrate certain shared similarities. These may indicate that, however distinctive it may appear to be at first sight, an individual’s life story may be “like some other stories”. Finally, when all the social samenesses and emergent patterns have been allowed for, it is expected that each story will, on close inspection, still have its own uniqueness and thus be “like no other story”.

A particular student’s differentiation (and thereby uniqueness) is achieved against an obvious background of social similarity and sameness, as well as considerable pressures towards social conformity, so the general strategy of the study is progressively to “peel away” successive layers of shared social similarity so that the students’ personal differences can be the more clearly discerned. The pragmatic rationale underlying the study’s design is that until some of the shared characteristics of the students’ shared social lives and autobiographies have been described and removed from consideration, it will be difficult to discern clearly those features of the individual autobiographies which are distinctive, different and perhaps even unique.

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, this pragmatic rationale in underpinned by a wider methodological concern that is well expressed by Jarvis’ observation:-

I am concerned that ever since the Enlightenment, we have distilled out differences and ended up with similarity. But if we distilled out similarity – then we are left with uniqueness! (Jarvis, 2001:1b).

The study as a whole thus directs itself to the business of “distilling out similarity” in the search for some of the ways in which each student’s autobiography is “like no other story”.

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5.2 Outline of the study’s three principal phases

In the manner suggested by the McAdams quotation above, the three phases of the study will aim successively to “peel away” layers of greater **generality** until the analysis reaches a layer of greater **specificity** and **uniqueness**:–

- In the first phase of the study the first layer to be examined will be the shared norms, values and practices which, from the students’ point of view, constitute the formative social “moral order” within which they live for so much of the year. This social world and its values informs the daily lives of all the school’s students, not just the participants in the present study. Its nature and the extent of its influence on the formation of individual identities is the primary focus of this first layer of the study.

- Next, the second phase of the study examines the life-stories of the 42 participants. These stories are compared and analysed for the existence of **shared** features and **common** patterns. In particular, the analysis during this phase of the research concentrates upon describing common features of the characteristic **content** and **structure** of the individual autobiographies. At this stage, the autobiographies specially produced for the present study are compared with three **other** forms of indigenous autobiographical writing which are produced during the course of a usual school year. This second type of comparison allows the **distinctive** characteristics of the research autobiographies to be seen more clearly, and their value as instruments for manifesting a students’ sense of **identity** to be assessed.

- In the final phase of the research, the principal research question is addressed directly. The study’s principal question, **In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?**, is broken down into two separate questions:–

  *In what specific ways are the life stories unified?*
  *In what specific ways are the life stories differentiated from each other?*
To answer these two sub-questions, the autobiographical material produced by the 42 participants was examined very closely. The data collected during the course of the study was analysed through a series of multiple "readings", guided by a structured "Reading Guide" (modeled on the work of Brown et al. (1987) and Gilligan et al.(1990), by a range of analytical questions derived from the work of a large number of other scholars who have speculated about the features of autobiographical and other narratives, and also by the researcher’s previous experience as both a reader of autobiographies and as a qualified psychotherapist. The process of data analysis was, for convenience, divided into ten constituent phases or "readings". At the conclusion of each constituent stage of the complete cycle of ten separate "readings", written records (in the form of a variety of pro formas, tables, summary digests, written annotations and pen portraits) were kept of the findings at each stage, to act as a basis for further analysis, and to furnish an audit trail of the process of analysis.

Further reflection and analysis of these data was employed to classify and categorise the large number of unifying and differentiating factors (more than seventy in all) into a structured descriptive taxonomy which summarised the findings of the entire analytical process.

Finally, it was suggested that the taxonomy of unifying and differentiating features derived from the students’ life stories provided a sufficient and detailed answer to the study’s principal research question.

The sections that follow provide a brief description of the school context within which the research was carried out, and of the sample of 42 participants whose autobiographies lie at the heart of the study. These sections are followed by a brief section which outlines the sequence of principal stages which marked the research process. Having outlined the three principal categories of data collected, the chapter finishes with a more detailed explanation of the three principal phases of the research’s design.
5.3 Social context: the principal characteristics of the research school

The researcher had the opportunity to spend a period 8 months in the residential environment of an English Public School. The ages of students varied between thirteen and nineteen. Most students were from home backgrounds with sufficient financial resources to afford the very high school fees, more than two-thirds of the average national salary at the time of writing. The school accepted a number of students from abroad, with India, Kenya, Thailand, Hong Kong, Germany, Turkey, Mexico and the former Soviet Union amongst those nations represented at the time of the research. Students were assigned to one of the several boarding houses. The ethos of the school was academic, and in addition, there were also sporting activities on most days, as well as a wide variety of cultural activities. The school operated seven days a week, though recent changes prompted by parental pressure had meant that many students could choose to be away from school on Saturday evenings if they wished to go home instead, and if all their school commitments had been fulfilled.

The researcher taught a number of lessons each week during his placement at the school, and also took a full part in the wider life of the school. He therefore had opportunities to meet students in the classroom, during the morning coffee break, over lunch, during cultural and sporting activities, as well as at a variety of evening functions. He was present at communal occasions when either the whole school, or substantial portions of it, were present, such as the daily chapel services each morning, Headmaster’s Assemblies, concerts and plays. He also had the opportunity to observe some of the activities which were centered in the individual Boarding Houses, such as the “Benefactor’s Feast” at the end of the Christmas term.

5.4 The sample of student participants

Although the researcher had access to the whole of the school, and was able to talk, discuss, interview and observe a wide range of students during his time at the school, the major part of the study rests upon the more intensive and detailed individual autobiographical data which he collected from two particular groups of students.
The researcher's initial period of preparatory observation demonstrated that adolescent boys, who formed the majority of this school's population, were characteristically reserved when it came to talking about themselves. For a study which adopts a “life story” model of identity and an autobiographical methodology, this personal taciturnity seemed at first to pose a major practical problem. The researcher was also concerned with an ethical problem; that of obtruding unnecessarily into the academic and personal lives of the students. As was explained in the previous chapter, both sets of problems were solved by the construction of dual-purpose exercises which served simultaneously the students’ educational needs as well as those of the researcher.

During the first of the two school terms which constituted his placement at the school, the researcher was asked to stand in for an English teacher who was absent for a term. Part of the requirements for the GCSE English course which the students were then studying required the students to produce written work which was not based on any literary text. Autobiographical writing fulfilled both the students’ and the researcher’s requirements very well. In a similar way, the students participated in a number of additional written, spoken and argumentative tasks which contributed to both their own studies and educational advancement, as well, simultaneously, as contributing to the research project. When the absent teacher returned at the beginning of the following term, the researcher was transferred to a different group of students where, fortuitously, similar academic parameters prevailed. As was explained in the previous chapter, both groups of students were briefed in advance about the potential dual purpose of their work, and all were informed that their decision to allow their work to be used as part of the study was something which they might freely decide, without fear of prejudice, after their school work was, for academic purposes, duly marked and graded. All the participants were, in the event, very willing to allow their work to be used, and several expressed considerable interest in the study’s eventual outcome.

Under these circumstances, the principal sample of student participants was composed of two separate English classes. The first was a group of fifteen year olds who had already spent their first year in the school, and were now in their second year. They had been streamed according to intellectual ability, and all the group’s members were
in the upper half of the school’s academic ability range. The second group was a group of fourteen year olds who were still in their first year at the school. The group was a mixed ability group, with a wider range of academic ability than the group of fifteen year olds. The group occupied a more central position within the range of intellectual abilities for their year.

The researcher would have liked to include a sample of both male and female older students in the autobiographical part of the study, but the opportunity to do so as a natural part of their academic studies did not present itself. The principal sample of autobiographers therefore comprised a group of adolescent boys aged, at the time of the study, between thirteen and sixteen. Twenty of the boys had already spent their first year in the school and had now begun their second year. Twenty-two boys were still in their first year at the school, and, at the time the autobiographies were written, were in the middle of their third term at the school.

As outlined in the previous section, all the students at the schools had parents or other relatives who were sufficiently affluent to be able to pay the substantial school fees from their disposable incomes. The ethnic composition of the sample included students from Japan, China, Pakistan, Kenya, Indonesia, Ireland and South Africa. In all, nearly 20% of the sample’s members were not holders of British passports. The sample also included three pairs of brothers as well as one severe dyspraxic, and one student who presented himself with undiagnosed social difficulties.

5.5 Sequence of the research process

The research process fell into five distinct phases:-

1. Initial period of preliminary observation at the school in order to:-

   - Get a feel for the “ethos” of the school.
   - Get to know some of the students.
Pilot a number of written and conversational autobiographical exercises to see what sort of methods and approaches were likely to be effective in this unusual environment.

Observe at first hand some of the ways in which young people talked about themselves and their communal life.

2. *Designing the study* as a whole, as well as its principal “research instruments” in the light of:

- The study’s principal research question
- A sufficiently well-informed “local knowledge” (as a result of the preliminary period of observation and pilot studies) concerning what methods would be practicable and ethical within the idiosyncratic confines of this unusual environment.

3. *Period of Placement* in the residential school. During this time, the five main categories of data collection (see below) took place. This phase of the research process occupied a period of eight months. A variety of school documents were collected throughout this period, and an observational journal was kept throughout.

4. With the principal period of observation and data collection finished, an intensive period of *data analysis* began.

5. After the major part of the data analysis had been completed, the researcher was able to return to the school during the next academic year to *follow up* a selected number of issues, and to *check the accuracy* of some of his initial findings through discussions and interviews with both present students and recent school leavers.
5.6 Main types of data collected during the study

The two principal categories of data collected during the research have already been outlined in the previous methodological chapter; autobiographical data from individual students, and “ethnomethodological” data which offered a students’-eye view of the school’s unofficial norms and values.

A) Biographical methods to explore the identities of individuals

At the heart of the present study lies the collection of written autobiographies from two groups of students. Altogether, 42 students took part in this component of the research. The explorations into personal identity provided by the individual autobiographies were supported by three other methods of data collection; a “follow-up interview” (“Questions for Reflection”- for this and other research protocols, see the Methodological Appendix); an imaginative exercise to explore each student’s principal motivational commitments (The “Motivational Theme Test”, based on the work of Murray, 1938; Bakan, 1966; McClelland, 1951, 1984, and McAdams, 1985, specially devised for the present study), and a graph-based exercise (based on the research of Gergen and Gergen, 1993b) in which students were asked to represent and evaluate their life course in graphical as opposed to written form. These principal forms of biographical data collected are now explained in a little more detail:-

1. Written Autobiographies

As was explained earlier, 42 students took part in this major component of the research. The students, mostly between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, were members of two different English classes. All the students in the two groups were boys, a feature of the design dictated by the practicalities of the school timetable and certain ethical considerations.

To stimulate them in their reflections prior to writing their autobiographies, each student was given a copy of a specially-adapted version of McAdams’ “interview protocol”. A copy of this protocol (“Writing your own autobiography”) can be seen in
Appendix F. McAdams’ “interview protocol”, evolved from his extensive and specialized research into identity formation, was specifically designed to elicit participants’ life stories in such a way that their narrative identities were exhibited clearly. On the basis of McAdams’ (1985) considerable empirical research it was therefore believed that this “protocol” would provide a basis for developing a modified version (“Writing your own autobiography”), suitable for the special context and purposes of the present research. It was made clear to participants that the “Writing your own autobiography” guidelines could be modified or entirely dispensed with if students chose; the form and content of their autobiographies was a matter for each student to decide for themselves.

Being focused on specific personal experiences, McAdams’ protocol implicitly asks students, in effect, to reflect on and then make personally significant selections from the biographically-situated experiential learning which constitutes their life course. The reflective nature of the task entailed that it was readily accommodated within Jarvis’ (1987, 1992) model of experiential learning.

The length of the written autobiographies varied between approximately 300 and 11,000 words in length, rather less than a quarter of a million words of this autobiographical material being collected in all.

2. Follow-up “interview”

In the design of his study of 90 college students, McAdams (1985) followed up the written autobiographies produced by his participants by interviewing many of the students about selected aspects of their lives and writings. McAdams’ students were studying developmental psychology as part of their university course, and McAdams was aided by a team of fellow researchers and interviewers. Neither of these conditions obtained in the present study. As previously explained, it was decided that personal face-to-face interviews with each of the students would be impractically time-consuming for a single researcher, as well as unnecessarily intrusive for the students, so a modified written form of “interview” was adopted. After writing their autobiographies, participants were given a brief list of “follow-up questions” which
asked them to reflect on their autobiographies. The follow-up questions were generated as a result of the researcher's initial inspection of the written autobiographies. Three principal aims informed the selection of questions. First, they aimed to stimulate the students to reflect on the possible multiplicity of their social and temporal selves. Secondly, the questions sought the students' views about any effects the school environment may have had on their developing sense of identity, and finally, the questions asked students to present their own views on the sources of their uniqueness. A copy of these questions ("Questions for Reflection") can be found in Appendix F.

3. Motivational Theme Test

In the design of his original study, McAdams (1985) administered a range of psychological tests to his student participants. The most important of these was the Thematic Apperception Test (Morgan and Murray, 1935; Murray, 1943). The Thematic Apperception Test was designed by Murray as a tool for identifying hidden unconscious and conscious motivations which Murray (and indeed McAdams) believed to be important well-springs of personal identity. The TAT was designed as an instrument in which subjects were shown an ambiguous picture featuring a number of people. Respondents were then asked to imagine or invent an explanatory story which connected the features of the picture. This interpretation was then coded so as to yield numerical scores across a variety of specific categories of motivation. For both Murray (1938) and McAdams (1985), the use of this test complemented their biographical explorations. In the context of the research school, however, it was felt that the TAT would be an inappropriate instrument to use. The participants, unlike McAdams', were not studying psychology, and the use of the test, though interesting for the researcher, would contribute nothing to the education of the students themselves. Its covert projective design also raised ethical problems in this context.

In the research of Murray (1938) and McAdams (1985), the principal aim in using the TAT was to provide a complementary alternative measure of participants' dominant motivations through the eliciting of their imaginative response to standardized stimuli. The researcher therefore designed an imaginative exercise which might address the
issue of dominant motivational themes in the participants’ lives, but which might do so in a way that was of some educational benefit to the students. The exercise devised was based on a light-hearted poem about how people might choose to spend their last twenty-four hours if they believed the world was about to end. Faced with this situation, the poem envisages people doing things they had always wanted to do; things, in short, that were important to them and which displayed overtly their characteristic motivations and desires. This exercise was undertaken by the students in the two principal research groups. It was hoped that the exercise would be stimulating and enjoyable for the students, and would also – though in a more open and overt way than Murray’s TAT – provide an additional indicator of dominant motivational themes which might furnish complementary or contrasting comparisons with the written autobiographies. Details of the theoretical basis, construction and scoring of the Motivational Theme Test can be found in Appendix F.

4. Autobiographical Graphs; Lifeline diagrams

In an autobiographical study conducted with a group of late adolescents, Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) asked their participants to represent the ups and downs of their life course in the form of a single line drawn on the axes of a graph. The graph’s horizontal axis represented the person’s age in years, and the vertical axis represented their level of satisfaction and happiness. As a result of their research, the Gergens made a number of claims about the characteristic types of plot that are exhibited in life stories, suggesting that there are three basic plot types. (These claims are outlined and, in the light of the findings of the present study, evaluated later.) This exercise in data collection was not considered central to the study’s aims. Since, however, it took only a few minutes for students to complete, it was felt these data might be able to contribute an interesting complementary source of autobiographical data.

After an initial pilot study with two groups, an adapted version of the Gergens’ method was used with the two principal research group of autobiographers. This version of the exercise (“A life story in a single line”) is included in Appendix F. It was hoped that this data would also enable the researcher to evaluate the claims about generic autobiographical plots made by Gergen and Gergen (1993). In the event, the
results of these graphical exercises were found neither to support the Gergens' own conclusions, nor to complement the study's other biographical data in any clear or consistent way. These graphical data are therefore discussed only briefly in Chapter 7 and Chapter 10.

B) "Ethnomethodological" methods to explore the students' perceptions of their social world

In order to assess how far the idiosyncratic social world of the boarding school might influence the identities of its members, a number of methods were devised to explore what students had learned about the official and unofficial values, norms and expectations of school life. As was outlined in the previous chapter, four separate inter-related areas of the school's "moral order" were investigated. First, the unofficial rules of the schoolboy "Code"; secondly, the local "moral lexicon"; thirdly, the semiology of "Sport" as transmitter of influential values, and finally the local school and boarding house stereotypes. For each of these subject areas, at least two distinct and complementary types of data were collected. Each of these types of data were, in their turn, investigated through the collection of two separate data sets, with one data set from each of the two constituent research groups. In all, eleven different types of data were collected. Each data set was analysed separately before being compared with its matched pair, and then, finally, compared with complementary data. In more detail, the four areas examined were as follows:-

1. Discovering the "unofficial" school rules

"Fitting in" to school life and being "cool" require skilled social adjustment on the part of students, and they involve both detailed knowledge of the local norms and values, as well as the capacity to modify at least some aspects of a student's identity. What unofficial "rules" do the students perceive themselves as being bound by, and does the unofficial peer-group world prescribe what students should aspire to become? The aim of the two principal methods used to explore this area of school life was to gain some understanding of what students have learned concerning what Harré and Secord (1972) has described as the "rules and conventions" used by social actors to
generate their social behaviour. The researcher also wondered how far the unofficial norms of school life, particularly in the context of a "total institution", might influence the students' developing sense of their own identities. Before it would be possible to discern the school's social influences in the written autobiographies, it was first necessary to have some idea about what such influences might be. It was important, therefore, to try to discover, at least in outline, what students thought the community's unofficial norms and values were. Consistent with the study's learning perspective, students were asked what, on the basis of their own experiences, they had learned about the norms and expectations of school life.

Every student in the two principal research groups was given two overlapping aspects of school life to reflect upon. The first area was concerned with the unofficial social "rules" which, in the boys' eyes, shaped their behaviour. The second area was concerned with ideas of social fashion and aspiration; how could a student gain the respect and admiration of his peers? Later analysis of the data showed that, contrary to the researcher's initial expectations, the normative and aspirational aspects of peer-group social life formed a single unified whole rather than two distinct bodies.

a) The unofficial school rules; the rules of the local moral order.

In order to discover and explore the students' perceptions of the unofficial "rules" which they believed ordered their communal lives, students were asked to reflect on their own experiences of being new to the school. Having reflected on these early experiences, they were asked to consider what they had learned subsequently about how to fit smoothly into school life. On the basis of what they had learned from their own experiences in the school, they were then asked to imagine that they had to pass on some advice to a new boy who wanted to "fit in" to school life as smoothly as possible. What "rules" of guidance would they give to the new boy to help him settle into school social life easily? Students discussed the topic with a partner, and were then given the use of a video camera and asked to speak about what points of guidance they would give to a potential new boy. The students also produced a written summary of their personal views. All three complementary data sources were collected and analysed by the researcher.
b) How to be “cool”: local typologies of aspiration.

The students' local vocabulary had a rich variety of terms for labeling what was considered admirable in a student, and what not. The admired members of the student community might aspire to be thought “cool”, “wicked” and “rude”, whilst, on the social margins, others laboured under the burden of being “sad”, or of being “nerds”, “wimps”, or, worst of all, “gay”. What types of character were esteemed by students, and which were eschewed? The second “ethogenic” exercise asked students to reflect on what qualities a student would need to display in order to be accepted and even admired by their peers. The practical procedure adopted in exploring this area of local culture was similar to that used in the previous exercise; the topic was first discussed with a partner, in preparation for recording their views through the use of a video camera. In this second exercise, however, students were asked to consider how they might advise a fellow student who wanted to be admired by his peers. After reflecting on what they had learned from their own experiences at Bentham's, they were asked to imagine that they had got the job of being a fellow-student's “P.R. consultant.” Their client wanted to be considered “cool” within the school context. How would they advise their client? Again, the class discussions, the video-taped presentations and a written summary of their personal views by each of the students was collected and analysed by the researcher.

2. The local moral lexicon

a) The local moral lexicon: virtues, vices and insults

Four different groups, two of which were the two groups of autobiographers, were asked to list and define the major terms of approval and disapproval which they thought were in common use amongst students. The meanings and currency of the suggested terms were then discussed in class. Students also recorded their local “vocabularies” (along with the meanings of the terms) in writing. Questions discussed included:

*What terms of abuse and praise are used in school? Which are the commonest/strongest terms? What is the local semiology of widely used terms of abuse such as “nerd”, “gay” and “yo’ mama”?*
b) The moral lexicon: describing students in other Houses

The school had nearly a dozen boarding houses, the majority of which had similar number of students and were housed in similar buildings. Membership of a boarding house is a very important feature of life at the research school, and despite the marked physical similarities between “houses”, in the eyes of the students, each “house” seems to have a very distinctive identity. Initial observations demonstrated that students had strong evaluative reactions to other houses, so, arising from a lesson on “stereotypes” originally designed for a Religious Studies lesson on the theme of prejudice, an investigative exercise was designed which gave students a chance to demonstrate in a practical context how they used their local evaluative moral lexicon. At the same time, the exercise also built up stereotypical pictures of each of the boarding houses. Since house identity might also influence particular individuals’ senses of identity, it was felt important to clarify what students’ perceptions of the houses were.

This research exercise was achieved by taking large sheets of card, each of which was labeled with the name of one of the several boarding houses. These sheets of card were distributed around a classroom. Students were then free to write onto the appropriate piece of card whatever words and phrases they felt summed up the characteristics a typical member of that particular house. Students participated in this exercise with relish and were remarkably free with their evaluative comments. During the process of analysis, the researcher was surprised by the marked diversity of individual house identities.

3. The semiology of “Sport”

During the early stages of the study, the researcher (who sees himself as a non-sportsman) was surprised and bemused by the pervasive influence and complex web of meanings that sport supported within the research school. Initial discussions and observations suggested that sport was not merely a recreational activity, but was also a powerful and complex symbol system with considerable potential to influence a person’s sense of identity. After exploratory classroom discussions, a written task was
designed to explore this area further. Students in both of the principal research groups were asked to write an “argued case” (a communication skill required by their academic studies) to the question, *How important is it to be good at sport at Benthams?* Participants were supplied with additional “prompt” questions, such as:-

*How important is it to be good at sport at Bentham’s? What difference does it make if you are/aren’t? Are sporty people different from unsporty people? Are there special sporting stereotypes or special terms (e.g. “hero” or “disco”)? What value is set on being good at sport by students/the school as an institution?*

Detailed analysis of the students’ responses and arguments revealed a far-reaching system of *values* attached to particular sports, and to the attainment of sporting prowess in them. The semiology and values associated with such sporting activities were found to overlap and reinforce the values and norms uncovered in the other research exercises.

4. *School Stereotypes*

As another way of exploring the nature and potential of the school’s influence on the developing identities of its students, the two principal groups of student autobiographers were then asked to write down words and phrases which they believed were characteristic of an average Benthamite. The written task was preceded by initial class discussions, during which each group discussed issues such as:

Does being at Bentham’s give you a different kind of identity than you would have if you were, for instance, an Etonian, Harrovian, Carthusian, or member of Blackwater or Duckenfield Sixth Form College? What is the difference? Is there a “*typical*” Benthamite? What would other schools describe as a “typical Benthamite”? Is there a significance to the school’s ultimate punishments: being rusticated, being expelled, being expelled and denied membership of the Old Benthamite Club?

After the class discussion, the students wrote down their own views about the characteristics of a “typical” Benthamite. These responses were later collected and analysed.
C) Supplementary Background Data

The two principal categories of data outlined above were supported by the collection of various other types of data, including other types of student autobiographical writing occurring within the school context, informal conversations, interviews and discussions, the collection of documents relating to school life, and the researcher's observational journal. The collection of this wide range of background data aimed, first, to supply the researcher with a sufficiently well-informed understanding of school life to facilitate an adequately-informed interpretation of the autobiographical data. Secondly, some of the more informally-acquired data - particularly ad hoc conversations and interviews with students - often served to throw light on aspects of the autobiographies which might otherwise have remained obscure. The additional data collected fell into four main categories, of which the first is the most important

1. Three other types of local autobiographical writing

In addition to the autobiographies written specially for the present study, three other types of autobiographical writing which regularly occurred within the school were collected. During the period of initial observation it was discovered that there were three other distinctive types of autobiographical writing that were produced within the school on a regular basis before the research period began. The three types of autobiographical writing were highly distinctive, and each was designed to achieve particular purposes. The three types of autobiographical writing collected included:-

Sports Team Brochures which advertised and raised funds for regular international tours by the school's major sports teams. The brochures included a collection of biographies of the students selected to play for the touring team. Seven such sports brochures were collected, and their characteristic form and contents were analysed.

"Personal Statements" were written as part of the process by which final-year students gained admission to a university in the United Kingdom. Having stated their examination results and other academic credentials on the "UCAS" university
entrance form, the students had the opportunity to write about themselves, telling
their prospective universities about themselves, their interests and their wider
experiences in the form of a “personal statement”. A random sample of fifty of
these “personal statements” was collected and the characteristic form and contents
of the “personal statements” described and analysed. In addition, the researcher
found himself, as part of his duties as a temporary student tutor, assisting his
allocated students in editing and even drafting their personal statements.

The *Bentham’s Yearbook* was produced at the end of the school year, and each
school leaver was allocated a page in which they could describe themselves. Four
such *Yearbooks* were collected, and the characteristic forms and contents of the
students’ autobiographical pages were described and analysed.

The aim in collecting these supplementary autobiographical writings was to
provide a basis for comparison between the “research autobiography” format and
the other types. It was hoped that such a comparison might throw light on
McAdams’ claims that his “interview protocol” for autobiographical research
(which influenced the design of the present study’s autobiographical component)
was as effective in revealing participants’ personal identities as he believes it to
be.

2. *Informal conversations, interviews, video diaries and writings*

Whilst any research needs careful planning, many valuable sources of data came
along serendipitously. Students volunteered information, or discussed issues that
concerned them, or agreed to produce reflective pieces of writing or video diaries.
The researcher found such data of considerable value in revealing aspects of
identity formation and school life which might not otherwise have been available.

3. *The collection of documents relating to school life*

In order to provide the researcher with a sufficiently well-informed understanding
of the school context, the researcher collected a wide range of documents which
provided information about the values, norms, beliefs and expectations that informed school life. Such documents ranged from the official school rules and school calendar, to the unofficial school gossip magazine. These data provided the researcher with sufficient information to be able to make more sensitive and better-informed interpretations of the primary autobiographical research evidence. A list of some of the principal documents collected appears in Appendix F: ("Types of Supplementary Background Data Collected").

4. Researcher's focused observational journal

During the period of the study, the researcher kept a journal of his own observations. Both the official and the unofficial daily life of the school were considered within the remit of this journal. The students' daily attendance at morning chapel, and "Headmaster's Assemblies" were early examples of "official" public events which were observed and recorded, whilst the formal lunches which each house ate together frequently provided examples of informal and unofficial conversations. A brief outline list of some of the typical school events and experiences noted in the observational journal is included in Appendix F.

5.7 Data analysis: general approach

It was argued in the previous methodological chapter that the present research adopts an Interpretivist approach. It was further argued that Gadamer's Truth and Method (1975) and Philosophical Hermeneutics (1976) had been very influential on the particular form of interpretivism adopted by the present research. Accordingly, this hermeneutical approach directs the approach to data analysis adopted by the present study.

As was seen in the previous chapter, according to Gadamer (1975, 1976), the process of understanding always involves a painstaking and uncertain process of dialogue; a conversation with the person or text, each from their respective standpoints, in a dialogical, progressive and cumulative attempt at mutual comprehension. Gadamer
proposes a more modest, respectful and equal meeting between text and reader than might be envisaged in any of the other major research paradigms. In the process of entering the "hermeneutical circle" formed during the meeting of an interpreter and a text (or person), the interpreter's understanding has to be progressively refined through a process of respectful engagement, questioning and listening. Gadamer suggests that in the process of understanding and discovery, the would-be interpreter moves through a potentially endless series of cumulatively perceptive approximations in their understanding of the Other; a series of what he calls (1976, 1979) "rough drafts". The process of analysis and understanding can be enhanced through the expedient of approaching the investigation with a number of specific questions as a heuristic tool to aid the process of provisional understanding. This model of interpretation underlies the analytical approach taken to data analysis in the present study.

Gadamer’s approach would suggest that after collecting each of the sets of data outlined earlier, the material should be read repeatedly. At each reading, the researcher should seek to understand the material more fully and precisely. As he engages with the material produced by the study’s participants, the researcher brings to the activity of interpretation and analysis his own past experiences, his general intellectual beliefs and values, and his immediate academic reading and research questions. All of these factors constitute, in Gadamer’s terms, the essential "prejudices" without which no understanding would be possible at all. Some of the researcher’s "prejudices" have been presented in the Prologue and Chapter 1, as well as in the two intellectual and literary chapters which followed.

In the case of the present researcher, he brings to the interpretation and analysis of his data a lifetime’s fascination with knowing "what makes people tick", twenty-five years' experience as a teacher, a professional training and fifteen years' experience as a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, seven years’ formal and informal experience of academic exploration in the field of narrative approaches to personality, and a specialized interest in the analysis of language patterns developed through an acquaintance with the work of Milton Erickson (1985, 1989, 1996), Bateson (1972), Watzlawick (1967, 1983, 1988), Bandler and Grinder (1975a, 1975b).
At all stages of the data analysis, the aim of the analysis was to allow the data to speak for itself without, wherever possible, imposing prior categories, classifications or concepts upon it. The process of analysis for each particular set of data consisted of repeatedly reading the data, summarizing its characteristic contents and structures, continually questioning the patterns and features which seemed to emerge from the data, and then comparing these emergent patterns with the patterns and features emerging elsewhere in the data.

Since the aim of data analysis was to generate specific “low-level” (rather than abstract and general) descriptions of what the students had learned about themselves and their school’s official and unofficial norms and values, the hermeneutical approach to data analysis adopted here has a number of similarities with the “Grounded Theory” type of approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Repeated readings of the data, informed by constant comparison and theoretical sampling to validate emergent themes, constituted the analytical process by which patterns in the data could be discovered.

Each data set was analysed separately, before being compared and contrasted with other parallel or complementary data sets for further analysis and interpretation. At each stage of the analysis, written records were kept of the emergent patterns and features, with supporting exemplars of each. At every stage of the data analysis, a variety of pro formas, tables, notes, summary digests and, in the case of the autobiographies “pen portraits”, were used both to record current interpretive conclusions, and to serve as an audit trail. Some sample pro formas appear in Appendix F.

When approaching biographical data of considerable extent and complexity, the use of specific questions derived from the work of other researchers who have studied autobiographical and narrative writings was an especially valuable initial heuristic tool for focusing the researcher’s interpretive dialogue with the material. The process of producing cumulatively refined “multiple drafts” was enhanced through the use of such guiding questions. Space precludes, at this point, a separate review of the
considerable literatures on autobiographical research and Literary Theory which contributed specific analytical questions to the initial stages of the present study’s process of interpretive analysis. However, the influence of these questions and their authors will be acknowledged at the appropriate places in the following data chapters, particularly during the discussion of the autobiographies’ many distinct unique features in Chapter 9.

Given both the extensiveness of the data collected and the complexity of the interpretive process employed to analyse the data, the process of data analysis cannot be described in great detail in the present chapter without engendering unnecessary repetition and tediously excessive prolixity. As a compromise, the remainder of the chapter provides a schematic outline of the complex process of data analysis, with Appendix F including additional technical theoretical discussion. In addition, each of the four data chapters provide a summary of the methods of data collection and analysis upon which each of their reported findings are based.

5.8 Three main phases of data analysis

At the outset of the chapter, it was suggested that the study’s design could be divided into three distinct layers or phases. It may be recalled that these three phases were encapsulated in a quotation from McAdams’ work in which he suggests that:-

a particular life story is, in certain aspects, like all other stories, like some other stories, and, finally, like no other story. (McAdams, 1989: 162)

This quotation was taken to provide a convenient summary for the present study’s overall research strategy, which seeks to examine how the particular life stories collected in this study are “like all other stories, like some other stories, and, finally, like no other story”.

The process of data analysis can similarly be divided into three similar phases or layers:-
Phase 1: "like all other stories"

The students share in the official and unofficial life of the same school. Through the formative influence of this unusual social world which approximates to what Goffman has called a "total institution", students' individual life stories may be "like all other stories" told by students' at the same school. The first phase of data analysis therefore concentrated on data relating to the norms, values and rules which characterize the formative social world of the institution in which the study's participants live for the greater part of the year.

To this end, data were collected regarding three principal overlapping areas of school life in order to explore the characteristics of the local moral order that obtains at Bentham's. There were three principal areas for investigation in the first phase of the data analysis:

Discovering the "unofficial" school rules
The local moral lexicon
The semiology and importance of "Sport"

Each of the categories of interest above were explored through the use of at least two complementary or contrasting research exercises, each of which was repeated with at least two groups of participants. In this first phase of the study, eleven separate data collection exercises were undertaken, including five written exercises, three video-taped presentation exercises, a minuted class discussion, and video-taped interviews with a selection of recent school leavers:

1. Written exercise: How to get on well at Bentham's
2. Video presentations: How to get on well at Bentham's
3. Written exercise: How to be "cool" at Bentham's
4. Video presentations: How to be "cool" at Bentham's
5. Class discussion and written exercise: the local moral lexicon
6. Class activity: applying the local moral lexicon to other boarding houses
The data sets from each of these research exercises were analysed separately, studying the material closely and looking for similarities and patterns within each separate data set. Similarities and patterns emerging from the data were noted, and the patterns further investigated and tested by further focused inspection of the data. When each data set had been examined closely, parallel data sets (for instance, the sets of data produced by two different groups who undertook the same research exercise) were compared and contrasted. Their similarities and differences were again noted, and any emergent patterns and similarities were again scrutinized by repeated inspection of the data sets, and further comparison. This process of inspection, noting and comparison continued until the researcher felt confident that the patterns and similarities detected were sufficiently clear, distinct and well-supported by the available data.

**Phase 2: “like some other stories”**

The second phase of data analysis turned away from the data about the school environment and its rules and values, and turned instead towards the individual autobiographical material itself. However, although the second phase of data analysis made considerable use of the individual autobiographical data, its focus was on the similarities and shared characteristics of the individual autobiographies, rather than their unique and individual qualities. When the autobiographies were compared a little more closely, they may demonstrate certain shared similarities which indicate that, however distinctive it may appear to be at first sight, an individual’s life story may be “like some other stories”.

The second phase of data analysis fell into two constituent stages:-

*Stage 1*  Comparing the research autobiographies with other forms of autobiographical writing which occurred within the school.
Stage 2  Comparing the sample of the forty-two individual autobiographies specially written for the present study with each other.

Stage 1: Comparison with other types of autobiographical writing

It will be recalled that the data used in this stage of data analysis included:-

1. *Sports Team Brochures* produced to accompany international tours of the school’s major sports teams, and which incorporated biographies of the students selected to play for the teams.

2. “Personal statements” written by final year students as part of their UCAS university entrance documents, and in which they were asked to write about themselves and convey to their prospective universities their sense of themselves.

3. The *Bentham’s Yearbook*, a book produced at the end of the school year in which all school leavers are given a page on which they could describe themselves.

Each set of data was analysed separately by inspecting samples of these documents. The sets of documents were read carefully and notes were taken about their principal features and emergent patterns. Through a process of repeated reading and comparison, their characteristic forms and contents were ascertained and noted. Further reading and comparison was employed to probe the initial impressions received. This process of inspection, noting and comparison continued until the researcher felt confident that the patterns and similarities detected were sufficiently clear, distinct and well-supported by the available data.

The fruits of this analytical process were then available for further comparison with the sample of 42 individual autobiographies written specially for the present study.
Stage 2: Looking for shared patterns in the principal autobiographical data

In the second stage of Phase 2’s data analysis, the four types of individual autobiographical material produced specially for the study were examined. The four main categories of autobiographical data mentioned below were analysed separately, studying the material closely and looking for communally shared similarities and patterns within each separate data set. Similarities and patterns emerging from the data were noted, and the patterns further investigated and tested by further focused inspection of the data. When each data set had been examined closely, parallel data sets (for instance, the sets of data produced by two different groups performing the same research exercise) were compared and contrasted. Their similarities and differences were again noted, and the emergent patterns and similarities were again scrutinized by repeated inspection of the data sets, and further comparison. This process of inspection, noting and comparison again continued until the researcher felt confident that the patterns and similarities detected were sufficiently clear, distinct and well-supported by the available data.

The individual autobiographical material analysed during this stage includes the following four categories of data:-

1. *Two separate sets of autobiographies* written by the study’s principal participants. There were a total number of forty-two autobiographies in the sample. The autobiographies varied considerably in length, style and content.

2. *Two sets of “follow-up interviews”* in which, after completing their autobiographies, each participant was asked to respond to a number of questions about their own views concerning their historical continuity, social integrity and sources of personal uniqueness. For practical and ethical reasons already explained, the “interview” took a written form.

3. *Two sets of a “Motivational Theme Tests”*, which was an imaginative exercise based on Murray’s Thematic Apperception Test to ascertain a person’s principal motivational patterns. The exercise was designed to provide data
about motivation, a characteristic which personological research (so, Murray, McAdams and McClelland) judges to be of particular importance for the constitution of personal identity.

4. **Two sets of Autobiographical Graphs** or “lifeline diagrams”, based on the research of Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) in which the student autobiographers represented the ups and downs of their life course in the form of a single line drawn on the axes of a graph. Though peripheral to the study, it was hoped that this data would offer interesting comparisons with the written autobiographies.

**Phase 3: “like no other stories”**

The data used in this third and final phase of data analysis was the same as that used in the second stage of Phase 2, namely the four types of autobiographical material (Autobiographies, follow-up interviews, Motivational Theme Tests and Lifeline graphs) produced specially for the present study. The aims of data analysis in the third phase, however, are quite different from those in the second phase. The aim of the third and final phase of data analysis is to examine how far, when all the similarities, generalizations and social samenesses have been noted and allowed for, each story might, on close inspection, still have its own uniqueness and thus be “like no other story”. It was the uniquenesses and unities of the students’ life stories, therefore, which were the special focus of the third phase of data analysis.

This third and final phase of data analysis took the form of a cycle of ten carefully structured “readings” of each individual biographical text, punctuated in its later stages by the separate but integrated analyses of the data from the “follow-up interviews”, Motivational Theme Test and Lifeline graphs. The cycle of ten structured “readings” which constitute the third phase of the analytical process are explained in more detail later in the chapter; for convenience, they can be summarized as falling into three broad constituent stages:-
Stage 1: Understanding the individual autobiographies. The first stage was devoted to the close reading of each of the forty-two autobiographies which were specially written for the study. Although these autobiographies were read carefully in the second phase of data analysis, the aim during the earlier reading was the discovery of the similarities the autobiographies shared with one another. In contrast, during the first stage of Phase 3, the principal aim of reading was to understand each autobiography individually in itself and ensure, as far as was practically possible within the limits of time available, that the researcher had understood the distinctive individual characteristics of each separate autobiography.

Stage 2: Looking for unifying patterns in each of the life story narratives. Having achieved a good working knowledge of each individual autobiography, the second stage of data analysis in this third and final phase of the study re-examined all the autobiographical material for the evidence it provided of unifying patterns in the life story narratives. Further reading and reflection were employed to clarify, refine and codify the unifying narrative patterns which emerged during this phase of the data analysis.

Stage 3: Looking for differentiating patterns in the life story narratives. The final stage of data analysis was also the most substantial and time-consuming, involving a sequence of multiple readings of all the autobiographical material. The third stage of data analysis re-examined all the autobiographical material for the evidence it provided of differentiating patterns in the life story narratives. Further reading and reflection were employed to clarify, refine and codify the differentiating narrative patterns which emerged during this final phase of data analysis.

The three stages described above represent a very simplified version of the hermeneutical process, which might more accurately be described, it will be recalled, in terms of a continuous re-iterative cyclical process during which the two groups of autobiographies were read intensively during the course of at least ten cycles of focused “reading”. The process of “reading” and interpretation was aided by the use a “Reading Guide” (see below) and by the use of a variety of pro formas, tables, summary digests, notes and example-supported catalogues of potential categories.
which recorded the researcher’s tentative findings at each stage. The process of analysis and understanding was also enhanced through the use of a number of specific questions as heuristic tools to focus the reading, and to aid the process of progressive understanding. At the conclusion of each successive reading cycle, the provisional discoveries and conclusions were noted, to act both as a “rough draft” to serve as a basis for further exploration, comparison and criticism, and also to supply an audit trail of the hermeneutical process as it developed.

The early “readings” in the cyclical process of analysis and interpretation were directed through the use of a “Reading Guide”, based on the work of Brown et al. (1987) and Gilligan et al. (1990), and adapted for the specific interests of the present research. They argue that a “Reading Guide” offers a more flexible and open-ended analytical tool than the traditional practice of “coding”. Gilligan argues that coding fits the person into a pre-existing set of categories, whilst “reading” implies a more open and hermeneutically engaged approach which allows the data to speak for itself.

The scheme proposed by Brown et al (1987) is based on McAdams’ life-story model of identity, and is also discussed in Gilligan, Brown and Rogers (1990: 86). It suggests themes and features of life stories that can be systematically examined with each successive “reading”. The Reading Guide thus provides an element of structure to the initial stages of the analytical process, both by specifying the broad analytical themes to be examined, and also by proposing a structure of systematic multiple successive reading of the texts for each separate theme. Details of the construction of the Reading Guide are given in Appendix F. The “Reading Guide” thus offers a structured way of reading autobiographical texts, whilst avoiding more simplistic forms of “coding”.

The Reading Guide focused on both content and style of each autobiography. In terms of content, the Reading Guide’s initial phases directed attention to the narrator’s depiction of “key events”, such as their earliest memories, turning points, peak experiences, nadir experiences and experiences at Bentham’s. Regarding “style”, the Reading Guide directed attention to the emotional tone of narration, the characters involved in each event depicted, the ages of the protagonists in events, the characteristic imagery and metaphor employed, and the characteristic presence of a
narratorial "voice". The Reading Guide was used in conjunction with a specially designed two-page pro forma on which the observations made during the initial cycles of "reading" could be systematically recorded. Further details of the theoretical basis of the Reading Guide, as well as a copy of the accompanying pro forma can be found in Appendix F.

Later "readings" of the autobiographical texts were guided not only by the patterns and observations that had already emerged from the data in the earlier phases of the analysis, but were also guided by a welter of analytical questions derived from the work of other theorists working in the fields of autobiographical research and literary theory. Though too numerous to mention in detail here, such questions included the examples listed below. Names in brackets refer to theorists whose work initially raised these, or parallel questions:-

- How far does the narrator depict themselves as active or passive, as initiating actions or suffering them? (Bremond, 1973; Greimas, 1988)
- How far does the narrator depict themselves as heroic or ordinary? (Frye, 1957)
- Is the overall emotional tone of the story optimistic or pessimistic? (Bowby, 1969, 1973; McAdams, 1985)
- Do the stories give evidence of any important life goals? (McClelland, 1951, 1984)
- How far are the characteristic motivational patterns agentic and achievement-orientated, as opposed to affiliative and communal? (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1985)
- Does the life story demonstrate characteristic social preferences, such as being with large social groups or being alone? (Jung, 1923; Myers, 1962, 1976)
- How does the narrator evaluate the overall course of their life's trajectory, successful/ unsuccessful, satisfying/ unsatisfying, for instance? (Gergen and Gergen, 1993)
- How far how does the "inner landscape" of the narrator's consciousness compare with the "outer landscape" of the story's outward events? (Greimas, 1988)
- Is there evidence of characteristic plot types? (Frye, 1957)
5.9 Detailed procedure for analyzing the individual autobiographical data

The previous section provided a brief overview of the cycle of ten “readings” by means of which the individual autobiographical data was analysed in the second and third “layers” of the study’s overall design. In order to provide a brief overview, the complex cycle of ten “readings” which constituted these stages was summarized in terms of three major phases of analysis. However, the process of interpretation conducted during the analysis of the autobiographical data was considerably more complex than the three-stage outline summary indicated. In order to make the process more transparent and thus leave a clearer audit trail, the present section offers a more detailed description of the cycle of ten “readings” which constituted the analytical and hermeneutical process employed in the analysis of the autobiographical data. The re-iterative cycle of ten distinctive “readings” of the autobiographies was interspersed at certain points by systematic analyses of the other biographical data collected; the “Follow-up interviews”, the Motivational Theme Test data, and the graphical life story data. A more detailed description of the cycle of ten “readings” is provided below:

The first three “readings” of the autobiographies aimed, primarily to describe the main features of the autobiographies.

The First Reading focused on gaining an initial description of each autobiography, attending specially to the overall content and tone of the stories. Key events such as earliest memories, turning points, peak experiences, nadir experiences and experiences at Bentham’s were noted. Stylistic features of each autobiography such as emotional tone, and the characteristic imagery and metaphor employed were also noted. The findings of the First Reading were recorded on the specially prepared pro forma.

The Second Reading examined the autobiographies’ content and style in further detail, this time additionally beginning to look for recurrent patterns in the data. Additional findings and patterns were recorded on the pro forma.

During the course of the Third Reading, the findings of the first two readings were re-examined critically. In addition, further details and aspects of the autobiographies
were also explored. Such aspects include looking for examples of explicit experiential learning, explicit references to the ambient culture, references to political, religious or moral "ideologies" and the prevalence of "origin myths". Findings and provisional analytical conclusions were again recorded on the pro forma.

During the course of the Fourth and Fifth Readings, the autobiographies were re-examined many times, with the researcher armed with a battery of questions derived from the literature of narrative theory and other autobiographical research, examples of which were given above. At this stage, some of the academic literature which informed the questions referred to in the previous section was re-read, so that the questions engendered by the reading were articulately present in the researcher's mind as he approached the autobiographies again. Notes were taken of the answers emerging in response to each analytical question, and, when the notes and provisional conclusions became sufficiently clear, a number of general descriptive tables were constructed which summarized the emergent provisional patterns as an aid to further critical examination. When a pattern or category seemed to emerge with reasonable clarity and support, further instances were sought and tabulated to assist in the assessment of the category's plausibility.

At the conclusion of the first five "readings", all the autobiographies were read once more so that the researcher could assess his understanding of each individual personality so presented. When the researcher felt reasonably confident that he had a detailed understanding of each autobiography, he tested his understanding using what he came to call the "Edel Test". The distinguished biographical scholar Edel (1978, 1984) has argued that the biographer will know that he has managed to understand his subject when he has found the "myth" which animates and organizes their whole life. He writes:-

When the biographer can discover a myth, he has found his story. He knows the meaning of his material and can choose, select, sift, without deceiving himself about the subject of his work. (Edel, 1978: 2)

Applying this test to his own understanding of the autobiographies, the researcher encapsulated his current understanding of the forty-two subjects by writing 300-700 word "pen portraits" of each.
At this stage, the “pen portraits” were briefly set aside whilst the researcher analysed the data from the *Motivational Theme Test* and *Follow-up Interviews*.

**Motivational Theme Test:** The participants’ imaginative responses to the challenge of deciding what they would do if told that the world would end in twenty-four hours were analysed using a schema derived from the work of Bakan (1966) and McAdams (1985). Bakan argues that there are two fundamental motivational patterns which animate most people’s lives, which he calls the “agentic” and “communal” motivational patterns. The former refers to motivational patterns characterized by self-determination and a need to achieve things, whilst the latter is more concerned with personal relationships. Bakan’s dual classification was applied to the students’ responses using a simple coding procedure. Individual items within each individual student’s responses were sorted into one or other of two Bakan’s categories and counted. This produced a simple motivation profile for each student which indicated how many “agentic” or “communal” motivational themes their responses demonstrated. The characteristic motivational profile for each student was then compared with their written autobiography, and any similarities and differences noted. Further details of the design and scoring of the *Motivational Theme Test* are given in *Appendix F*.

**Follow-up interviews** At this stage, the “Follow-up Interviews“ were re-read and their contents compared with the content of the autobiographies. Any additional insights were added to the “pen portraits” in the form of annotations during the succeeding Sixth Reading.

During this further *Sixth Reading* of the autobiographies, the autobiographies were re-read and the nature and contents of their motivational themes were carefully inspected and compared with the results of the *Motivational Theme Test*. The researcher was surprised by the way the Test results complemented and sometimes illuminated the autobiographies. These observations were recorded by annotating the “pen portraits”.

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Before the final cycles of “readings” began, the Life line Graphs, based on the work of Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) were analysed by initial visual inspection, and then by mathematical analysis to determine the mean dispersion of the whole sample of graphs about the graph’s medial line. Individual “life lines” were then compared with individual life stories to assess the degree of correlation between the narrative plot line and the corresponding graph’s “life line”. Some correlations were noted, but no other definite conclusions could be drawn.

During the Seventh Reading, all the autobiographies were read once more with the purpose of systematically collecting, categorizing and analysing data which illustrated the similarities which most of the autobiographies shared; how each story is “like some other stories”. Drawing on the categories and patterns that had emerged in the previous “readings”, a large list was made of potential categories of “similarity”. Evidence illustrating each category was sought and noted. After this initial collection and sorting, the data was further considered. This data is presented in Chapter 7 below.

The Eighth Reading turned to the question: In what specific ways are the students’ autobiographies unified? All the autobiographies were read several times, noting carefully patterns of words, content and structure that had the effect of unifying the disparate elements of the students’ life stories. The findings at each stage were noted and the analytical process repeated several times, both to interrogate and to further explore the emerging patterns. The data from this part of the analytical process appears in Chapter 8.

The Ninth Reading turned to the question: In what specific ways are the students’ autobiographies differentiated? All the autobiographies were again read very many times, noting carefully patterns of words, content and structure that had the effect of differentiating one autobiography from another. The findings at each stage were carefully noted and the analytical process was repeated several times, both to interrogate and to further explore the emerging patterns. The data from this part of the analytical process appears in Chapter 9.
The final stage of the analysis turned to the manifold patterns which had emerged during the previous two stages of the Eighth and Ninth Readings. Analysis during this final stage of the study consisted of further critical and analytical reflection on the unifying and differentiating patterns that had emerged. Holding the data in critical dialogue with some of the literature on narrative theory, such as that by Frye (1957), an attempt was made to ascertain if, for reasons of practical convenience, the seventy categories of unity and difference that had emerged in the process of earlier analysis could be ordered into some kind of a descriptive taxonomy which would both summarise the data and display the emergent patterns in a clear and orderly way. The tentative Taxonomy which emerged during this period of reflection was tested against the autobiographies during a final tenth reading. This Tenth Reading of the autobiographies thus occurred at the end of the entire analytical process so that the researcher could examine the resultant taxonomy against the original data upon which it was based.

The study’s findings, based upon the data collected and analysed as just described, are presented in the four chapters which follow this one.
"We'll have rules!" he cried excitedly. "Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks 'em -" "Whee-oh!"
"Waccol!"
"Bong!"
"Doink!"

(Lord of the Flies, William Golding)

6.1 Outline of the next four chapters

The study's main body of evidence is presented in the four following data chapters. The way in which the data are reported in these four chapters reflects the overall strategy of the study in which successive layers of social sameness are "peeled away" in order to make it easier to inspect individual difference. With each successive layer the study aims to discover how:-

...every story is (a) like all other stories, (b) like some other stories, and, (c) like no other story. (McAdams, 1985: 53)

As was explained earlier, this dictum provides both a rationale and also a threefold scheme for presenting and examining the evidence collected during the course of the present study. The present chapter examines the most obvious way in which all the students' stories in the research school might be "like all other stories", namely through the formative influence of the norms, values and practices which they all hold in common by virtue of their common membership and formation within the same "total institution". The focus of Chapter 7 moves from the social norms, values and practices of the students' shared social world to begin to examine their individual autobiographies. When these individual autobiographies are collected and compared, it may still be possible to discern general patterns and characteristic social trends which, though various, are still less than personally unique. In other words, the second
data chapter deals with ways in which every story is “like some other stories”.
Chapters 8 and 9 examine the individual autobiographies to consider the ways in which the individual stories differentiate themselves from all the other stories and thus are “like no other story”. By examining the manifold ways in which the students’ life stories are unified and differentiated, the two final data chapters thus address the principal research question: In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

Having outlined the programme for the next four chapters, the present chapter returns to its own proper province; an exploration of the common norms, values and practices of the social world which all the students in the research share.

6.2 The Content of this Chapter

In order to provide an adequate context in which to describe and analyse the students’ individual autobiographical data, the present chapter offers a students’-eye sketch of the main features of the shared and highly distinctive moral world in which they live for the larger part of each year. It will be argued that the students’ social world can be characterised as an “honour morality” in which students achieve social “worth”, reputation and “respect” from their peers by following an implicit but influential “code” which lays down values and socially acceptable qualities of character for the individual, as well as providing a framework of values and priorities which govern social relations, academic endeavour and leisure activities. The values of this “Code” are additionally exemplified and reinforced by common practices such as the students’ frequent sporting activities (which thus function as moral practices as well as parts of the curriculum) and also in the moral lexicon in daily use amongst students. The data presented in this chapter thus provide a detailed social context to a study which is otherwise more individually focussed.

Although the researcher continued to collect documents and to keep an observational journal throughout the course of the research, in accordance with the subject-centered perspective of the study as a whole, the research in this phase, as in the autobiographical phase of the study presented later, aimed to collect data which
represents the students' subjective understandings and perspectives. What have they learned about the features of the unusual social world in which they live for so much of the time? What is their perspective on the implicit norms and values which shape their lives? How far do the “official” school rules and institutional values feature in the pupils’ interpretation and understanding of school life?

As was outlined in the previous chapter, to answer questions like these, a variety of types of data were collected from students; data which aimed to discover the “unofficial” school rules, data concerning the importance of “sport”, and data concerning the local moral lexicon. The data relating to these three main areas are presented and discussed during the course of this chapter. The analysis offered here suggests that the students’ social world is constituted along the lines of what Harré (1983), Weston (1975), Pitt-Rivers (1971), Diaz-Plaja (1968) and others have called a traditional “honour morality”, a distinctive sort of moral social organisation governed by an implicit “code”. In the case of the research school, its principal features are its strongly differentiated hierarchical distribution of powers and rights according to social status, its essential machismo, the considerable importance accorded to “sport” as a semiotic sacrament of social worth and masculinity, and, most importantly of all, the importance of being the right type of person. For convenience, the unofficial school value system is referred to as “The Code”, a term borrowed from a number of American military academies, and explained in more detail later (in section 6.10) when The Code’s status as an “honour morality” is discussed. It will also be argued that the moral values associated with certain specific types of sporting prowess, as well as the student’s home-grown local “moral lexicon” manifest and reinforce many of The Code’s characteristic values. In the course of the chapter, it will be suggested that “The Code” is quickly learned and seems to be almost universally current amongst students. “The Code” also provides the framework through which most students interpret the school’s official rules and values, including the school’s academic values.

It might be expected that such a “Code”, incorporated as it is within the social dynamics of a residential “total institution”, might add up to a very potent system (as Goffman, 1961, 1963, and others have argued) for moulding personal identity. To the
surprise of the researcher, the evidence presented in the two chapters following this one suggest that, though it may influence students' social identities (and even, in some cases, their characters), *The Code* has relatively little effect on students' unique sense of personal identity. This surprising discovery may have parallels with the findings of Alheit (1995) and other biographical researchers that macro-social theories are not always reliable predictors of individual experience. This discovery has considerable significance for the claims made by those like Goffman (1961, 1963) and Lave and Wenger (1991) who make strong claims for the primary formative impact of the individual's social affiliations on their developing sense of personal identity, whether in the form of "total institution" or "community of practice". This important issue is discussed further in Chapter 10.

6.3 Rationale for seeking a student's-eye view of their shared social world

Although the focus of the principal research question centres upon the uniqueness and unity of individual students’ senses of their identity, the overall design of the study takes seriously the very particular social context which all the participants share. There are five main reasons for this:-

1. Many social scientists (Denzin, 1989; Gergen, 1993) have criticised the tendency in much individually-focused autobiographical and life-story research for its failure to acknowledge or explore the formative importance of the social context in which individual autobiographers write. Harré (1998) in particular bemoans the tendency in recent autobiographical research to concentrate on individuals in a manner largely isolated from their social context. The design of the present study acknowledges the force of this criticism. The study’s theoretical perspective, influenced in different ways by the perspectives of Jarvis (1987, 1992, 1999), McAdams (1985, 1989, 1991, 1993) and Harré (1983, 1994, 1998), incorporates G.H.Mead’s early insight (Mead, 1934) that the social and the personal are intimately interconnected.

2. Goffman’s classic work (*Asylums*, 1961/1968) argues that boarding schools, like other “total institutions” (such as mental hospitals, prisons, monasteries
and orphanages) share similar characteristics. Such institutions, he further argues, exert very strong influences on the identity of the ‘inmates’ who reside within them; as was seen in Chapter 1, they are “forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment in what can be done to the self.” (Goffman, 1961:12 and 1968: 22). Since the research school approximates quite closely to his concept of the “total institution”, we might expect that the research school, too, would exercise a comparable and considerable effect on the character and identity of its “inmates”. This claim is discussed in the next chapter, and in Chapter 10.

3. Parallel, though more general claims about the formative influence of local social and discursive constraints are made by a wide variety of other social scientists, notably Gergen (1993) and Harre (1998). In order to assess the plausibility of such claims as they might apply to students in the research school, it is first necessary to ascertain what those social and institutional influences might be, so that they may be detected if they should appear in the individual autobiographies. For this reason, it is clearly important to try to discover those features of school life which the students see as the most powerful constraints within which they must construct their identities.

4. From both initial as well as from later observations, it seemed clear to the researcher that the “official” school rules, though they may have obliged outward conformity from the students, were not things with which students readily identified. More potent by far were the unspoken and unofficial norms and values which seemed to mould the students’ daily lives and characters, and with which, almost unconsciously and unquestioningly, they seemed to identify readily. Both the potency and the inscrutability of such norms made them of special interest and relevance for the present study on individual identity-formation.

5. For those who are brought up outside the Public School system, the somewhat exotic and hidden character of student life raises an important interpretive issue for would-be researchers. At the practical level, unless fore-armed with
considerable background research about the students’ culture, the outsider who reads a collection of individual student autobiographies may find it difficult to decide which features of the autobiographies were generic properties shared by many of the students, as opposed to being genuinely more personal and idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals. At the very least, therefore, this preliminary socially-focused research into the influential norms and values of the students’ social world provides the researcher with suitable background knowledge from which to understand and interpret the individual autobiographies. It may also help the researcher to tell the difference between idiosyncratic but shared social features of the autobiographies and those features which are more individually idiosyncratic.

6.4 Data collection

The principal aim of the first phase of the research was, as was stated earlier, to explore the students’ views of the unofficial norms and values which framed the daily life of the students at the research school. This, it will be recalled, was done by collecting data which represented the students’ learnings and understandings about their local social world and the unusual and highly distinctive norms and values which structured it.

After a period of initial observation, after which time some of the unusual characteristics of the students’ social world had become apparent, it was decided to investigate the unofficial “rules” or norms that a socially competent student (i.e. one with locally-nuanced skills of social adjustment) would be accomplished at both knowing and practicing. From the previous two chapters it will be recalled that, from his preliminary observations, the researcher initially thought that there might be two distinct sets of such “rules”; one set which covered the principles of basic social adjustment (“fitting in”), and a further “advanced” and exclusive set which provided a rough and ready blueprint for those who aspired to, or actually achieved the admiration of their peers.
Analysis of the data collected from two groups of students on these two exercises showed that the principles governing basic social adjustment were not easily separable from those governing the achievements of the social elite; the rules for "fitting in" were continuous with those for being "cool". Discussions with students confirmed that a single set of principles covered both aspects of social life, a discovery which was contrary to the researcher's initial expectations.

Analysis of the data regarding the content of this set of unofficial "rules" revealed remarkable consistency between students in each group, as well as between the two groups, despite the two groups being from two different age cohorts. Though not identical, the similarities between all the students' accounts were striking, suggesting that the social rules described here were widespread, and perhaps even almost universal within the student community.

Analysis of the content of "The Code" also suggested that it provided the frame within which the "official" school rules and its values were interpreted by students in their daily lives. Later discussions with students suggested that "sport"* occupied an important place in The Code, emerging not just as a physical activity, nor as a compulsory part of the school curriculum but, more importantly, as an important nexus of moral values within The Code. (*Only a few select sporting activities count as "sport" in the Benthamite Code, and this evaluative feature is indicated - as in the previous sentence - by the use of inverted commas around the term "sport"). This discovery, not initially anticipated by the researcher, was investigated in a further exercise with the students in both research groups.

As outlined in the previous chapter, three main overlapping clusters of data were collected in all:-

The "unofficial rules": Data in which students give their personal accounts of what norms and principles govern their communal life together.

"The Importance of Sport": Data in which students described and discussed the role and importance of sporting activities in their lives, along with the social and moral
importance of being particularly good or bad at sport. The aim of this set of exercises was to discover the position of sport, not only as an activity within the official school curriculum, but, more importantly for the purposes of the present research, as an influential value system importantly integrated with The Code. Student writings and discussions on the meanings, values and social significance of sport were collected and analysed.

"The Local Moral Lexicon": Data were also collected on the characteristic local moral vocabulary of evaluative terms and stereotypes in common use within the school community.

In the case of each of these three main areas (The Code; the importance of Sport, and the moral lexicon), a minimum of two different written exercises contributed to the data base, with each of these being undertaken with a minimum of forty-two students in the two separate research groups, drawn from two different year groups in the school.

Eleven separate data collection exercises were used in this phase of the study: six types of written exercise, three types of video-taped presentations, video interviews with a sample of recent former students ("Old Benthamites"), and a minuted class discussion on the importance of sport. Group discussions preceded and followed each of the five major written exercises. To create a "feed-back loop" in order to test the validity of the study’s findings, the accuracy of the researcher’s analysis of The Code was subsequently discussed with a sample of the study’s original participants, with a sample of recent Old Benthamites and also with a sample of current students who were not members of the original two groups.

Each individual data set was analysed separately using an interpretive analytical procedure influenced by the hermeneutics of Gadamer (1975, 1976) and the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967). This was outlined in the earlier chapter on analytical processes. The collected data in each set were analysed and then compared with other parallel data sets. Emergent categories and patterns were progressively refined and interrogated using a process of continuous comparison and cumulatively
refined categorisation, to produce increasingly refined analytical drafts. Further data comparison, coupled with reflection about the emergent patterns and categories was then undertaken to yield the results that are reported below:-

6.5 “The Code”
After reflecting on his own experiences, one particular fourteen year old student wrote down his guidelines for a new student who wanted to get on well at Bentham’s. These are the guidelines he proposed:-

Don’t be cocky to older years.
Do what you are told by older years.
Don’t be keen.
Don’t suck up to teachers.
Stay calm and don’t react to anything that older years say about you.
Generosity will get you a long way.
Remember that you are at the bottom of the pile.
If you have any strange interests, suppress them now.
Don’t boast.
Don’t spend all your time on the computers.
Get involved with other Houses so you don’t become irrelevant.
Be yourself.
Don’t try too hard to get laughs.
Make friends and hang around with the cooler people.
Never have a break-down in public.

Other members of his class produced, independently, their own sets of guidelines that are remarkably similar to the one outlined above. As might be expected, although there are many variations in the precise wordings of each student’s account, the similarity of sentiment is often striking. For instance, every member of the research
group of fourteen year-olds included a “Don't be cocky” rule (i.e. Don't act as if you have a higher social status than that to which you are entitled), and the following represent the complete range of variations within the sample of fourteen-year olds:-

Don't be cocky to older years.
Don't be cocky to your elders or to people more popular than you.
Don't annoy the Seniors*.
Don't piss off Seniors*.
Don't be cocky.
Don't be arrogant.
Respect the elders.
Don't suck up, but don't be cocky.
Don't get on the wrong side of Seniors*.
Do not make friends with Seniors*.
Obey Second Years.
Don't ignore older years, especially the Seniors*.
Understand the hierarchy.

(*In the interests of preserving the anonymity of the school, the generic term “senior” has been used to replace the more idiosyncratic and distinctive local term.)

The rule enjoining deferential demeanour towards seniors occurs in the specific verbal form of “Don't be cocky” no less than eight times in the research group of fourteen year-olds. The parallel rule also appears in the guidelines offered by the group of fifteen year-olds, with the specific verbal form “Don't be cocky” occurring no less than six times, alongside a comparable range of variations.

A further example must serve to illustrate the striking overlap in the contents of different students’ sets of guidelines. There seems to be widespread support for a “Be generous” rule, with the following verbal variations current amongst the fourteen year-olds, more than 70% of whom included such a rule:-

Be generous. (three occurrences)
Don't be stingy. (four occurrences)
Don't be tight. (three occurrences)
Share your food.
Bring lots of food, like noodles.
Share your food voluntarily.
Don't be annoying or stingy; it ain't great.
Don't buy too much from the Tuck Shop*, and don't be Jewish with any food.
Bring some money and food to school.
Have some money.
Bring some money to school.

(* In the interests of protecting the school’s anonymity, the school’s more distinctive and peculiar local name for “Tuck Shop” has been withheld; the racist term “Jewish” occurs in the original.)

The variations of each rule presented in the examples above also serve to clarify how the rule is understood in the local context; the “Be generous” rule is seen to refer primarily to students’ willingness to share their “tuck” with their peers. In this context, money is useful because of its ready conversion into food via the services of the “Tuck Shop”.

Although no two individuals’ sets of rules are identical, the degree of overlap in content is considerable. This makes it possible to produce a generic set of rules for each of the two principal research groups in such a way that most of the students’ individual sets of rules would overlap significantly with the generic set. The sets of rules for each of the two groups are set out briefly side-by-side below. The set on the left were produced by the group of fourteen year-olds who were “new boys” who had been in the school for less than six months at the time of the exercise. The set of rules on the right were produced by students who were in the year above, and who had had both more experience in the school, as well as a slightly more senior position in the hierarchy (for convenience, these are referred to as “old hands”). It will be seen that there is a core of almost identical rules shared by both groups, along with a number of rules where the students’ places on different rungs of the social ladder gave them different positions in the moral hierarchy, along with differentiated rights and freedoms appropriate to their respective social statuses:-
Figure 6.1 Two age-related versions of “The Code”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New boys</th>
<th>Old hands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t be cocky</td>
<td>• Don’t be cocky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t be keen</td>
<td>• Don’t be keen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t suck up to teachers- but be polite</td>
<td>• Don’t suck up to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be relaxed; take a joke</td>
<td>• Be laid back; take a joke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be generous</td>
<td>• Be generous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be yourself</td>
<td>• Be yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Play sport; preferably be good at it</td>
<td>• Play sport; preferably be good at it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be friendly and nice to people</td>
<td>• Be friendly; try to get on with everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be sociable; don’t be “irrelevant”; Get some mates</td>
<td>• Be sociable; get involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have your own fashion sense</td>
<td>• Have your own style; don’t dress like a skiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t try too hard to get laughs or be cool</td>
<td>• Always be up for a laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t be arrogant; don’t boast</td>
<td>• Be confident and a bit rebellious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suppress strange interests</td>
<td>• Stand up for yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t sneak/dob</td>
<td>• Don’t be too goody-goody; get busted at least once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t be a gimp, geek, nerd, gay, paranoid, skitz or irrelevant</td>
<td>• If it is dark, disobey any school rules that have “grass” in them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t break down in public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The similarities between these two generic codes and the fourteen year-old boy’s verbatim example given earlier is readily apparent. The considerable overlap between the generic codes for the two different year groups is also readily apparent. In the section of the table above the dotted line, the codes are virtually identical. In the rules occurring below the dotted line, the variations can be explained by the differential moral rights and developmental agendas of the two age cohorts who occupy subtly different positions in what is recognisably the same hierarchy operating under a
**common** code which orders the characters and social relations of different year groups. Discussions with students within and beyond the research groups confirm both the universality and general accuracy of this analysis, which is why the researcher felt it appropriate to refer to this code using the *definite* article (*The Code*), since there seems to be only one in operation.

### 6.6 The Code: an explanatory commentary

The two versions of *The Code* given in the table above are now, for convenience, further amalgamated to produce a simpler generic version which is outlined below, alongside some explanatory commentary to clarify the local meaning of each rule. These explanatory comments are derived from an analysis of parallel forms of the rule available within the sample, and from discussions with the students:-

**Don’t be cocky to older years.** This is a rule about knowing your place in the social hierarchy, and about showing the deference appropriate to your station. “Seniors” are at the top of this hierarchy, and new boys are clearly at the bottom. One new boy’s version of the rule puts it succinctly: “*Remember that you are the bottom of the pile.*” Appropriate deference is shown by “respecting” elders, by “doing what you are told” by seniors.

**Don’t be keen.** Variations of this emphatic and universal rule make its meaning clear: “*Don’t work too hard*”; “*Don’t try to be first to lessons*”; “*Don’t try too hard. Don’t be early for lessons all the time*” The tone of this rule stands in ironic contrast to the *official* school rules which begin : “*Academic work must be your priority. You should aim, by wider reading and further enquiry, to do more than satisfy formal academic requirements.*” The teaching staff might take some comfort, however; many students attach a rider to the powerful “*Don’t be keen*” rule, which is “*Don’t be lazy*”. Whilst it is socially unfashionable to be academically enthusiastic, complete indolence is also proscribed. Navigating between the Scilla of “keenness” and the Charybdis of “laziness” clearly requires - as do many other rules in *The Code* - the exercise of discerning judgement and refined social skill on the part of students.
Don’t suck up to teachers - but be polite. The prescribed attitude to teachers demonstrates a parallel ambivalence to that already seen in the students’ attitude to work. Relations between students and teaching staff are considered by the staff to be good. Nonetheless, for the student, a fine balance between “keenness” and disrespect has to be achieved. On the one hand, the wise student is advised “Don’t be a geek and suck up to teachers”, but this is counter-balanced by the (rather less frequent) injunction to be polite or avoid “dissing” (disrespecting, cheeking) the teachers.

Be relaxed; take a joke. The essence of this rule is that students should attain an appearance of equanimity and imperturbable calmness in the face of provocation and personal agitation – particularly when being teased or “got at” by their peers and by seniors. “Stay calm and don’t react to anything that older years say about you”; “Be calm and take a joke” and “Be laid back about teasing” are characteristic variants of this rule. The importance of this rule for the style and quality of day-to-day relationships amongst students is hard to over-estimate, and equally hard to convey to the outsider. No quirk of human nature, appearance or personal circumstance is immune from the pungent scrutiny of the “joke” - usually incorporating some degree of what an outsider might interpret as verbal ridicule. For example, the possession of a high voice, low standards of personal hygiene, a hairy bottom or even (in one extreme case recorded while the researcher was present at the school) a recently deceased mother, may all become targets of highly personal remarks which the recipient has to learn to accept with apparent, if not actual equanimity. It is the mark of a “good bloke” that he can “take a joke” against himself; the defectively masculine “wimp” cannot. To be able to “take a joke” is a primary indicator of possessing a sound character.

It must be emphasized that however brutal this practice of institutional teasing may sound, it is sharply distinguished from bullying by most students. However uncomfortable this sometimes abrasive and knockabout humour may feel at first, by their second year in the school, most boys seem to relish the loud and lively exchanges, often preferring school social life to life at home. Although few students would care to admit it, it would seem that the knockabout humour functions as an important bonding tool; whatever else it may mean, a remark about the hairiness of a
fellow-student’s bottom or their success with women at a party, implies a degree of intimacy and social belonging more intimate than other ostensibly more polite forms of attribution might do. In this respect, the researcher was fascinated by a series of interviews which he conducted with recent “old boys” in which they lamented the comparative emotional distance they experienced at university where the constraints of more cautious and politically correct forms of humour and relationship resulted in a less intimately bonded style of social relationships than they had enjoyed at school. The “old boy” interviewees further argued that “learning to take a joke” was, quite literally, character-forming, and they supplied evidence of a number of particular cases - especially of quiet and shy students - who gradually became more resilient as a result of institutional teasing (Source: research Video Interview 08/07/02). This issue is discussed further in the next chapter.

Being seen to be upset or irritated by personal “jokes” would invite either redoubled ribbing, additional ascriptions of feebleness, or both. The emotional self-control cultivated through the practice of self-restraint required by the “Be relaxed; take a joke” rule would seem indispensable for the attainment of the traditional Public School “stiff upper lip”. This Stoic virtue has a distinguished ancient and aristocratic pedigree; it can be found, for instance, in the parallel concept of sprezzatura in The Courtier, Castiglione’s (1967) influential handbook for upwardly mobile sons of the Italian Renaissance gentry; they too were encouraged to develop the appearance of an apparent self-confidence which would be unruffled by contrary circumstances. Interestingly, Clarke (1969) argues that Renaissance Florentines were notorious for their cruel practical jokes and personal insults as well as their sprezzatura, so the Stoic “stiff upper lip” and personal ribaldry may be ancient bedfellows.

The new boys’ version of The Code seems to include additional rules which offer further practical guidance about the cultivation of sprezzatura :-

**Suppress strange interests** suggests prudence in self-revelation.
Don’t be a gimp, geek, nerd, gay, paranoid, skitz or irrelevant crisply outlines some of the possible moral identities in the local typology of persons that are best avoided by the wise and socially adept new boy.

In the event of finding oneself on the receiving end of uncomfortable teasing, then two further rules counsel keeping the discomfort strictly to yourself:

**Don’t break down in public**

**Don’t sneak/dob** (i.e. Don’t tell tales to the teachers. *"Dob" is a local word similar in meaning to “sneak”. Both terms proscribe “telling tales” to teachers.).

**Be generous.** The many variants of the generosity rule were outlined earlier, and the extant variants make it clear that voluntarily giving away parts of one’s personal supply of food or “tuck” is considered to be an important distinguishing mark of the student who is worthy of respect. “Generosity will get you a long way”, whereas “stinginess” or being “tight” will get you the reputation for being “Jewish”, “Afghan” or “Arab”. The importance of public munificence within student culture bears some comparison, perhaps, with the Kwakiutl, and other Northwest Coast Native American tribes where the giving of food and gifts to others can demonstrate the social standing of the giver (so, Farb, 1969).

**Be yourself.** Despite the strong constraints on personal self-expression already encountered (the strongly hierarchical tone of many of the rules, the injunctions to social deference and to the restraint of ones natural emotional reactions in the face of criticism and ridicule), both research groups were insistent that “Being yourself” was of considerable importance. The social and emotional skills needed to navigate the complexities and paradoxes of The Code are clearly considerable. Whatever the social pressures, to be worthy of the respect by his peers, the student must “be himself”. The student worthy of respect must “Be original; don’t be like all the rest”, “Be individual; don’t be like everyone else”, “Do not cave in to peer pressure.” Even the youngest boys’ code of rules insist that there are limits to social deference: “Obey Seniors - but don’t be pushed around”, “Stand up for yourself”, and even the more defiant “Do not conform”. For the older cohort of boys, this area of The Code seems to increase markedly in importance, with the appearance of a cluster of additional injunctions which commend the judiciously graduated violation of some of their
younger conformities, marking the older students' local moral right to a greater degree of independence. Several of the older boys' additional rules in the table above relate to this area of growing confidence and diminishing deference. These rules include:–

Be confident and a bit rebellious
Stand up for yourself
Don’t be too goody-goody; get busted at least once
If it is dark, disobey any school rules that have “grass” in them

The meaning of the former pair of rules speak for themselves. The third rule speaks of deliberately getting “busted”. Getting “busted” in school parlance means getting caught for a flagrant infringement of official school rules. The moral significance of “Get busted at least once” rule was explained by one very literate student by a comparison with Shakespeare’s Henry V. Like scars won at the battle of Agincourt, the pains and penalties incurred by such acts of self-assertion serve as a badge of courage in the eyes of ones peers; they demonstrate that the perpetrator has moral fibre.

A more specific kind of judicious rebellion is envisaged in the “If it is dark, disobey any school rules that have grass in them”. Like most English Public Schools, the school had extensive grounds, and students had to traverse the campus several times each day when moving between their boarding houses and their lessons. The official school rules warned students to: Keep to footpaths, avoid crossing pitches and walking on the grass (see Second Master’s Grass Rules).

The previous “Second Master” (Deputy Headmaster) was perceived as having a strong personal commitment to enforcing the “Grass rules”. Boys being boys, it seems clear that the existence of countervailing boys' “grass” rule indicated the genesis of a local “sport” of nocturnal grass-walking with a particular hubristic significance.

Whilst the older students’ version of The Code includes rules which amplify the Be Yourself rule, encouraging a little judicious rebellion, independence and self-assertion, the new boys’ version, in contrast, contains instead a cluster of additional rules which
enjoin the keeping of a “low profile”. New boys must cultivate the more deferential social demeanour appropriate to their lowly position in the overall hierarchy. Such rules, mostly self-explanatory, include:-

*Don’t be arrogant; don’t boast*
*Don’t try too hard to get laughs or be cool*

**Play sport; preferably be good at it.** The apparent brevity and simplicity of this rule conceals a rich and complex network of meanings and values which are explored separately in the next section of the chapter. “Get involved in sports and get into sports teams” represents the most general form of the rule, with “Play sport”, “Be good at sport”, “Play football” and “Like football” being frequent variants. As we shall see below, not all sports count as “sport” in the student value system, but involvement in, and prowess at “sport” can have a marked effect on a student’s moral, social and academic status.

**Be friendly and nice to people** Despite superficial verbal similarities between this rule and the succeeding “Be sociable” rule, analysis of the data supplied by both groups reveals two distinct clusters of material. In outline, the “Be friendly” rule enjoins the cultivation of a generic friendly attitude in all daily social relations, whilst the “Be sociable” rule (along with its associated rules, “Get some mates” and “Don’t be irrelevant” recommends the building of a spectrum of particular relationships with immediate peers. (To confuse matters, discussion with students revealed that sometimes the phrase “Be sociable” was used to mean “Be friendly”.”) “Be friendly and nice to people”, “Have respect for everyone around you” and “Be nice to people on the way up; you may meet them on the way down” convey the flavour of the “friendliness” rule, whose primary attitude-governing function seems to be that of keeping the social cogs sufficiently well oiled to facilitate the close social proximities of institutional boarding life.

**Be sociable; don’t be “irrelevant”**. The importance of building a network of personal relationships emerges particularly strongly in the data supplied by the new boys, though it remains important to their seniors too. “Get some mates” puts the rule in its most down to earth form. Other variants include “Get friends out of House as
well as in House”, “Establish a system of mates” and “Join in with people” convey the importance of building a network of different types of relationship within the school. The opposite of social connectedness is being “irrelevant”, a criterion applied to students who are perceived as avoiding involvement with their peers. “Irrelevant” students are perceived as being reclusive, of spending “all their time on the computer” or of “staying in their room all day”. From its frequency in both this set of exercises as well as some of the later exercises in this phase of the study, “being irrelevant” is a major social and moral defect.

Have your own fashion sense. The students’ complex array of style rules constitute a minefield for the middle-aged researcher. Both research groups had strong views on what constituted appropriately acceptable style in music, clothing and hairstyle. The complexity of these data might easily furnish the material for an entire book, which is beyond the scope of the present study. To risk the grossest of generalisations, at the time of the research, the predominant fashions in music precluded enthusiasm for boy bands but licensed a predilection for Rock. Clothes of all sorts (from trousers to tee shirts, through to “hoodies” - hooded track-suit tops) needed to be loose and baggy; “skin tight” clothing would result in social ridicule and ascriptions of homosexuality. Certain types of sportswear such as track suit bottoms, trainers and even baseball caps were stylistically precarious, especially when associated with brand names such as Reebok, Nike and Kappa; these garments and brands were for “skivs” - people perceived to be from a lower social class. Hair should be “spiked up” with the assistance of the various potions, gels, waxes and mousses commercially designed for the purpose. In general, the older group demonstrated more acutely discerning sophistication, as well as latitude in their tastes than the younger group; the latter seemed more anxious to conform than their elders.

The rules discussed in the above description occur frequently in the writings and discussions of the students, but the digest is by no means an exhaustive account of the wider range of norms and rules which affect daily life in the school. Apparently natural actions like walking, for instance, are subject to definite principles of social influence. It is clear that there is a recognised “cool” way to walk: “Never walk too fast”, “Walk around with your hands on your groin” or “Move as if you are tired or
doped up”, “Scuff your heels and don't run unless you have to.” Are some of the common suggestions. One of the present researcher's most memorable pieces of data is a videotaped demonstration of this lumberingly “tough” and masculine method of locomotion, complete with de rigeur groin-scratching interlude.

Even the most intimate details of private life are not immune to The Code's social influence. Four students in the group of fifteen year-olds expressed variants of the colourfully expressed rule counselling a degree of modesty in masturbation: “Don’t get caught polishing your helmet”, “Don’t get caught spanking the monkey” or “Get busted doing something once but not tossing off.”

In a later follow-up study with a group of new entrants who had only been in the school for two weeks, it was confirmed that new boys arrived at Bentham’s ignorant of The Code. The Code, however, was very quickly learned and soon became a powerful and almost universal determinant of boys’ social relationships and character.

6.7 “Gods, not clods”: How important is sport?

Participation in organised team games has always been a prominent feature of Public School life ever since the re-foundation of such schools in the nineteenth century (Newsome, 1961). The game of Rugby football was famously invented at Rugby School, “Eton Fives” is played far beyond the cloistered confines of its origins at Eton College, Windsor, and historians of the nation’s favourite game credit another Public School, Charterhouse, with the invention of the world’s first set of Association Football rules. Most boys’ Public Schools choose to play either football or rugby as a “major” compulsory sport in the winter term, but not both. The research school, like many others, was a “football” school.

A typical Public Schoolboy might find himself playing sport on an almost daily basis, and the research school has a strong commitment to hockey, cricket and football, with a particular emphasis on the latter. In each of the three terms of the school year one team sport is designated as the “major” sport for the term. At Bentham’s, football, hockey and cricket constitute the “major” sports, and all boys are compelled - or
strongly encouraged - to participate in the wide range of competitive inter-House and inter-school sporting fixtures involving these sports. Sporting fixtures may occur on at least six days each week. Those selected to play regularly for school and house teams may be awarded a special tie which denotes their achievements. In addition to the "major" sports, the school also offers a very wide variety of "minor" sports and physical activities, ranging from tennis, rugby and judo, to lacrosse and deep-sea diving. In such a context, therefore, sporting activities form an obvious and important part of the official school curriculum.

Whilst discussing the "Play sport" rule with students, it was of considerable surprise to the researcher to discover that sporting activities were not only an obvious part of the school’s official curriculum, but also appeared to serve as a very important part of the student’s own implicit value system. Further explorations in the form of written exercises and discussions with the two principal research groups, as well as interviews with senior students and recent old boys demonstrated that “sport” was as vital a part of The Code as it was of the school’s official curriculum. Moreover, “sport” encapsulated a strong value system which could have a strong effect on a student’s “respect” (their social and moral status) within the community. One fifteen year-old student (who describes himself as “not a very athletic person”) puts the position in a nutshell:--

To most people sports are more important than anything else to prove what type of person he is and what he is worth. Their academic side is not that important to people. People gain their reputations at Bentham’s according to whether they are good at sports or not.

From the opposite end of the range of sporting ability, one of the school’s sporting “gods” (having played for many major school teams since his earliest days in the school), paints a similar picture:--

You get respect for your sporting talents, more so than in any other field - more than academic work. It’s part of the group, the social thing. People rate sportsmen...People hold the door open for you...They want your approval.

These quotations reflect faithfully the general current of student opinion. Another student (a passionate musician who forced himself to play - and enjoy - rugby)
underlines the importance of sport and indicates the penalties of not being good at sport:

It is fairly important to be sporty at Bentham's, or at least to try, because if you are not in a team for anything, then you are branded as a 'malco'*, and are thought of as a recluse who does not do anything in the afternoons except play computer games. (* "malco" is a local word meaning "mal-co-ordinated" or poor at sports)

Not all sports are of equal value. Amongst students, football ("it is the only true game") is more important than either hockey or cricket, but any of these three "major" sports are unquestionably more important than any of the others. A few select additional sports, such as tennis and rugby might count as "sports" with some sections of the student population, but other "minor sports" such as athletics or golf do not really count as "sport" at all, not being considered to be sufficiently "physically demanding". As one keen golfer complained: "It is possible to be excellent at golf and still be considered as a bad at sport." This hierarchical evaluation of sports is confirmed in the following quotation, which also goes on to articulate the considerable range of moral evaluations which students associate with sporting prowess, or the lack of it:-

If you want to prove you worth it is extremely important to be good at a 'mainstream' sport (i.e. football, hockey, cricket and rugby). This will earn you real respect from fellow year members and make you 'cool'...if you are good at any other sports, other people will discriminate against you and call you a 'pussy' or 'weakling'.

Being good at sport is thus a very important way for students to establish their worth as a person within the local culture. The evaluative vocabulary in the above passage is both fascinating and characteristic. The approvingly masculinist tone of evaluative terms like "worth" and "respect" and "cool" are reserved for the men who play "real" sports like football and rugby; "minor" sportsmen who do not play "real" sports, along with other lesser mortals are liable to be classified as "pussies" and "weaklings". The earning of respect and the achievement of personal worth in the eyes of ones peers seems very frequently to be expressed in this characteristic type of machismo vocabulary, something which will be further discussed presently.
Despite his sporting success, the musician-turned-rugby-player quoted earlier both describes and criticises this aspect of the student value system:-

It is part of the boarding school ethos to be good at games, and even if not, to try to get into a team, in order to be a man. However, it is my distinguished opinion that feeling each other's posteriors in a rugby scrum, or the art of hitting a ball whilst being padded to the teeth and then watching how far it goes, is not exactly the pinnacle of masculinity.

Being good at sport is about “proving your worth”, about “earning respect” from one’s peers, about “popularity” and “admiration” from peers. Being good at sport will also help you to “fit in”, to “make friends” (especially in your early months in the school) as well as having a more “popular and sociable life amongst other Benthamites.”

Amongst other students it earns you respect “and respect is what earns you your self-respect and social rank.”

Not everyone can be a sporting “god”and receive acclaim and admiration, but sporting excellence is not, however, an absolute requirement. If you cannot be good at games, it is, however, important to participate and, crucially, to try. Those who fail to take part or show a reasonable degree of commitment may find themselves stigmatised unless they have some compensatory attributes or strategy, such as the ability to make others laugh.

For the enthusiastic and academically well-motivated student, sporting prowess can effectively ward off the opprobrium of The Code’s cardinal sin of being “keen”, whereas the academic non-sportsman is more prone to such accusations if they are seen to avoid sport and prefer computers.

It is possible to detect an informal three-tier moral typology underpinning the sporting scene. On the top tier, outstanding sportsmen may be accorded the status of being a “hero”, a “legend” or a “rude boy”. In the middle tier, the averagely competent sportsman who participates and tries is a “good bloke”, whilst on the lowest tier, the student who has neither skill nor commitment is in danger of being a “reject”, “malco”, “retard”, “spastic”, “pussy”, “weakling”, “lazy” or just “gay”.

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As students move up the school hierarchy, sporting prowess decreases in importance as an indicator of social and moral worth, and amongst the students there were some dissenting voices who argued that you could create an independent social identity without the aid of sporting success if you had other strengths of character. Nonetheless, the general importance of sport as a carrier of local social values is very widely acknowledged. It seems, therefore, that participation in sport is not only part of an official programme of activities which form part of the school curriculum, but also part of an unofficial and complex system of moral evaluation.

In addition to the school's official commitment to sport, and the students' unofficial value system which surrounds it, a third value system associated with “sport” emerged in the later stages of the research during a chance conversation with a girl student in her final year. She explained how new girls are always given an introductory talk by some of the older girls. One of the most important parts of the talk, apparently, is the moment when the older girls show the new girls the range of different boys’ sporting ties which denote what sports team the wearer plays for. According to the senior girls, the more prestigious the sports team, the more desirable its wearer is as a potential boyfriend. Any first team player in a “major sport” is highly desirable, but a member of the 1st XI Football team is most desirable of all.

Thus it is, therefore, that the institution of “sport” occupies an important place in the students' moral code, linking together official school recognition of sporting success, peers' evaluations of one another's characters, and girls' assessments of boys' sexual attractiveness into a single complex system.

6.8 The Moral Lexicon

Are the values which can be seen in The Code and “sport” reflected in the characteristic evaluative vocabulary used by the students? In two different exercises the researcher endeavoured to gather from the two principal research groups their accounts of the terms of praise and blame, of virtue and vice, in common use amongst the students. Their collected written vocabularies were clarified and further defined through the use of recorded video presentations, discussions, and a practical exercise
in which students had to describe typical members of the other school boarding houses. Although the meanings of each word in the resultant lexicon were ascertained, they are not reproduced in detail here because of limitations of space; the meanings of many terms will, in any case, be readily accessible to the reader’s intuition. An analysis of these data revealed that the principal categories of the moral lexicon reflected the main concerns of the honour morality’s values, and in so doing, offered a degree of validation for the study’s earlier analyses which resulted in “The Code”.

In both exercises the single largest (i.e. most numerous and most various) categories of moral evaluation were sexual in nature, with “homophobic” references being most numerous and varied of all. The term “gay”, for instance, was widely used as an all-purpose insult. The following table categorises some of the more common features of the lexicon:-

Figure 6.2 The moral lexicon at Bentham’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms of abuse; homosexual allusion</th>
<th>Terms of abuse; heterosexual allusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Sheep-shagger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay boy</td>
<td>One-incher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom burglar</td>
<td>“Yo mamma”/ “your mum”*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bog rat</td>
<td>Jock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal musketeer</td>
<td>Chode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir boy</td>
<td>Minger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batty boy</td>
<td>Barbie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anally bearded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faggot fudge-packer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuzz-muncher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limp-wristed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bum bandits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal excavator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphill gardener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoonist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving Upward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms relating to “generosity”</td>
<td>Terms relating to being “keen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stingy</td>
<td>Keen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jew</td>
<td>Try hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Keen bean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight-arsed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms relating to “cockiness”</th>
<th>Terms relating specifically to sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cocky</td>
<td>Sporty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck up</td>
<td>Good bloke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>Legend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up their own arse</td>
<td>Malco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jock</td>
<td>Loser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms of high respect and social status</th>
<th>Terms of low respect and low social status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally cool</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude boy</td>
<td>Totally irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good bloke</td>
<td>Boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard core</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alright bruv</td>
<td>Pointless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awright mate</td>
<td>Loser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lad</td>
<td>Flid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Tosser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms referring to socio-economic status</th>
<th>Terms of low status and stigmatisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Townie</td>
<td>Freak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kev</td>
<td>Weirdo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pikey</td>
<td>Mong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minted (rich)</td>
<td>Twat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wigger (&quot;black wannabe; white nigger&quot;)</td>
<td>Gimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pussy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*"Yo mamma"*: all purpose sexual insult, short form of “I had your mum for sex last night and she was very good”.

Although there were small variations between the local moral vocabularies collected from the two research groups, the similarities are more striking than the differences. An inspection of the main categories of the evaluative terms quoted above would seem to demonstrate a significant overlap between the moral lexicon and the values and norms of The Code. Several of The Code’s core values, such as knowing one’s
place in the social hierarchy, avoiding “cockiness”, being generous, sporty and acceptably masculine, are all amply represented in the moral lexicon’s richest evaluative categories. Discussions with current students, as well as with recent past students confirmed the overall accuracy of the analysis.

It is very striking how many of the terms have either an explicit sexual reference, or reference to having the approved masculine type of characteristics (such as being a “lad”, a “good bloke”, “rude boy”, rebel” or “hard core”, as opposed to being a “wimp”, “pussy”). It is also very striking that the single largest category of evaluative terms in the lexicon apparently stigmatise homosexuality. The single commonest general term of abuse used by students was “gay”. These striking features, coupled with a certain machismo detectable in both The Code, and the students’ understanding of the importance of “sport”, prompted further scrutiny of these data in order to examine the construction of masculinity within the local culture.

6.9 “Being a Man”: the construction of masculinity at Bentham’s

One theme that emerged in the earlier section on “sport” was the association between sporting prowess and masculinity. In the previous section on the students’ moral lexicon, even though most of the individual terms of the Benthamite moral lexicon were left unexplained, the large number of terms which have a sexual (often homosexual) reference will not have escaped the reader’s notice. Analysis of conversations and interviews with a range of students both past and present, suggests that, although less explicitly articulated than some of the other values of The Code, the acquisition of a socially acceptable form of “masculinity” is one of The Code’s foundational values, a value which therefore orders and shapes the relationships and social statuses of students amongst their peers. In comparison with Mac an Ghaill’s major study of the construction of masculinity amongst students attending an English State school (The Making of Men, 1994), the present section which discusses the distinctive construction of masculinity at Bentham’s is much more limited in scope. It suggests, nevertheless, some interesting points of contact.
Some of the areas of school life in which the students’ conception of masculinity at Bentham’s is exhibited may be arranged under four main headings:

1. The prevalence of sexual terms in the school moral lexicon

A perusal of the table (Figure 6.2) which displays the moral lexicon in use at Bentham’s may surprise the reader previously unacquainted with the culture of Public Schools with its frequent (and sometimes explicit) sexual references. Perhaps the most striking feature of the lexicon is the large number of terms which have a sexual reference. The largest single category of terms were those having a homosexual reference, and, as has already been mentioned, the most commonly used all-purpose insult used by students was the term “gay” (as used in the common phrases, “You’re so gay” or “That’s so gay”). The terms listed in the “Terms of abuse; homosexual allusion” section of the table, though often very explicit in their allusion to specific sexual acts, are probably comprehensible without further explanation, but an examination of the next section (“Terms of abuse; heterosexual allusion”) may be more inscrutable to the outsider. Although the section of Figure 6.2 refers to this category of terms as “heterosexual allusion”, only two of the terms refer to girls; a “minger” is an unattractive or common girl, whilst a “Barbie” (as in Barbie doll) is a kind of “blonde bimbo” more endowed with good looks than brains, and who likes to hang around with high-status sportsmen. Most of the other terms in this category incorporate a specific reference to the penis, sometimes coupled with some additional attribute. Perhaps the most self-explanatory term is “one incher”, a word applied to boys judged to have a small penis, whilst the mystifying term “chode” refers to a boy who has a penis that is very wide - “wider than it’s long”, as one student put it. A “jock”, on the other hand, is the pejorative term given to a cocksure sportsman who believes he is “hung like an elephant and God’s gift to sport”, someone who tells you “how great they are and how large their penises are”. A “sheep-shagger” is reputed to meet his carnal desires outside the boundaries of the human species, whilst the common abbreviation “your mum” (like its Afro-Caribbean parody “Yo’ mama”), is a sexual boast whereby one boy taunts another that he has made a sexual conquest of the other boy’s mother, and is usually interpreted as an abbreviation of phrases such
as: "I had your Mum for sex last night and she was very good" or "Give my regards to your Mum."

The interesting feature of such terms is not primarily the explicitness of the sexual allusions, but the way these explicit allusions are linked to other values of status and masculinity which permeate The Code. Taking both the heterosexual and homosexual terms together, it appears that the male genitalia, their size and uses, have become tokens which can affect one's place in the social hierarchy and one's consequent social status. This is further discussed later.

2. "Sport" and masculinity

The association between sporting prowess and masculinity has already been mentioned in an earlier section. It will be recalled that the individual sports are themselves viewed hierarchically within the students' Code. Football is the most highly esteemed sport, followed by hockey and cricket. These three constitute the "major sports", although many students also admire rugby. The "major" sports are perceived as being more important, more "physical" and, at least implicitly, more masculine than others, much to the chagrin of those whose expertise is in a "minor" sport. It may be worth recalling one of the quotations given earlier in the chapter so that its association between sporting ability, social worth and defective masculinity can be inspected closely:-

If you want to prove your worth it is extremely important to be good at a 'mainstream' sport (i.e. football, hockey, cricket and rugby). This will earn you real respect from your fellow year members and make you 'cool'...if you are good at any other sports, other people will discriminate against you and call you a 'pussy' or 'weakling'.

The hierarchical arrangement of the different sports, and the importance of sporting skill are clear in this quotation. Those who fail to demonstrate the appropriate sporting talent will be branded as weak or somehow feminine (the term "pussy" refers to the female genitalia). In either case, the poor sportsman is, by implication, defectively masculine.
Several boys made the association between sporting prowess and masculinity explicit:

It is part of the boarding school ethos to be good at games, and even if not, to try to get into a team, in order to be a man.

Once again, masculinity and sporting prowess are associated, with the conative moral value of “trying” (a manifestation of “guts”) reinforcing the moral status of masculinity within the code; “being a man” is not a biological endowment, but rather a moral status which is achieved when the person has developed the approved masculine virtues and “character”.

It will be recalled, too, that high social status, sporting prowess and sexual attractiveness are also - at least for the girls at the school - strongly associated; the outstanding sportsman who plays for the First XI will not only be admired by his peers, but also be sexually desirable to girls (unless, of course, she is a “Barbie” and he is a “jock”!)

3. The signifiers of masculinity

In addition to the development of a sound moral character (as prescribed by the values of The Code, and as reinforced by the local moral lexicon) and adequate sporting prowess, there would seem to be a number of other culturally available resources which may stiffen a Benthamite’s limp masculinity.

An important signifier of masculinity amongst students would seem to be the possession of a large penis. The researcher’s incredulity was shaken on a number of occasions by the extent to which, though apparently very modest in their personal habits (the practice of communal showers, for instance, had not occurred in the school for many years), Benthamites seemed to be very well-informed about the dimensions of each others’ genitalia. In other contexts outside the educational world, a number of commentators (such as Monette, 1994; Davies, 1999) have noted the male “obsession” with penis size, and it may be that the Public School world is no different from any other in this respect. Nonetheless, from anecdotes volunteered by students, it would
appear that frank conversations on the topic of the penis sizes of different members of the community are considered neither uncommon nor unusual in a number of boarding Houses. Reporting one such conversation that had gone on a few days previously, one boy, a keen sportsman and member of several prestigious sports teams, admitted freely (in the context of explaining the meaning of the term “chode”) that the day before the interview, he had been in the pub with a group of fellow hockey players. During this time there had been “a twenty minute conversation in the pub talking about various people they knew, and how big they were.”

Another important signifier of masculinity, particularly for the older students, is the acquisition of a girlfriend. Whatever other comforts a girlfriend may bring, one of her primary values for many boys is the aura of enhanced masculinity and status she can bring to the boy who possesses her (boys “have” a girl friend). The same senior sportsman who previously reported the pub conversation about penises also described the role of girlfriends:-

Obviously, having a girlfriend is a great confidence-booster, but it’s a status thing as well. It’s a kind of symbol; you get respect. It’s about proving you’re a man. You often get pressure from other men to have a girl-friend.

Having any old girlfriend, however, will not necessarily improve your perceived masculinity; to have a girlfriend that one’s peers perceive as a “minger” or a “Barbie” (an ugly girl or a “dumb blonde”) may undermine the would-be Casanova’s masculine credentials. On the other hand, a “fit” (good-looking) girl-friend can certainly enhance a boy’s perceived masculinity and status in the eyes of his peers. An incident described by another senior boy illustrates these principles. In the following quotation, the boy is describing an occasion when, after the end of a school match on a Saturday afternoon, his girlfriend (who attended another school) turned up towards the end of a school match to watch him play. When he is seen talking to her, a procession of his friends walk past:-

A whole load of people from school keep walking past and judging me on it. They want to know “Who’s this, then?”. One by one they begin to realise that she’s my girlfriend, and they can see she’s really good looking. Suddenly, you can see they’re all saying to themselves “She’s alright!” suddenly my mobile goes off. It’s Adam from my House. He’s standing about a hundred yards
away from us. "She's O.K. ", he says. You can see that people now look at me in a completely different light for having a blonde, beautiful girlfriend. People judge me on it. That shows it's a status thing.

In a similar way, making certain types of sexual conquest can also serve to mark the various rungs on the ladder by which the Benthamite male increases his masculine credibility. In their autobiographies, three members of another research group of fourteen year old students described "getting off with" or "pulling" (French kissing) a girl as an important moment in their life so far. As an eleven year old, one boy is at a "disco" with his friends, and sees an attractive girl:-

I danced with her a few times and then, for the first time in my life, I pulled her. I had been urged on all night by my mates so, in the end, I did it. This was a massive achievement because I had never even kissed a girl, let alone pulled one. I felt very cool and proud of myself. Some of my mates were jealous because they had never done it before, but most thought it was really cool.

The experience described above does not seem to be about forming an enduring friendship or relationship with another human being; it is an achievement, a rite of passage on the way to the boy’s increased masculinity. The physical act is prompted by the boy’s peers, and then approved and “respected” by them afterwards. Many of the anecdote’s features show marked similarities with the previous quotation about the sportsman’s blonde girl-friend.

4. The contestations of masculinity

A close inspection of Figure 6.2 reveals, as will be recalled earlier, that the largest single category of abuse terms are those which have a homosexual reference. This category of terms has more members than any other single category, and many of the terms are also frequently used. "Gay", as has already been explained, is one of the most commonly used terms of abuse in the entire school, being used as an all-purpose term of disapproval, as well, sometimes, to cast aspersions on another boy’s masculinity. Chapter 11 will present some extracts from the stories of some gay students at the school. Their experiences at school have sometimes been quite difficult and even traumatic, and it may well be that the difficulty of their experiences may, at least in part, be connected with the apparently homophobic tone of the moral lexicon
and even the Code itself. Certainly none of this group of students felt able to make their sexuality public.

The school has a small number of female students, who need to be resilient to cope with the predominantly male ethos of the school. The attractive ones may find that they possess a certain amount of power by virtue of their looks; most “ordinary” girls get on with their work and their lives as best they can. Girls perceived to have a “good personality” (i.e. a personality with an acceptable type of “character”) would, like their male counterparts, be respected. However, girls may not always be respected as much as an equivalent boy would. Even in the high-status world of sport, things are not equal. As one boy put it succinctly:-

Sports-girls don’t have the same status as sportsmen.

In the light of the evidence presented above, it would seem that the boys at Bentham’s live within a social world which constructs its sense of masculinity in a very distinctive way. “Being a man” in the socially-approved ways appears to be bound up intimately with the values of The Code, the need to have the right sort of character, and the students’ high estimation of “sport”. Their sense of what is, and what is not acceptably masculine is also reflected in their characteristic moral vocabulary. The culture’s striking insistence on masculine values, as well as the ambivalences implicated by the prevalence of frequent terms of homophobic abuse alongside frankly phallocentric language, invite further scrutiny, but such discussions would be far beyond the scope of the present study. Although there are major differences between the type of school investigated in Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) study and Bentham’s it is clear that, if typical, both schools construct masculinity in ways that are strongly prescriptive, and in ways that may be oppressive to those who, by sexuality, temperament or gender find themselves indisposed to conform to its constraints.

Having considered several different aspects of the students’ perceptions of their unofficial school culture, the time has come to put all the pieces together and consider its overall nature and structure. It will be suggested in the next section that the students’ peer-group world at Bentham’s exhibits many of the characteristics of a type
of moral and social order that has been described as an “honour morality”. This “honour morality” is constituted by its Code, its values and its moral lexicon which permeate and govern the day to day social relations in school.

6.10 Principal characteristics of Bentham’s “honour morality”

What rules, principles and values govern the daily life of students when they are left to themselves? Many of the principal rules and values are enshrined in the students’ distinctive Code. Above all The Code is about “respect”, “approval”, “popularity” - about being “rated” by one’s peers; in short, to use an older term, about ones “honour”. The respect of ones peers (ones “honour”) comes about by having the approved type of character - a character which does not react when teased, is generous, and which is good at “sport” (or at least tries). The person worthy of respect knows that the two main rules are “Be yourself” and “Go with the group”, and is skilful in knowing how to balance these two apparently irreconcilable principles in any social situation. It is suggested here that many of these characteristic features can be understood by viewing each of them as an aspect of what some social scientists have called an “honour morality” (so, Harré, 1983; Weston, 1975; Pitt-Rivers, 1971; Diaz-Plaja, 1968; Goffman, 1961, 1963) and moral philosophers have called “virtue ethics” (so, MacIntyre, 1981/1985; Foot, 1978; Anscombe, 1958; Geach, 1977; Frankena, 1970; Crisp and Slote, 1997). An honour morality is a moral order in which one’s moral status depends primarily on what kind of person one is; it is, as Harré (1983:236) argues, more about identity than about decision: “...one does not choose to be a gentleman or a lady. One cannot and maintain one’s identity. If one is in a position to choose between being a gentleman or being a bounder, one cannot be a gentleman.” According to Weston (Morality and purposive action 1975:16), an honour morality “provides a picture of a certain kind of person to be.”

For readers unfamiliar with this type of moral order, many of its characteristic features, including the use of the term “Code”, can be seen, by way of example, in the following brief extracts from a speech given on the 12th May, 1962 when the eighty-two year old General Douglas MacArthur returned to the elite American Marine Corps officers’ training academy at West Point to receive the highest medal his alma mater
could bestow. The emphasis on possessing the approved qualities of character appropriate to being “an officer and a gentleman”, and of following the “Code” at all times, require that the cadet will show himself to be not only a man of integrity, but also a true member of “The Corps” with its heroic, hierarchical and aristocratic values. MacArthur’s speech began by suggesting that the prestigious medal is given not to him personally, but to “the great moral code” he had served all his life:-

But this award is not intended primarily to honour a personality, but to symbolize a great moral code - the code of conduct and chivalry of those who guard this beloved land of culture and ancient descent.

He goes on to indicate the essence of this “code”, and, characteristically, to stress that the “code’s” aim is to form character, not just regulate outward behaviour; honour moralities are about being the right kind of person, not just doing the right thing:-

Duty; Honour; Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, and what you will be...They build your basic character, they mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the nation’s defense, they make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid.

His catalogue of virtuous qualities of character continues, and includes humility, honesty, generosity, courage and compassion. The catalogue of soldierly virtues, which may have to be developed through “blood, sweat and tears”, finishes with a phrase that has subsequently become famous. The acquisition of these virtues:-

...teach you in this way to become an officer and a gentleman.

Finally, not only is the Code concerned with building the right sort of character. One who follows the “Code” is, above all, a member of a specific community, a close-knit band of brothers whose bonds are not broken, even by death:-

You are the leaven which binds together the entire fabric of our national system of defense...The Long Gray Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses thundering those magic words; Duty-Honour-Country...The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here...

But in the evening of my memory, always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes “Duty; Honour; Country”. Today marks my final roll call with you, but I want you to know that when I cross the river, my last
conscious thoughts will be of The Corps – and The Corps – and The Corps. I bid you farewell.

*The Code* that has been described in the present chapter shares a number of important structural features with the kind of traditional honour morality depicted nearly half a century ago by MacArthur. It gives detailed guidance to students about what kind of *person* they might *be*. It prescribes particular virtuous qualities of *character*. Although the term “honour” itself is rarely used, an equivalent vocabulary of “respect”, “reputation” and “worth” is common. What general features, in summary, does Bentham’s own local honour morality possess?

First, it is strongly hierarchical. Social status, rights and freedoms are contingent upon one’s place in a “pecking order”, which is constructed through a complex mixture of age seniority and earned peer respect. Deference becomes *less* important with age, whilst possessing an independent social identity becomes *more* important, as the two subtly different versions of *The Code* from the two different year groups revealed.

Secondly, the respect and approbation of one’s peers is, in general, something which is *earned* as a result of the kind of *qualities* a person has. It is very striking how frequently rules, practices and moral evaluations refer to the *sort of person* someone *is*, rather than merely what they *do* or decide on one or two occasions; it is about *character* more than about mere conduct. It is about possessing certain *virtues* and avoiding certain *vices*. The accomplished footballer *is* a hero, whereas the reluctant swot *is* a “wimp”. You must *be* generous, and *not be* “keen”. To borrow Frankena’s phrase, *The Code* tends to emphasize “Being” rather than “Doing”. *The Code* thus invites comparison with the type of moral system analysed by Anscombe, Foot, MacIntyre, and Frankena as “virtue ethics”, and by Goffman, Harré and Weston as an “honour morality”. In *The Code*, respect, “worth” and honour are accorded to students with admirable qualities of characters. Advancement in moral status is not – as it is in Kohlberg’s (1975, 1976, 1978, 1981) cognitivist model – a matter of more advanced types of *thinking*, but of building a better sort of *character*.

Thirdly, in ways similar to other “honour moralities” (such as aristocratic English gentlemen, Japanese Samurai, army officers etc), the prescriptions of *The Code* are
not up for negotiation or intellectual cavilling. The “officer and gentleman” simply follows the appropriate code, however inconvenient or uncomfortable, and thus does the “right” thing; to fail to follow the prescribed code is not to be seen as a morally inventive person, but simply as a “cad” and thus not a real member of the “club” at all. Betrayals of “The Code” in honour moralities encourages a distinctive and often pungent moral vocabulary which labels “insiders” and “outsider” clearly; it demarcates those who, on the one hand, are accepted and respected as being “one of us”, or, on the other, stigmatises and rejects those who are not as “one of them.” The “good bloke” and the “legend” are clearly members of the respected “in” group, whilst the “wimp”, the “retard” and the “gay” are not. There is a similarly rich moral vocabulary which stigmatises unacceptable qualities of character. These characteristics of honour moralities may explain, at least in part, the distinctive and pungent nature of Bentham’s local moral lexicon. Harré (1983) argues that ridicule and shame are emotions particularly characteristic of honour moralities.

Fourthly, since favourable moral evaluation depends so often on qualities of character, endeavour and effort are of primary importance. The honour morality is a morality of conation rather than deliberation; of “guts”, endeavour and will-power, rather than intellectual refinement. So it is that the “good bloke” is one who gets involved and, crucially, tries at sport.

Fifthly, in an honour morality, “loss of face” constitutes a particular disaster, which may go far to explain The Code’s insistence on not appearing to be “keen” on one’s studies, on not breaking down in public, and on learning how to “take a joke”.

Sixthly, many important aspects of this schoolboy honour morality devolve around a certain conception of masculinity, an issue which was discussed in some detail earlier. High value is accorded to being a “lad”, “rude boy” or a sporting “legend”, whereas low value is ascribed to “wimps”, “pussies” and “gays”. There is an emphasis, too, on the rigorous control of one’s emotional reactions, on not breaking down in public, on being able to “take a joke”.

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6.11 Implications of The Code for personal identity

Standing back from the welter of local detail so far described, it seems clear that The Code (understood compendiously to include not just the ‘rules’ but also the associated value systems such as “sport” and the ‘moral lexicon’) constitute a coherent, highly sophisticated and powerful influence on students’ behaviour, attitudes and social identities.

The Code seems to be quickly learned and is almost universally acknowledged throughout the school, and by old boys. Researchers such as Goffman (1961, 1963), Weston (1975), Pitt-Rivers (1971) have claimed that such honour codes are powerful determinants of social behaviour and social identity. Since, as was outlined in Chapter 1, the school approximates quite closely to Goffman’s criteria for being a “total institution”, it might be expected that so pervasive an honour code, enshrined and empowered as it is by the “total institution” would, as Goffman predicted, act as a “forcing house for changing persons” (Goffman, 1968:22). That this is not so, is one of the surprising features of the students’ autobiographies which are examined in the next three chapters.

This surprising finding has important implications for Goffman’s claims about the identity-moulding power of “total institutions”, just as it has implications for other socially-dominated accounts of identity formation such as that of Lave and Wenger (1991). Their claim is that personal identity is acquired through membership of “communities of practice”, a claim which, like that of Goffman, is discussed further in Chapter 10.
CHAPTER 7

WRITING ABOUT YOURSELF AT BENTHAM’S

I always carry my diary with me when travelling; one should always have something sensational to read on the train. (Oscar Wilde)

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the most obvious way in which all students’ stories in the research school might be “like all other stories” (McAdams, 1989:162), namely through the formative influence of the norms, values and practices which they all hold in common by virtue of their common membership and formation within the same “total institution”. The focus of the present chapter moves from the social norms, values and practices of the students’ shared social world to begin to examine their individual autobiographies. When these individual autobiographies are collected and compared, it may still be possible to discern general patterns and characteristic social similarities which, though idiosyncratic, are still less than personally unique. In other words, this chapter reports some of the ways in which an individual’s story is “like some other stories.”

The differentiation and uniqueness of the individual is achieved against an obvious background of social sameness, so the general purpose of the present chapter is to examine the students’ individual autobiographies to discover which features of their narratives may represent generic social characteristics rather than individual ones. In keeping with the design of this study, the pragmatic rationale for this chapter is that until some of the shared characteristics of the students’ autobiographies have been described and removed from consideration, it is difficult to discern clearly those features of the individual autobiographies which are distinctive, different and perhaps even unique. In Jarvis’ (2001b) phrase, therefore, the chapter proceeds with its strategy of “distilling out similarity” in order to increasingly refine its perception of individual differences and uniquenesses.
Goffman (1961, 1963), in common with many other social scientists, suggested that living in the kind of intensively circumscribed residential environments which he has labelled “total institutions” may have very marked effects on the personalities of their “inmates”. It will be recalled that he argued that such institutions exert very strong influences on the identity of those who reside within them; they are “forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment in what can be done to the self.” (Goffman, 1961: 12).

Whilst it is clear that The Code has considerable effects on the social identities of students whilst they are at school, (and may also have longer term effects on the characters of at least some students), one of the study’s most surprising findings is that despite the very considerable social pressures of the institution and its Code in the direction of conformity, an astonishing variety of distinctively different personal identities emerge in the students’ autobiographical writings. Another surprising discovery is that, despite the prevalence of its influence in the students’ shared social lives, The Code itself makes almost no appearance in the life stories of individual writers.

At least since the days of G.H.Mead (1934), it has been almost a truism in the social sciences that there will be many ways in which a shared social context will act as a powerful determinant of individual character and identity, and that although they may occupy unique positions in time and space, each individual will accumulate socially acquired characteristics which, though they may be distinct from members of other social groups, are nonetheless not unique since they derive from a social environment which is shared with others. Durkheim’s (1951) study of suicide, for instance, one of the foundational works of modern sociology, notoriously demonstrated that even so personal and intimate an act as suicide shows stylistic trends which are indicative of socio-economic class. The present study suggests that each student’s formation of a sense of personal identity appears to be surprisingly independent of the values of their shared institutional context, and this raises interesting questions about the adequacy of the accounts of identity formation given by Goffman (1961, 1963), Lave and Wenger (1991) and others. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 10. The very extensive variety of ways in which students’ identities are both unified and differentiated from
one another in their life stories, is described in the two chapters which follow the present chapter.

In addition to their considerable and sophisticated social learning, it seems, therefore, that students' autobiographies reveal a much greater wealth of what Jarvis (1987:76) has called "individual learning". In order to reveal this distinctive type of individual learning more clearly, however, it is necessary progressively to "distil out" (Jarvis, 2001b) further social similarities. To this end, the present chapter directs itself to the business of distillation in two different ways:

In the first part of the chapter, the research autobiographies were compared with samples of three other types of indigenous autobiographical writing occurring within the school each year. Against this broader background of student writing, a layer of social similarity or difference - at the level of autobiographical genre - might be discerned, and the truly distinctive and individual features of the 42 autobiographies may be enabled to emerge with even greater clarity in the examination of individual differences presented in the following two chapters. In this context, the graph-based “life-line” autobiographies proposed by Gergen and Gergen (1993) are also briefly reported and discussed.

Having compared the research autobiography genre with other local autobiographical genres, the second part of the chapter goes on to compare the study's sample of 42 autobiographies in order to detect any shared characteristics they may have; to explore, in other words, ways in which these life stories are “like some other stories” in the research sample.

7.2 Other types of autobiographical writing at Bentham’s

In order to provide a sufficiently well-informed understanding of the local context in which the research autobiographies were produced, the researcher looked for evidence of other types of autobiographical writing which occurred within the school context. Three other indigenous local autobiographical genres were discovered, whose
characters differed widely, not only from each other, but also from the type of personal autobiographies produced specifically for the study.

Analysis of these data suggests that each of these three distinct indigenous autobiographical genres is shaped by the specific purpose for which it was designed, rather than by its generalised cultural location. This issue, along with its implications for the views of scholars such as Denzin (1989), Gergen (1993), Harré (1998) and Hammerle (1995), is further discussed in Chapter 10. The findings described below make it clear that although each of the genres outlined indubitably contained a selection of the students’ narrated life experiences, each particular local genre had a strong influence on the selection and presentation of the chosen material, an influence that exercised a more restrictive influence than that of the genre (based on McAdams’ work) used as the primary heuristic tool for the present study. The section also includes a brief summary of the graph-based autobiographical exercise, modelled on the work of Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993), that was used as a further possible source of comparative data.

Three types of indigenous autobiographical writing were examined. The first type consisted of sports team brochures which advertised and raised funds for regular international tours by some of the school’s main sports teams. These brochures characteristically included short biographies of the student team members. The second type of indigenous autobiographical writing appeared as the “personal statement” which was incorporated into the “UCAS” university entrance form which senior students submitted as part of their university entrance procedures. A third and much more informal type of autobiographical writing was produced by each school leaver for inclusion in the annual Bentham’s Yearbook. These three types of autobiographical writing, and the characteristic types of personal identity presented within them, are now examined further:-

**Sports Team Brochures**

The autobiographies that featured in sports team brochures were written for inclusion in a glossy and high quality brochure which aimed both to publicise and to raise funds
for a school team undertaking a sporting tour of a foreign country. At least one of the school’s “major” sports undertakes such an international tour in every school year. Comparison of several such publications reveals that there is a “house style” for these brochures. Each brochure takes the form of an A5 booklet with a high-quality card cover featuring the school’s coat of arms, a title, and a colourful, dynamic photograph of the appropriate sports team in action. Inside, there are, characteristically, facsimiles of letters on official headed notepaper from The Headmaster, the Prime Minister (or other well-known political figure), as well as a letter from a famous international sportsman involved in the appropriate sport. The “centre-page spread” depicts the team and its sports coaches in traditional serried ranks, and this is followed by a section comprised of biographies of all the individual team members. Although individual players may draft their own autobiographies, the house style of the publication presents these as third-person biographies rather than autobiographies. A single paragraph is allocated to each individual, and this is accompanied by a photo of the player concerned. Each “autobiography” follows a similar form. The subject is frequently referred to by their nickname (e.g. “Beano”, “Sav” “Hoops”). Their previous education is outlined, followed by their previous experience as a player in the tour sport as well as other sports, often mentioning specific teams for which the subject has played. Particular specialisations are usually mentioned, followed by a droll remark or two about the player’s aspirations, strengths or foibles. The following is typical:-

“Chingo” was schooled at Brampton House near East Wittering, and is now in Lockman’s House. He was in the U16As in the 2002 season as a speedy front-runner. His other sports include U16A Football (Captain) and he represented ISFA U16s. He has a reputation as a fine athlete who has qualified for the National Championships as a top triple jumper. He won the Victor Ludorum for his age group. He is also in the school tennis team. Chingo is an all-round Renaissance Man who loves sport but is also the winner of the French Declamation Prize. Will he pick up Bahasa Malay as quickly?

“Personal Statements” for University Entrance

Students in their final year at the school regularly have the opportunity to produce two other types of autobiographical writing. The first of these is in the context of writing their “personal statement” for their “UCAS forms” (university application forms.). The
UCAS form also collects together summaries of past examination successes as well as references written by the students’ teachers. One page of the form, however, is devoted to the students’ own “personal statement”. Students are advised that the kind of impression that this statement creates can be of considerable importance in gaining the offer of a place at their preferred university. In writing their personal statement, students seem to have two principal aims; first, to show themselves as interestingly different from other candidates, and secondly to furnish further evidence of their academic superiority. During the research period, the researcher examined fifty such personal statements, as well as playing a role (quite independently of the research) in helping some students to draft them.

Students commonly begin their statement by adducing particular reasons why they wish to study the university subject of their choice, before providing some specific (usually anecdotal) evidence of their particular aptitude, experience and enthusiasm for the subject. The personal statement is usually concluded with a final general section in which their wider sporting, leisure interests and successes are outlined. Limitations of space mean that a typical example must suffice to convey the tone and style of such personal statements. One student, applying for admission to a university course in politics, begins his personal statement thus:-

Although some would regard it as a cliché, politics is at the heart of all relationships in society. When I see statements being made such as “keep politics out of the issue”, I have to wonder whether this is comparable to the idea of breathing. One can take the example of the English cricket team which went on tour to Zimbabwe. This was seen as giving credibility to the overtly corrupt regime. One aspect of politics which I have been particularly been drawn to is the process by which political argument can be stripped down to reveal a philosophical basis. I have been able to pursue this interest through the frequent debates of the school’s Wittgenstein Society (philosophy society). I was inspired to take politics further during a talk by Lord Butler on “life behind the scenes in Number 10”, during a Chamberlain Society lecture (political society).

As a result of my work experience at Piccadilly Publishing, I was given the opportunity to gain experience in various aspects of the media which encompassed political journalism as well as editorial skills.

The statement goes on to give details of the writer’s media work with a group of “underprivileged teenagers”, before going on to describe the “educational merit” and “opportunity for independence” afforded by a trip to Florence. “Cultural interest” was
further evidenced, apparently, by the student’s membership of the school’s Poetry Society. In the concluding section of the statement, the student’s membership of a band, the band’s contributions to a “compilation C.D”, his membership of football, cricket and tennis teams, and his plans to visit Washington D.C. to “enhance my study of American politics” were also outlined.

Bentham’s Yearbook

The academically serious and morally worthy tone and content of such UCAS “personal statements” stands in stark contrast to the autobiographical writing to be found in the “Bentham’s Yearbook”. All final year students are invited to contribute a full page to the publication. Although the large hard-bound book in which these student autobiographies appear is expensively produced, the tone and style of the page designs are not. Designed primarily for immediate consumption by peers, the material on most of the pages is energetic and often brash. The overall tone of the entries is jokey, even ribald; the content, often Chaucerian. The writing is often occupied with anecdotes of embarrassment, boasting, mocking and shaming. In these respects, the Yearbook might be seen as a communal exercise in what The Code called “taking a joke”. Most authors’ self-revelations are presented under typical sub-headings such as “Most Embarrassing Moments”, “Funniest moments”, “Greatest Achievements”, “Things I’ll Miss” and “Most Likely To Say...”. Each page is decorated with a photograph, or even several photographs, of the student. Many of the pictures are roughly cut from larger pictures, and many photographs depict the subject in relaxed or unusual situations, not uncommonly accompanied by sunglasses, alcohol and/or cigarettes. A high percentage of the pictures are, to say the least, informal, quite a number apparently having been taken in the later stages of riotous parties. Some entries in the Yearbook are too saturated in esoteric references and “in jokes” to be comprehensible to the outsider.

The exposure of one’s own or other’s moments of embarrassment seems a popular subject of the Yearbook’s characteristic autobiographical writing. Boasts about drinking, smoking, sexual conquest and defeat, successful and unsuccessful challenges
to aspects of school officialdom also account for very many references, of which the following are typical of the more comprehensible claims:

"Dexey finding a bra in my tuck box".

"Being found by Housemaster passed out on the toilet at 1 a.m. after a ‘heavy’ night drinking".

"Waking up in the morning after Jo’s 18th with my hand on Julie W’s feminine assets and having no idea who she was."

"Weeksy diving for my pants on his birthday and exposing to all my punani”.

(sic)

"Doing the ‘Full Monty’ at the Lack of Talent Show."

The student whose worthy UCAS university entrance form was quoted earlier produced a page which illustrates vividly the contrast between the kind of autobiographical writing in a UCAS “personal statement” and the Yearbook. Ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity (as well, perhaps, of public decency) preclude reproduction of the student’s page itself, more than half of which is occupied by a photograph of the student in a newsagent’s shop, stark naked except for a pair of economical Y-fronts. “Achievements: Watch this space” proclaim the words underneath, which are followed by a small number of additional inscrutable references. Whereas in his UCAS personal statement the student had spoken of his admiration for the way a political argument could be “stripped down to reveal a philosophical basis”, his Yearbook page clearly involves a quite different (and less philosophical) “stripping down”. However, here, just as in his UCAS statement, he endeavours to stand out from the crowd, even though, in the case of his Year Book page, it is not his academic credentials that are on display.

In an age of electronic communication when both UCAS personal statements and Yearbook pages can be submitted to their respective editors electronically, it is to be hoped that each type of autobiography finds its appropriate recipient. Accidental mix-ups, though potentially amusing, would highlight dramatically (and for the students, perhaps disastrously) the considerable differences in purpose, style and content which characterise these two distinctive local autobiographical genres.
Less embarrassment at such crossed wires would be experienced by most of the “foreign” students who entered the school only in the sixth form. They seem to have either ignored or failed to understand the zany and scatological conventions of the *Yearbook* genre which their peers, who have had more extensive experience of the local culture, seem to relish. The “foreigners’” pages tend to have a respectable or professionally-taken photograph of the student concerned, and this is accompanied with a brief account of their scholastic and sporting achievements, usually rounded off with some valedictory good wishes to their peers.

**The “research autobiography” genre**

In contrast to the three indigenous types of autobiographical writing, the autobiographies which form the basis of the present study are longer, more reflective, more personal and usually less obviously written to gain the approval of a public audience. Before they began writing, students were given brief suggestions about a number of ways in which they might approach writing their life stories. These standardised “instructions” were adapted from those used by McAdams (1985, 1993) in his research on the life story model of identity. It was, however, stressed that students were free to construct an autobiography in any way they chose, subject to the condition that it should be a piece of writing (Smetana and Strauss, for instance, wrote autobiographical music). Following McAdams’ (1985) protocol, a number of alternative approaches, none of them mandatory, were suggested. After reflecting on their life course, many students divided their life story into sections or “chapters”. In some cases, these chapters followed a simple chronological progression; in other cases, the arrangement was thematic. Following a suggestion of McAdams (1985), other students structured their life stories according to personally selected “*Key Events*” in the life course, which could include such things as peak experiences, nadir experiences, turning points, earliest memories, important childhood memories, and best and worst experiences at Bentham’s.

In the three genres discussed previously, the characteristic content, style and tone seemed to be prescribed quite narrowly by the respective local social conventions. Little, or very restricted use was made of experiential *narrative* in these three genres,
and all, despite their huge differences in content, style and tone, had a primarily rhetorical function, which was that of establishing a claim, either to academic, social or sporting credibility.

In all these respects, the sports tour brochure, UCAS university entrance form “personal statement” and Yearbook genres stand in marked contrast to the “research autobiography” genre. The latter is designed to allow students to explore and present a broader understanding of their own identity than is envisaged in some of the other genres. It seems to have provided an opportunity for a more extensive and reflective presentation than was possible within the limitations of space in the other three genres; in consequence, much more extensive use is made of narrative. The autobiographical research genre is also much less public than any of the others. This seems to result in a more private and intimate tone of writing in which the writers are freed equally from the constraints of “playing to the gallery” of their peers, as well as from the effort of trying to impress academic or sporting experts.

Being shared primarily between the researcher and the student alone, the research autobiographies often seem to elicit responses which are not dissimilar to the kinds of account produced in more private and intimate settings such as counselling and psychotherapy. In the research autobiography genre, the students had considerably more personal autonomy in their choice of content, tone and style than was available to them in the other genres. The criteria for the selection of material were established by the students’ personal judgements about what was most important in the context of their whole life course, rather than some restricted aspect of it, such as academic, sporting or sexual prowess. The revealing and personal nature of the writing has, at the very least, an appearance of sincerity, honesty and genuineness. The rich and complex range of individual differences displayed by these autobiographies far exceeds the narrower range exhibited by any of the other forms.

**Graph-based autobiographies; Gergen and Gergen’s “life line” graphs**

A further possible source of comparison with the written autobiographies was supplied by the brief graph-based “life-line” graphs which all the study’s participants
produced. Utilising a suggestion drawn from the work of Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993), students were asked to represent their lives in graphical form. In two pieces of research, Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) conducted studies in which they asked subjects to draw a single line which represented the ups and downs of their lives. Drawn onto the axes of a graph which had the student’s chronological age along its horizontal axis, and their overall sense of happiness on the vertical axis, the Gergens proposed that this single line represented - at least in outline - the autobiography of the subject who produced it. They further argued that there were three basic types of “life line” possible, which represented three basic types of autobiographical narrative; an ascending graph line corresponded to a “progressive” narrative, a descending line to a “regressive” narrative, and a horizontal line to a “stability narrative”.

Applying this procedure to a research group of adolescents and young adults, they reported that, when averaged out mathematically, the trajectory of the average adolescent’s graph traced a line in the form of a shallow valley; a positive start, a period down in the dumps, with some later improvements.

These results were not replicated when their graphical exercise was tried with the forty-two student autobiographers, as well as two other groups at Bentham’s. The actual variations in the lines produced by individual students was very diverse and permitted no easy generalisation. No single line approximated to one of the Gergens’ three basic types of line, nor was it clear that the general trend was for the graphs to assume the form of a shallow valley. Moreover, when the graphical “life-lines” of individual students were compared with the autobiographies written by the same students, it was difficult in many cases to see any clear relationship between the two.

Because the graphs were not accompanied by explanations or comments from the students, it was difficult to interpret the meaning of the fluctuations in their “life lines”, or to know how the individual student thought it might relate to their written autobiography. Neither the overall trajectory, nor the emotional tone of the line necessarily correlated with the written autobiography. As a source of data, the Gergens’ data collection technique did not provide autobiographical information which was useful for the present study. A more detailed critique of their work is
provided in Chapter 10, which also includes a discussion of the theoretical significance of discovering *several different* genres of autobiographical writing within a single local environment.

### 7.3 Comparing life stories: some generalisations

In this second part of the chapter, the autobiographies written specially for the present study are compared with each other, and their general similarities and differences summarized and discussed. First, however, the students' own views on the similarities they share with their peers are also discussed.

*Like everyone else?*

If the *autobiographies* are examined closely, there are many ways in which the students and their stories are similar. The students *themselves*, when asked to discuss what makes them different from anyone else, also acknowledge that there are many ways in which they are *like everyone else*. Characteristically, however, each such admission of similarity is usually followed by an immediate qualification that re-asserts an element of *individual differentiation*:-

I know I am not different from anybody else in the school; in fact, I am very average at everything. I like to think, however, that I am different because I think so much about anything and everything.

Or another student says:-

I suppose I am really Mr. Average. I am not fantastic at anything, but I am not bad at most things. But what makes me different is my personality.

*Socio-economic and educational similarities*

Since most students share a similar socio-economic background, it might reasonably be expected that these similarities would be reflected in the autobiographies. At the time of research, the school fees were very high, which meant that the majority of students came from home backgrounds where parental earnings were such that their
disposable incomes made the annual expenditure of a very large sum on education economically feasible. Students typically come from similar, though certainly not identical, affluent middle class backgrounds. Most, but not all students had also shared similar previous educational backgrounds, being educated at “Prep” (independent fee-paying private “Preparatory”) schools, and often at pre-Prep or nursery schools before that.

Although most students had been to fee-paying Prep schools previously, this was not so in all cases. More than ten per cent of the two research groups had attended State schools for at least part of their earlier education. In each of these cases, the experience of State education had proved unhappy, either because of bullying, or because of perceived lower academic standards, or both, and this had prompted the change to private education. In those few narratives where State school education appeared, it was characterised as unfriendly, rough and sometimes violent, even if one student shrugged it off laconically:

"I was constantly bullied and made fun of. Still, it should have, but didn't really bother me."

**Range of experiences**

Despite the comparatively narrow range in the students’ socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and despite their (as yet) limited opportunities for life-changing autonomous choices, the range of experiences discussed in the autobiographies was considerably more diverse than was initially expected. Like the Gilbert and Sullivan character who, “though related to a peer” could “hand, or reef or steer”, the Benthamite autobiographers also included amongst their number one student with an aristocratic title and two who admitted to being “related to a peer.” They also included those who could fly an aeroplane, had played cricket at Lords, had driven Eyton Senna’s formula one racing car, and had gone hang-gliding with their mothers in exotic parts of the world. Nor, lest the autobiographies be parodied unfairly as being more P.G. Wodehouse than Dostoievsky, was the darker side of life excluded from their autobiographical accounts. In addition to the almost universal human experience of illness and occasional hospitalisation, the forty-two autobiographers
between them also clocked up three serious car crashes; numerous bereavements; encounters with dead babies, grandmothers and a mother; a near-fatal air disaster; being pursued around the house and garden by two armed gunmen; several cases of extreme cultural dislocation through transplantation to a different country and language; divorce and domestic violence.

How far does the school social world permeate the autobiographies?

As was seen in the previous chapter, the students’ social life at school seems to be dominated by the pervasive and powerful influence of The Code. The principal values and norms of The Code - its hierarchy, pre-occupation with “cockiness” and due deference, with maintaining status and reputation through the use of appropriate social involvement, sporting prowess, and the judicious control of self-disclosure - is largely absent from the students’ autobiographies. Although many students seem to relish their school social lives and enjoy the company of their peers, and although they also speak and write freely about this social world elsewhere, this world appears infrequently in their autobiographies. More than half of the students failed to mention many such school experiences at all, despite the fact that the research’s autobiography guidelines explicitly suggested that they might reflect on their more memorable experiences at Bentham’s.

The events and experiences selected for narration in their autobiographies included the school world only occasionally. When the school world was included, it was as the setting for a particular achievement or set-back whose significance had a meaning in the wider trajectory of the individual’s life course. For instance, fifteen year old Dan recalls the miserable, rain-sodden final inter-house hockey match of the previous season. He, the diminutive goalkeeper of the defeated team is, at the match’s conclusion, surprised and delighted at being given the award for being the “Player of the Season”. Despite its school setting, within the context of his autobiographical narrative, it is clear that this event offers a further illustration of a personal theme which runs through Dan’s life, and which far transcends the school context. The theme - discovering that his “stickability” in the face of adversity brings surprising success - occurs as early as the age of three, and then recurs at several decisive
moments in his life narrative later. It seems clear that the sense of personal identity presented in his life story includes specific school experiences but is not created by them.

A different type of school event features in the life of another student. Rodney has an identical twin brother who is also a student at the school. He describes his distress at being placed in a lower academic form than that of his brother when they both entered the school. Although set at school, the significance of this event goes far beyond academic matters. At a number of points in his story, Rodney is beset by worries about being “hopeless”, particularly in his attempts to win the approval of his parents and others. In the context of his intensely close but also competitive relationship with his twin brother, the struggle to be different, but not worse than his brother seems to be an important life-theme. It is one which far transcends the boundaries of school life.

Most notably and surprisingly of all, despite their prevalence in regulating the day-to-day social lives of students at school, the particular norms and characteristics of The Code hardly appear in the autobiographies at all. A student’s sense of subjective personal identity seems in most cases, therefore, to be constructed in ways which are independent of (and occasionally in defiance of) whatever social identity they acquire through their communal social lives presided over by The Code and its values. The significance of this surprising discovery is further discussed in Chapter 10.

**Variety and diversity despite social pressure to conform**

Despite the huge social pressures to conform to official and unofficial institutional norms, an astonishing variety of distinctively different identities are presented in the autobiographies. These differences - the object of the study’s principal research question - are described and analysed in the next two chapters, and include differences in perceived status relative to others, degree of agency, self-awareness, personal characteristics, personal style, type of humour, adopted roles, social preferences, degree of emotional openness, articulacy, emotional intensity, temperament, naivety or sophistication and neuroticism.
An attempt was made to analyse the overall degree and type of narrative structure evident in the autobiographies (other more specific issues of genre, form and “script” are discussed separately later). The autobiographies could be divided into three rough classes. In the first, just less than half of the sample chose to use McAdams’ “Key Events” schema (earliest memory, highest point, lowest point etc) as the basic structure for their autobiography. A further quarter of the sample produced a straightforward type of “chronology” in which idiosyncratic personal criteria of personal selection seemed less overt and articulate. Though none permanently adopted such extreme banalities, one or two autobiographies sometimes made use of the most elementary narrative device of all, that of simple temporal consecutiveness; “and then...and then...and then...” Finally, nearly a third of the sample produced autobiographies that had more distinctive and idiosyncratic forms of organisation, such as being organised by personally significant themes.

Although in the more idiosyncratic autobiographies the selection of material was more clearly dominated by personal meanings and themes, none of the autobiographers completely rejected the chronological sequence of their life course in any radical way. The other two types of arrangement already discussed are, of course, also inherently chronological anyway. It seems, therefore, that all the autobiographers adopted some type of chronological structuration in recounting their life stories. This may reflect Ricoeur’s foundational insight that “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is ordered after the manner of a narrative.” (Ricoeur, 1984: Vol I:3).

The variations in the choice of one of the three basic categories of chronological form discussed above did not correlate in any obvious way with the degree to which the material was ordered, shaped and given personally distinctive characteristics. From the evidence collected, however, the age or developmental stage of the autobiographers may have some connection with their capacity to shape their material into autobiographies which portray a coherent and well focused sense of personal identity. Self-presentation tended to be either indistinct, diffuse or fragmentary in seven or eight of the fourteen-year-olds’ autobiographies, whereas this was true of
only two or three of the fifteen-year-olds, a finding that would fit in with the proposals made by Erikson (1959, 1968), Marcia (1966, 1980), McAdams (1985, 1989, 1993) and others about identity formation being a developmental task to be progressively accomplished during adolescence, as well as to the more general claims made by Piaget (1927, 1969, 1972) and others about cognitive development.

Motivational Themes

The brief Motivational Theme Test (for details see Chapter 5 and Appendix F) was designed to explore students’ emotional and motivational preferences. It was administered over the same period of time as the written autobiographies, and its data suggested that students did indeed have distinctive motivational patterns which were surprisingly well detected using the dual classification proposed by Bakan (1966) and adopted by McAdams (1985, 1989, 1993). Bakan and McAdams, it will be recalled, proposed that all specific human motivations may be divided into two broad classes which they call “agentic” and “communal”. The former includes a characteristic pattern of motivation in which personal agency, independence and achievement are primary values. The “communal” class includes a more affiliative pattern of motivations which seek intimacy and personal relationships as primary values.

Each of the individual aspirations expressed by students’ in their responses to the Motivational Theme Test proved to be classifiable using Bakan’s two-fold schema. The simple motivational profiles that emerged from the analyses of the students’ responses to this test were also not only consistent with the overall motivational characteristics manifested by the corresponding students’ autobiographies, but also proved useful in the interpretation of the autobiographies of some of the more laconic or introverted writers. Given the apparent simplicity of the Test, these findings surprised the researcher.
7.4 Comparing the life stories: characteristic content

**Early childhood memories**

Many students chose to reflect on and report their earliest memories and important childhood experiences. A few merely reported the memory, evincing no particular interest in, or understanding of it. For many, however, the early memory presents a snapshot of a type of experience, personal characteristic or theme that would recur again in their life story, even though the autobiographer may not always have been fully and articulately aware of the memory’s significance. In a surprising number of stories, an early memory is presented consciously and articulately as an “origin myth” or “iconic” image of a theme that recurs throughout the succeeding story.

It is difficult to conclude whether the emotional tone of a person’s early experiences - whether optimistic or pessimistic - actually sets the tone for the subsequent life story, as McAdams (1993) has suggested. The majority of such early memories are positive in tone, and the general trend of many such life stories moves in an optimistic direction. However, the individual trajectory of ups and downs which follows each person’s early childhood memories is varied, complex and less easy to generalise. Statistical generalisations (for example, Gergen and Gergen, 1987; Gergen and Gergen, 1993) about such trajectories tends to iron out real individual differences. This makes it difficult to assess McAdams’ claim about the developmental origins and pervasive influence of early childhood experiences. This issue is further complicated by the present researcher’s discovery of a common tendency in several of the autobiographical narratives to characterise early pre-school childhood as a time of uncomplicated and often blissful “innocence”, which was then subsequently followed by a time of painful “experience”, a pattern classically modelled in Blake’s (1958) poetic Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience.

When it was described, early childhood was frequently characterised as a time of bliss, innocence and uncomplicated contentment; this ‘age of innocence’ was frequently followed by a contrasting “age of experience” which was seen as more complex and frequently painful, bitter and – initially – unhappy.
It is the case that for the smaller number of life stories which began with a painful childhood memory, a few of these maintained the initial negative tone throughout the rest of the life story. The number of such cases, however, was small, and this must make any generalisation precarious. These, and the previous cases mentioned, are also subject to the further interpretive difficulty that it is hard to know from the stories themselves how far early painful experiences induce subjects to interpret their lives pessimistically, and how far current painful experiences prompt the selective editing of a wider pool of memories, from which painful memories are selectively chosen so as to be consonant with the pessimistic current sense of self. This question raises issues also explored by current research into “state-dependent” memory and context-dependent memory (Godden and Baddeley, 1975; Bower, 1981), but is beyond the scope of the present study.

Turning points

Denzin (1987a, 1987b, 1989) and others have argued for the importance of the “turning point” as a decisive organising principle in autobiographies. Both in his life story research with recovering alcoholics (1987a, 1987b), and in his later theoretical writings about the “progressive-regressive” method of biographical research, Denzin emphasizes the importance of such “turning points”. In the present study, only two-fifths of the students felt they could identify a turning point, half did not identify any such decisive moment, and one-fifth articulately rejected the appropriateness of the category. This might suggest that the “turning point” concept is not a universal category. It may be characteristic of a certain specialised “dramatic” type of life story, classically exemplified in stories of religious conversion, recovery from addiction or eventual acceptance of problematic sexual identity, in which a marked contrast exists between obvious “before” and “after” states. For those students who could identify such a turning point, the two commonest single categories of turning point consisted of bereavement and gaining a place at Bentham’s.
Peak moments

Three-quarters of the students could identify a definite “peak moment” in their lives, an experience which stood out as being special, important or wonderful. On the basis of his own extensive research, McAdams (1993) argues that such experiences are of particular importance in revealing facets of the person’s sense of who they are. “Peak experiences” characteristically involve the achievement or fulfilment of an individual’s special needs and desires, and are thus important indicators of their most powerful motivations.

The commonest single category of peak experience (11 cases) featured family holidays, though fourteen year olds accounted for two-thirds of this number. Three other types of peak experience (gaining a place at Bentham’s, outward-bound trips at their previous school, and personal success outside school) accounted for the next three most popular categories (6 – 8 cases) each.

Nadir moments

Responding to the suggestion that they reflect on the lowest or worst point in their life story so far, three-quarters of students in the study identified such a moment. By far the commonest type of nadir experience (a third of all students) was occasioned by a bereavement. This was commonly a grandparent, less commonly an uncle, and, in two tragic cases, a mother and baby sister. The range of nadir experiences was considerable, including personal illness and injury, domestic unhappiness, separation anxiety, bullying, as well as the traumatic possibility of facing death or disaster.

School experiences

Although the autobiographical guidelines specifically suggested that students reflect on their experiences at Bentham’s, more than half of the sample chose not to do so. Moreover, as the two examples given earlier indicate, many of those who did mention an experience at Bentham’s did so because it contributed to, or illustrated a personal
theme or characteristic which was already an established feature of their life story as a whole.

This comparative exclusion of school experiences from the autobiographies suggests that such experiences tend not to play a decisive role in the formation of the students’ subjective sense of identity. This selective omission is echoed by the almost complete absence of The Code from the autobiographies. Both The Code and the social and educational world of the school may be powerful determinants on students’ social identities, but their subjective personal identities seem to be constructed in dynamic contradistinction from these social norms, adding credence to Wrong’s (1961) argument that those social theories which suggest that individual identity is socially determined in a passive way operate with an “over-socialised conception of man.”

The clearest finding of the study in this area, however, was how important winning a place at Bentham’s had been to students. Given the apparent low priority given to academic endeavour in The Code, this came as a considerable surprise to the researcher. A third of all students claimed that getting into Bentham’s was either a turning point, or peak moment in their lives. The contrast between the non-academic aspirations of The Code and the characteristically overjoyed descriptions of students when they discovered that they had got into Bentham’s, highlights the complex relationship between the different domains of social and personal values.

In many instances, students’ autobiographies carried dramatic accounts of the moment when they received the results of the Common Entrance Examination (the examinations upon which their entry to Bentham’s depended), or the moment when they received the letter with the good news from Bentham’s itself. In the majority of these cases, the experience was marked by extreme tension and apprehension leading to relief and joy. The vividness of such accounts is, in many cases, eloquent testimony to the event’s pivotal personal importance. After receiving the news, one fourteen year old goes sculling on the river, briefly ‘phoning his mother at work about his results, but not wanting to talk about them with her. He wants to enjoy this moment of success alone:-

alone:-
I called my mum and told her my grades. She was thrilled, but I didn’t want to talk long because I wanted to bask in my achievements. I was the only one home, so I grabbed loads of chocolate bars and watched TV for several hours and then went upstairs to play a computer game. On that night I don’t recall getting any sleep, or for the rest of the day, but I do remember not ever being so happy.

With terse understatement, another boy says simply:-

I had been awarded and exhibition. It was the greatest moment of my life.

For some, arrival at Bentham’s represents a simultaneous departure not only from home, but from the language and culture in which they had hitherto been brought up and educated; seven of the participants in the two principal research groups were brought up outside the United Kingdom and learned English as a second or third language.

Not surprisingly, some students report that their first day at Bentham’s was rather overwhelming, and others report experiencing painful homesickness during their early weeks at the school. A few (four cases) report instances of teasing or minor bullying, most of these occurring at their previous Prep schools.

The majority of students, however, are often enthusiastic about Bentham’s. In comparison with their Prep schools, they enjoy the school’s extra freedom, the good sporting and leisure facilities, and, above all, the social life with their peers. Sporting achievement provides the largest single category (nine cases) of “best” Bentham’s experiences, with academic success accounting for six cases. The general quality of life, weekend outward-bound trips and schoolboy pranks furnished other categories, each accounting for two cases each. Once ensconced at Bentham’s, the school’s academic status (and their sense of achievement in getting into it) is taken for granted as they get on with new challenges.

**School life before Bentham’s**

Various types of earlier school experience (i.e. prior to their arrival at Bentham’s) appear in a number of the autobiographies. About half of all students describe
encountering *some* sort of difficulty in their earlier school careers. These difficulties can be further classified into three categories:-

First, there are those who mention the shock of their very first experience of formal schooling. For some, the very first day of formal schooling proves traumatic and incomprehensible. For such students, formal schooling is their first real encounter with the social world beyond the confines of home and family. It is commonly an experience of shock and confusion. Characteristically, the young child did not realise in advance that formal schooling would be a very different kind of experience from their earlier home, play group or nursery education. With a sense of deep shock, one fifteen year old student recalled his first experience of formal schooling with terse incredulity; “I thought it was a play group”.

Secondly, there are those who describe difficulties in finding a successful and confident *modus vivendi* at school. A wide variety of personal factors and circumstances may be at work in such cases. It may often be a matter of a student learning the basic *social skills* needed to cope with the social world of school. Later, it may mean discovering their own particular talents, or of finding out how the school system works so that they can play the system *successfully*, or it may involve something more complex such as emerging from the shadow of a successful older brother.

Finally, there are a small number (three or four cases) who report instances of *severe bullying*. Most students seem to accept that a certain degree of rough and tumble is an inevitable part of life at any school. In a small number of cases, however, serious bullying dominates and threatens successful adjustment to school life. There seems to be considerable variety in both the *severity* of bullying which students experience, and also in how individual students *cope* with it. All of the four cases of serious bullying occur before students arrive at Bentham’s. In two cases, the bullying occurs at State schools, and is sufficiently serious to induce the student to seek private education. In the two other cases, the bullying takes place at Prep schools. In all of the cases, the bullying seems most common between the ages of 9 and 11, though such a generalisation is precarious because of the small size of the sample.
The most extreme case of bullying reported in a student’s autobiography provided a further example of a theme which had appeared much earlier in the student’s life story. Enduring, surviving and eventually transcending life-threatening trauma is a theme which is repeated in Andrew’s dramatic life story, a story which permeated by gothic violence and glorious survival:-

On another occasion when I was in the playground and there were no staff on duty, the same boys (the ones who tripped me up and banged my head) tied me to a tree. It was terrifying and humiliating. Some older boys had pulled my shorts down so I just had my "skimpys" on. "Skimpys" were the name for underpants that weren’t boxers. You were ridiculed if you were wearing these. I had asked my mum for boxers but she just said, “Wait until you have grown out of them.” They managed to tie my hands to a low branch of a tree. My feet were dangling and nearly touching the ground but because my hands were tied so tightly to the branch it really hurt when I tried to touch the ground. I was trying not to act scared but it was obvious I was scared. The branch was thick and the bark was hard and rough. The bark was so dry it bent outwards and dug into my skin. I thought I was going to die. When they heard the bell, they untied my hands and ran out of the school gates. I fell to the ground. I was gasping for breath when a teacher found me and took me back to the classroom. I could barely speak.

At the opposite pole from the tone of horror that permeates the previous account, another student alluded to his State school difficulties in a more understated and laconic way. Wagnerian drama is replaced with a more sardonic tone of which Jack Benny might have been proud:-

I was constantly bullied and made fun of. It should have, but didn’t really bother me.

**The importance of the family**

When the social settings for all the events recounted in all the autobiographies are analysed, the commonest and most characteristic social world depicted is that of the family. The precise nature and extent of the family group varies from student to student. For some students, the most important relationships are those they have with their parents. For a smaller number of others, a particular relationship with a sibling is
particularly important, examples of which are given later. Some students live with only one parent, some with two, and some within the context of an extended family that includes grandparents too.

The importance and frequency of the family in providing a setting for students’ formative experiences is underlined by their estimation of who has been the most important influence on their lives. When asked to write about this on a separate occasion, more than half of the students chose a family member, with parents and grandparents accounting for half of these. In view of this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that family bereavement is also the single largest category of “nadir experience” (see below) which students report.

**The influence of the surrounding culture**

Theorists (such as G.H. Mead, 1934; Geertz, 1973, 1983; Gergen, 1993; Denzin, 1989 and Harré, 1998) from a wide variety of schools of thought within the social sciences have argued strongly that the ambient “culture”, “society” or “discourse” in which individuals finds themselves, is powerfully influential upon the developing personality of the socialised individual. Although the present study makes no attempt to deny that we are sociable and socially-formed creatures, the findings of the present study suggest that the nature of this process may be more devolved, dynamic, local, fragmentary and personally idiosyncratic than has usually been acknowledged in the various schools of social science, whether symbolic interactionist, Social Constructionist or Discursive.

From the evidence of the present, albeit limited study, explicit references to the wider ambient culture are remarkably few, and almost always peripheral or tangential to the particular author’s subjective sense of identity. Explicit references to culturally-available literary texts were negligible, though there were a few explicit references to videos, films and shows watched. Only fourteen explicit cultural references could be counted in the entire corpus of nearly a quarter of a million words of autobiographical data. The few references might be classified as follows:-
Figure 7.1 Cultural references featured in the autobiographies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videos</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Thomas the Tank Engine</em> (2 references)</td>
<td><em>Macbeth</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Simpsons</em></td>
<td><em>The Jungle Book</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shows and Plays</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specific Sporting personalities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Mousetrap</em></td>
<td>Eyton Senna (racing driver)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grease</em></td>
<td>Shane Warne (Australian spin bowler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Annie Get Your Gun</em></td>
<td>Philip Tufness (England cricket coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other cultural references</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The phrase “siren call” (as an unconscious reference to Classical literature.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The paucity of these references suggests that whatever influence the ambient culture may have on adolescent identity formation, it is, to say the least, indirect. Such cultural influences as there may be seem distant and peripheral compared with the more obvious formative presence of the family, local moral orders and, most important of all, personal experience.

**Emotional Learning**

The number of the occasions upon which students chose to talk about an occasion when they learned something important was very striking, especially since the researcher’s guidelines to students contained no mention of experiential learning as either a research interest, or a possible category of autobiographical reflection.

Interestingly, the content of most of the reported learning was not academic learning. In almost all cases, the instances described occasions in which emotional learning was the principal theme of the event or experience recounted. Typically, the students narrated experiences about such things as coping with difficult circumstances,
learning from mistakes in conduct, about having to learn emotional self-control, and about understanding and coming to terms with loss and bereavement.

The number of occasions when students reported and reflectively articulated their emotional learning surprised the researcher. From his observations of previous student discussions and conversations, the researcher did not expect the degree and frequency of emotional openness and articulacy which the autobiographies revealed. On average, each autobiography "owned up" to between one and two such emotional "confessions". Bereavement - often of a grandparent - was, as has already been seen, a common low point in the autobiographies of many students, and often one which served to prompt considerable reflection and emotional learning.

The range of emotional "lessons" learned was, however, very broad, as the following selection of quotations from different students may indicate:-

"That P.E teacher taught me the values of life -- to believe in myself, to be self-confident and to be self-dependent. He taught me to have a positive attitude in difficulties; 'It's only pain' was his phrase, and that has stayed with me."

"The death of my uncle Henry made me realize how short life is, and also taught me to live each day as if it were my last."

"From my time at nursery school, I learned two lessons:-- First, that life isn't fair, and secondly that the world has optimistic and pessimistic people in it."

"I learned to become a good loser."

"I learned that teachers don't always tell the truth."

My view of 'love' has been poisoned by listening to years of my parents' arguments. I have seen every member of my family have their heart broken. My experience of love has been bitter. The word is flung about too much by people who do not understand it. I said some of these things to my father. I told him that, thanks to them I'd had a very bad childhood. He said, "It's not so much a 'bad childhood'; more like a 'first taste of real life'."

"When I climbed that rope, I knew I had finally conquered my Everest. From that day, I knew that if I tried my hardest and had some encouragement, I would succeed."
The prevalence of the nature and frequency of emotional learning in the life stories of the students raises a number of important issues.

First, Jarvis’ claim that “Disjuncture, or discontinuity, between biography and experience of the wider world is a fundamental condition of human learning.” (Jarvis, 1987:80) would seem to be borne out by the many episodes of emotional learning reported by the student autobiographers. Many other examples are given later in the text, and it is striking how often a particular episode recounts a powerful disjuncture or discontinuity between their past and present experience. Mezirow (1981:6) has also drawn attention to the “disorientating dilemma” as a stimulus to self-examination.

Secondly, the prevalence of an emotional content to so many selectively reported autobiographical episodes suggests that Jarvis (1999, 2001a) is correct, not only to include emotional learning within his model of experiential learning, but also to insist (as his more recent work has increasingly done) on its fundamental importance.

Thirdly, the varying degrees of emotional sophistication exhibited by the different autobiographers would seem to give support to Gardner’s (1983) claim that there is not just one, monolithic kind of intelligence which aids people in their adaptation to their changing life-circumstances, but that instead, there are several different kinds of intelligence. Amongst the seven principal types of intelligence identified by Gardner, are included what he calls the “personal intelligences” which include both interpersonal skills as well as “intrapsychic” capacities for emotional understanding.

Finally, both Goleman (1996) and Salovey and Mayer (1991) have mapped in great detail the way intelligence is integrated with, and manifested through the emotions, and it may well be that the episodes of emotional learning reported by the students in their autobiographies provide further evidence of individual capacities in this regard. A significant number of students suggested that writing about some of these experiences had helped them to understand and come to terms with a painful experience, a claim that has potentially profound implications for the practice of
emotional education in schools. The final chapter discusses further some of these implications for research and practice.

Sexuality and Gender in the autobiographies

The autobiographies of the fourteen and fifteen year olds show relatively little romantic experience of girls - certainly less than might be expected for their peers in State schools. Girls and women, when they feature in the stories at all, are depicted in traditional or even sexist ways. When females appear in the life stories they are usually mothers, grandmothers or female teachers (classifiable into the dual categories of witches and saints). Girls, when they appear at all, are depicted as sisters or “giggling Barbie dolls”, as beautiful but unattainable, or as nominal presences who exist somewhat (theoretically) on the more distant horizon of adult desire and possibility. Three fourteen-year olds describe “getting off with” (French kissing) a girls, though in all three cases, the act is prompted by male peers and undertaken primarily to fulfil what they perceive as a masculine rite of passage. Only one student describes a friendship with a girl. Sisters can be a blessing or a curse: one fifteen-year-old student recorded the enormous difference his little sister’s birth had on his life:-

Undeniably the best moment of my life was when my little sister, Debbie, was born. I would have been a very lonely child if it had not been for her devotion to me. She used to follow me around the house all day, just content to live in my shadow. I could talk to her for hours on end and she would just listen and nod sympathetically, even though she didn’t know what I was talking about...

This contrasts with fellow student Jack who described how, when he was a five year old on holiday, he watched his father dive into a murky green river in France, only to be told by his older sister that the river was full of man-eating crocodiles, and that he would never see him alive again. She laughed whilst he screamed in terror. On another occasion his sister woke him up one morning with the news that his parents had been killed in a car crash (they hadn’t). He concludes:-

I think the person who has influenced me most has been my sister, Claire. For most of her nineteen years of life my sister has been rude, spiteful, devious and all the other qualities you would expect from a convict.
With enormous seriousness, fifteen-year-old Ed looks back to the fateful turning point of his life, an encounter with his personal *femme fatale* at his fifth birthday party. There, summoning up all his courage in a moment of reckless self-abandonment, he told “the most beautiful girl in the class” that he loved her:-

I proposed to her, having been encouraged by her brother, and she was whisked away before she could reply. This was the most embarrassing moment ever in my life. This event changed my entire personality. From that moment on, I became the introverted person I am today.

Contrasting with the life-changing unrequited passion of that moment for Ed, another student merely includes girls amongst the list of inevitable *chores* of adulthood, which he numbers along with “getting a job, making money to pay the bills, and having kids.”

Another boy had a very unpleasant shock on his first day at nursery school; he discovers he is one of only two boys in an entire class of giggling girls:-

I was horrified when, on my first day, I was welcomed by the sound of giggles and the sight of two beautiful girls fighting over who was better, *Barbie* or *Cindy*. Shocked by the lack of boys in the classroom, I searched for a seat, preferably next to a boy.

A little later, glimpsing his best friend Charlie, the same boy runs with relief to the spare seat beside a fellow male. At their first day at their *next* school, both boys are apprehensive that a similar situation will be repeated; fortunately, it will not:-

‘Look,’ cried Charlie with joy, ‘no girls; everyone here is a boy!’

A fourteen-year-old student concludes his autobiography with the observation that being at Bentham’s is so much more interesting than being at Prep school:

…because here we are always pre-occupied with something interesting, unlike prep school where all you have to do is flirt with some annoying Barbie-loving girls,

though in a final *envoi* he magnanimously dedicates his autobiography to:

…those annoying, screaming, pink, Barbie-loving prep school girls that got me through my early life at school.
In just one of the autobiographies, a student confesses to falling in love at first sight:-

The last to enter the hall was the most beautiful thing I'd seen in my life. She looked straight in my eyes and I looked back with a little smile just for good measure.

By the end of the same evening, various friends showered him with variants of the phrase “Guess whose sister fancies you!” He concludes the section:-

I couldn’t believe it. I was straight on the case of getting her phone number. That night had been one of my best moments so far.

When writing about what they would do if they only had twenty-four hours left to live, several writers included sexual and emotional aspirations that had been otherwise absent from their autobiographies. Characteristically, a number of writers admitted to wanting to have sex before they died, and one put it with poignantly disarming honesty:-

I have thought about this a lot. I would like to die not a virgin. This would be a top priority, so anyone would do, but obviously the fitter the better.

Just before the world ended, one reluctant romantic pours out his long-accumulated yearning to an un-named girl. Before he dies, he will make up for some of his earlier hesitations, and declare his love openly:-

Finally, I would tell her all the things that I wanted to say to her that night, but did not have the courage to do so. I would tell her how long I have loved her, how my heart aches, how she makes me smile, how my love burns, and how every time she sneezes, I know I’m in love.

7.5 Conclusions

This chapter has thus compared the way the student’ forty-two life stories are “like some other stories” in two distinct ways. First, the sample of forty-two autobiographies written specially for the study were compared with three other types of autobiographical writing occurring in the school, so that the distinctive features of the “research autobiography” genre might be seen more clearly alongside the other autobiographical genres.
Secondly, the forty-two “research autobiographies” were compared with each other in an attempt summarise some of the most obvious ways in which these life stories demonstrated at least some common or widespread similarities. Most autobiographies, it was argued, had some type of chronological structure, though the precise type varied. Many writers reported early childhood experiences which had an atmosphere of innocence and contentment, later followed by the more uncomfortable or traumatic experiences of early schooling. Contrary to other research (e.g. Denzin, 1989), less than half of the sample acknowledged any decisive “turning point” in their lives thus far. Family holidays and getting into Bentham’s constituted two of the commonest types of “peak experience”, whilst the death of a family member or close friend constituted the commonest low points. Many experienced periods of unhappiness, strain or even trauma at some stage in their school careers before reaching Bentham’s, usually as a result of difficulties with social adjustment, self-esteem, academic performance, or, in a smaller number of cases, serious bullying. The family and close friends provided the greater part of the autobiographies’ social worlds, in which there were few explicit references to the ambient culture, the popular media and their values. The social world described was predominantly a boys’ world, with the appearance of females being limited to mothers, grandmothers and sisters. The number of occasions in which the students reported and articulated learning emotional lessons from their personal experiences was very striking.

The kind of comparisons summarised above, it was argued, would enable the individual distinctivenesses of each separate life story to be discerned more clearly in the analysis of the autobiographies which takes place in the two following chapters.

The two succeeding chapters now turn to subject matter of the principal research question, which is to examine some of the ways in which students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique in the writing of their life stories. The next chapter deals principally with some of the ways in which students achieve a unified sense of personal identity in their life stories. This is followed by a further chapter that deals with the important issue of the manifold differences displayed by the life stories, and the issue of each story’s consequent uniqueness.
CHAPTER 8

PULLING YOURSELF TOGETHER: THE NARRATIVE UNITY OF LIVES

I am large, I contain multitudes...
   Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

In what does the unity of a single life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life.
   Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue

8.1 Introduction and aims of the chapter

This chapter and the one that follows move from the similarities and samenesses of the students’ autobiographies, towards an examination of their unique and unified differences. The two chapters, therefore, proceed to the final stage of the study’s three-stage research strategy of progressively examining the ways in which:

every story is (a) like all other stories, (b) like some other stories, and, (c) like no other story. (McAdams, 1985:53)

The aim of this research strategy has been that by “peeling away” the more general layers of socially-shared similarities, those aspects of the autobiographies which are most distinctive and different may be the more easily discerned; as Jarvis puts it, that by “distilling out similarity…we are left with uniqueness”(Jarvis, 2001b: 1). This chapter and the one that follows, therefore, move on to consider the ways in which “every story is like no other story.”

Whatever the predictable similarities between the students’ life stories, close analysis of the individual autobiographies reveals an astonishing range of differences and idiosyncracies, as well as a considerable number of ways in which students unify their life stories. The overwhelming impression created by the students’ life stories is that each is not only unified, but also sufficiently differentiated from the other stories to justify a claim to uniqueness. This chapter and the one that follows it, therefore,
proceed to discuss the evidence that relates to the study’s principal research question; *In their autobiographical writings, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?*

The argument of the two chapters will be that one of the ways in which students achieve a sense of themselves which is unified and unique is through the manifold ways in which they construct their *life stories*. Close analysis of the students’ life stories reveals at least *thirteen* different narrative techniques by which students can construct and present a sense of themselves as *unified*, and at least *sixty-three* narrative techniques by which students can *differentiate* themselves sufficiently from the authors of other life stories so that each story may be seen as *unique*. This analysis of the narrative techniques of unification and differentiation are derived from a close reading of the forty-two autobiographies themselves. The *unification* of the narrative sense of identity is dealt with in this chapter, and the *differentiation* of narrative identity is examined in the next chapter.

In examining the students’ autobiographies in order to explore the sense of identity that each presents, the principal research question, it will be recalled, was resolved into two constituent questions:-

1) In what specific ways do the authors *unify* their life stories?
2) In what specific ways do the authors display *differences* in their life stories?

The first of these questions is examined later in the second half of the present chapter, whilst the second question, though answered in *outline* in this chapter, is fully answered in the next.

### 8.2 Summary of the process of Data Analysis

Although the findings presented in these two chapters may be lengthy and complex, the approach taken to reach them is essentially inductive and simple. It will be recalled that the process reported in these two chapters fell into three main phases:-
First, each life story was read repeatedly in order to understand the distinctive sense of subjective identity that each life story presents. The re-iterative reading process was an active and dialectical one in which each autobiography was explored not only for its own characteristic features and structures, but was also compared with the other autobiographies, and also interrogated through an array of questions and tentative hypotheses which emerged cumulatively during the process of interpretation. The primary aim of this first phase of the analysis was to reach a point where the researcher felt that he had gone sufficiently far in being to able understand the distinctive characteristics of each separate autobiography, so that, as Edel (1978: 2) puts it, the researcher has ascertained the “personal myth” that animates the subject’s life, because:-

When the biographer can discover a myth, he has found his story. He knows the meaning of his material and can choose, select, sift, without deceiving himself about the subject of his work.

Having attained some understanding of the distinctivenesses of each individual life story, the second phase of the analysis was more comparative, and consisted in re-reading the life stories many times to compare and contrast the ways in which they provided distinctive answers to the two constituent research questions about how the students’ life stories were unified and differentiated. The goal of this phase of the analysis was to trace repeated patterns used to unify the stories, as well as distinctive categories of difference manifested in the life stories. The multiple readings were organised into ten constituent principal cycles of analysis, the first four phases of which were mainly descriptive, whilst latter phases were more analytical. As was discussed in Chapter 5, an adapted version of Brown et al. (1987) and Gilligan (1990) et als’ “Reading Guide” was used in the earlier phases of the readings to help give focus to the early stages of interpretation, though this was soon insufficiently specific to be of continuing use. A variety of pro-formas, tables and notes were used to record the data and emerging observations, patterns and categories at each stage. At the end of this second phase of the analysis, the unifying patterns and differentiating categories were isolated and listed, each being supported by several specific illustrative instances drawn from the autobiographies.
The third phase of the analysis involved standing back from the autobiographies themselves and turning attention to the collected patterns and categories of unification and differentiation which had emerged from the second phase of the analysis. It was hoped that further reflection and analysis might enable the multitude of desultory of patterns and categories to be organised, for simplicity’s sake, into a smaller number of higher-order general categories. The aim of this third phase of the analysis was to present a systematic taxonomy which might summarise the autobiographical data, as well as draw attention to the enormous range of ways in which life stories are both unified and differentiated from each other. It was further hoped that, in a clearly organised form, the taxonomy might provide a potentially useful heuristic tool which might serve as a “Reading Guide” for future researchers wishing to investigate the unifying and differentiating features of life stories.

8.3 Approach to answering the principal research question; outline summary

It was intended that the results of these three phases of analysis previously outlined would provide sufficient evidence for answering the principal research question about the achievement of unified and unique personal identity which animates this study: In their autobiographical writings, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

Based on Erikson’s (1959, 1968) and McAdams’ (1985, 1993) conception of identity, the principal research question explores two particular aspects of a person’s own sense of their own identity; unity and uniqueness. It will be recalled that the question expresses the research’s distinctive subject-centred conception of personal identity with the phrase, “sense of themselves”.

A person’s “sense of themselves” is, however, by its very nature, not only personal but often private too, and this raises particular difficulties for the researcher. The researcher wishing to explore a person’s sense of who they are cannot have direct access to a person’s ongoing mental life, but can only take occasional soundings of the deep and ever-shifting oceans of personal consciousness which surround individuals’ daily existence. The theorists who have been most influential on the present study -
McAdams (1985, 1993), Bruner (1986, 1990), Ricoeur (1992/1994), and Erikson (1959, 1968) - suggest that, although a person’s sense of who they are might be represented in a variety of ways, it can best be represented in the form of a personal narrative which tells their life story.

As was seen in a previous chapter, McAdams’ life story model of identity has been selected as an appropriate way of exploring the students’ “sense of themselves” for the purposes of the present study. Having adopted both McAdams’ narrative model of identity, as well as some important aspects of his research methodology, the principal research question of the present study is thus both asked and answered in terms of his particular life story model of identity, which is used as a means to “operationalise” the person’s subjective sense of who they are, at least as they saw it at the particular time at which they produced it.

If McAdams’ life story model of identity be accepted for the purposes of the present study, then the principal research question can be both posed and answered in very specific terms. The first aspect of the question, “How do students at the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified?”, can be answered by analysing the life stories to produce a list the specific methods which are employed by the writers to unify their narrative accounts of themselves. The second aspect of the principal research question, “How do the students at the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unique?”, can be answered by analysing the life stories to reveal the principal ways in which the life stories are differentiated from each other. It is argued, both by the students and the researcher, that “uniqueness” is the effect of cumulative differentiations; at a certain point, accounts that are sufficiently highly differentiated will achieve, at least for practical purposes, uniqueness.

The results of the detailed analysis of the individual life stories are summarised in the two Taxonomies listed below. The first taxonomy lists some of the ways in which students at the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified through the use of particular narrative and verbal patterns, and is therefore called the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns. The second taxonomy summarises some of the ways in which the students’ autobiographies demonstrate diverse differences. For
convenience, this list of differentiating patterns in the life stories is referred to as the
*Taxonomy of Narrative Differences*:

**Figure 8.1 Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns**

**Foundational patterns**

Simple conjunction
Use of indexical “I”

**Temporal Patterns**

Explicit linking of past and future selves
Cross-referencing previous or future experiences

**Cognitive perspective patterns**

Perspectival incorporation
Unity through consistent epistemic style
“Book-ends”; Seeing life as a unified whole through “framing”
“Bird’s eye view” or “Stepping back”; the act of narration “steps back” from, and thereby
encapsulates, the experiences recounted narrator

**Characterological and motivational patterns**

Unity of “character”
Thematic unity
Teleological unity; Organisation of the narrative around a unifying end point or final goal

**Narrative structural patterns**

Use of unifying refrains, quotations etc
Structural unity through the overt organisation of the life narrative

**Figure 8.2 Taxonomy of Narrative Differences**

**PLOT**

Content: “What I’ve been through.”
1. A unique package of experiences.
2. Distinctive defining moments
3. Specific peak experience
4. Specific memorable/dramatic experiences
5. Particular early experiences
6. Particular nadir experiences
7. Defining stasis experiences
8. Important emotional learnings

Overall organisation, interpretation and evaluation of experiences
9. Degree of structuration of the narrative
10. Overall type of plot trajectory (pre-generic form)
11. Overall direction of plot line (upwards or downwards)
12. Overall gradient of plot line (degree of drama)
13. Overall plot tone
14. Tendency to incorporate distinct sub-plots
15. Use of common narrative meta-patterns
16. Use of idiosyncratic structuration

CHARACTER

“Grid references”; identifying character by reference to objective markers or matrices
17. Dynastic/family or relationship position
18. Ethnicity; nationality/religion/culture or language
19. Age category or status
20. Official school roles or position
21. Intellectual abilities; exam performance, academic success, IQ, EQ
22. Recognised sports performance or achievement
23. Reference to calendar date
24. Reference to real world events
25. Identity through relationship to God and saints etc
26. Use of other peoples’ words to express identity; use of others’ quotations

Identity by body; the body as an important or characteristic feature of identity, or location for self-defining physical experiences
27. Body size and shape
28. Body as a location of important self-defining physical experiences
29. Clothing and appearance as important markers of identity

Attributes and characteristics; innate and acquired traits, dispositions, skills and capabilities
30. Temperament and acquired characteristics and traits.
31. Skills and attributes.
32. Degree of characteristic agency or passivity.
NARRATOR’S “VOICE”/STYLE

33. Epistemic quotient; the narrator’s degree of self-awareness
34. Degree of openness or reserve
35. Degree of identification between the narrator and the “character” who represents the subject of the experiences reported in the life story
36. “Position” of the narrator relative to the “character”
37. Narrator’s characteristic attitude to past, present and future selves
38. Degree of Agency
39. Distinctive cast of other characters; characteristic social gestalt i.e. the people characteristically present or absent from the autobiographer’s world and the characteristic relationship style
40. Overall characterisation of the past and present selves
41. Presentation of “origin myths” accounting for an aspect of personal identity
42. Presentation of iconic episodes of personal identity
43. Narrator’s distinctive use of opening and closing “framing” statements to characterise the autobiography as a whole.

THEME

Motivations, emotions, preferences and goals
44. General category or type of motivation e.g. Bakan’s (1966) preferences for “agentic” as opposed to “communal” goals.
45. Specific major life goals and values towards which the subject is orientated, and which acts as an important component of identity.
46. Characteristic social preferences.
47. Degree of independence or dependence on others
48. Narrator’s emotional style; “brightness” or emotional intensity.
49. Narrator’s emotional style; “contrast”, or acuteness of emotional variability.
50. Narrator’s emotional style; “colour” or characteristic emotional tone.

Values
51. The subject’s overall evaluation of their life course
52. Inclusion of specific ethical evaluations of particular experiences.
53. Rhetorical disowning or “explaining away” of a former self’s behaviour.
54. Acknowledgement of ethical horizons beyond the individual self.
The details of this Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns are described and explained in the second part of this chapter. In the next chapter, the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences is described in detail, when the many ways in which the individual life stories are differentiated from one another are discussed.

The study’s Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns, together with the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences, constitute the researcher’s answer to the principal research question posed at the outset of the study, and it is argued that this analysis demonstrates a wide variety of ways in which, in their life stories, students do indeed construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique. Before describing and explaining the first Taxonomy’s specific unifying patterns which are traceable in the students’ autobiographies, however, a number of preliminary philosophical issues regarding personal unity need to be discussed.

8.4 The problem of personal unity

A person’s identity, according to Erikson (1959, 1968) and McAdams (1985, 1993) not only encapsulates their personal uniqueness, but it also serves, by definition, to give the person’s many social and temporal selves a degree of unity and stability which they might otherwise lack; identity is, in this sense, a “grand schema of self” (McAdams, 1987:22). Sacks’ (1985) cases of Korsakov’s syndrome, discussed in the study’s first chapter, highlighted the dire consequences for a person’s identity when the unity of the self is compromised, damaged or destroyed through loss of memory.
On the other hand, as was seen earlier, post-modern thought has accepted, as a truism if not a battle-cry, the decomposition and fragmentation of an older unified and autonomous sense of self which dated back to the Renaissance (Sarup, 1993). The modernist prodigality of Whitman's "I am large, I contain multitudes" which echoes the self-confidence of a Renaissance writer like Alberti (see Clarke, 1969) has, at the post-modern hands of Foucault and Derrida, been "deconstructed" as "a product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious." (Sarup, 1993: 2, researcher's italics). The unitary and autonomous "individuality" of Renaissance man has been deconstructed so as to appear fragmentary, problematic and illegitimate. Derrida (1972, 1976) has attacked the idea of a unitary and stable "self" as another manifestation of the "metaphysics of presence"; Foucault (1973, 1980) urges the socio-historically constructed nature of human reality, whilst Levy-Strauss (1966) concludes that "the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him." (Sarup, 1993: 1).

Major philosophical issues, therefore, congregate around this question of the unity of the self, and although the full discussion of such philosophical issues lies beyond the scope of the present study, it is important to indicate that, whilst the researcher is not inclined to accept the kind of simplistic, atomistic and asocial modernist picture of the self which can be found in the work of Descartes, the post-modernist deconstruction of this position is seen as equally unsatisfactory.

In a number of ways, the movement of the present study therefore runs counter to both the Cartesian as well as the post-modernist project. Older dualistic metaphysical conceptions of personal uniqueness and identity have been attacked vigorously by Wittgenstein (1953) and Ryle (1949), long before French-speaking post-structuralist thinkers began their own deconstructive projects. Such older conceptions of the self are insufficiently socialised. Subsequent post-modernist deconstructions, however, are not without equal but opposite difficulties. Without wishing to turn the intellectual clock backwards, the present study wonders whether too abjectly passive a conception of human "subjectivity" falsely assumes an "oversocialised conception of man" (Wrong, 1961), ignores the capacity of individuals to interpret and learn from their experiences in genuinely idiosyncratic ways (Jarvis, 1987, 1992, 2001a; Warnock,
1998), and whether too hasty and vandalistic a kicking around of “presences” may not destroy too easily some of the unities of identity necessary for mental health.

Whatever validity there may be in post-modernism’s critique of the Cartesian subject, psychopathology and neuroscience, as indicated in the opening chapter, reveal that radical dissolution of personal unity has profound and terrible consequences. Multiple personality disorder, schizophrenia and degenerative diseases of human memory such as Korsakov’s syndrome (Sacks, 1985), demonstrate the huge cost to an individual’s fundamental coherence and sanity if their personal unity is prevented or profligately abandoned. Whilst post-structuralist thinkers may argue that “the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him” (Sarup, 1993: 1), Spence’s (1982) psychiatric experience, like that of Sacks (1985), makes him more circumspect about such a project; an individual’s sense of unity and identity is already very precarious:-

...we are all the time constructing narratives about our past and future; and the core of our identity is really a narrative thread that gives meaning to our life, provided - and this is a big if - that it is never broken. Break the thread and you will see the opposite side of the story. Talk to patients in a fugue state, to patients with Korsakoff’s syndrome or Alzheimer’s disease, and you will sense the terror behind not knowing who you are, what happened yesterday, and what will happen tomorrow. (Spence, 1982: 458).

Aware of issues like these, a wide variety of writers have insisted on the paradoxical “unitas multiplex” (Stern, 1938:73), the ever-changing unified multiplicity of personal identity, and many have suggested that narrative provides the means by which the disparate fragments of an individual’s autobiography may be co-ordinated, though never fixed, into a unified whole. Dilthey (1910/1962), for instance, had early anticipated the need for Zusammenhang des Lebens (the connectedness of life) in life history writing, something which corresponds to MacIntyre’s (1981/1985) more recent conception of “the narrative unity of a life.” Ricoeur (1883, 1984, 1985, 1992/1994), over the course of several volumes (culminating in Oneself as Another) argues persuasively that “the character draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others.” (1992: 147).
It is this paradoxical but necessary sense of personal unity, achieved by narrative means, which constitutes a major element of Erikson’s (1959, 1968) and McAdams’ (1985, 1993) conception of “identity”, and whose narrative ramifications are explored in the present chapter.

8.5 Two types of personal unity, and the different consequences of their loss

It will be recalled that Erikson’s (1959, 1968) work, like the present study, distinguishes between two different ways in which a person’s sense of identity needs to achieve an appropriate degree of unity. There is a synchronic kind of unity or “sameness” and there is also a diachronic kind of unity or “continuity”. The former represents the unity of a person’s identity across a multiplicity of different social situations, whilst the latter establishes unity, integrity and persistence across the many temporal selves of an individual’s personal history.

Although the difference between these two types of unity has not been widely discussed, a little reflection suggests that, as well as differences between them, there is an important asymmetry. It is suggested here that failure to maintain unity in either category of personal identity has important, but very different types of consequence for a person’s identity. Some of the cases of profound or selective amnesia discussed by Sacks (1985) reveal the radical effects that profound memory loss can have on a person’s sense of identity. Victims of Korsakov’s syndrome who lose the capacity to retain all or some of the memories of their past selves lose the diachronic unity of their sense of identity in proportion to the degree of memory loss. The case of William T which was examined in an earlier chapter, illustrates the point well. William T can retain memories for only a few minutes, and so is compelled to create a new identity for himself on a continuous basis. He (literally) cannot remember who he is. A radical loss of contact with former temporal selves radically undermines the possibility of any stable personal identity.

For those who are not so unfortunate as William T, there remains a further kind of problem in personal unity that need to be solved. Most human beings, being the social creatures that they are, live their lives within a very complex array of different social
worlds, in each of which they may play a different role; a woman may be a mother, a bank manager and an adulteress, all of which roles require very careful co-ordination if the different elements are to be harmoniously held together. Failure to achieve convincing unity of identity here (both for herself, as well as for others) would tend to create a variety of moral problems of identity which are quite distinct from the kind of temporal identity problems raised by amnesia or Korsakov's syndrome. Issues of integrity and hypocrisy, credibility and deception, reputation and unpopularity, as well as feelings of guilt or satisfaction may be just a few of the possibilities which are associated with an individual's achievement of social or "synchronic" unity of personal identity.

8.6 Unity: general findings of the study

Having raised some of the intellectual issues associated with the achievement of a unified sense of personal identity, the second part of the chapter now outlines some of the ways in which the students themselves talk about these issues of personal unity and integrity. The students own views on the issue of the unity and integrity of various social selves - their social or "synchronic" unity - are first summarised. When this has been done, the chapter concludes with an exposition of the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns, the study's analysis of some of the ways in which students' life stories are unified through the use of a variety of narrative structures and devices.

The most obvious and general finding of the present study is that all of the autobiographies convey a sense of personal unity, although in one or two cases the sense of unity communicated is not well developed. In most of the autobiographies, this sense of a unified identity is very convincingly and strongly realised. Most of the students' autobiographies describe a wide range of younger and present selves which are well unified into coherent, continuous and fluent narratives. The autobiographies create, therefore, a convincing overall impression of personal unity and continuity.

In two particular cases, the organisation of the autobiographies was less continuous and coherent, which may or may not be connected with the special educational needs
these writers experienced. One of these two writers was significantly dyspraxic with a very short attention span, whilst the other had undiagnosed academic and social difficulties which may or may not have been associated with a number of personality difficulties. The exploration of the effects of specific inherited learning difficulties on personal identity might form the basis for a fascinating independent study, but is beyond the scope of the present research. The very small number of such cases in the present research sample would make the drawing of any conclusions in this regard very precarious, and so is not attempted.

It is also the case that, whilst the students’ life stories give considerable attention to the experiences of their various earlier selves, they give much less attention to their different social selves; a variety of temporal selves is on display, but different social selves are rarely on display. For this reason, the diachronic unity or “continuity” of their sense of self is much more fully documented than whatever sense of synchronic social “sameness” their personal senses of identity may possess. This disparity between the full treatment of diachronic unity and the weak treatment of synchronic identity is explored in the next section.

8.7 Different social selves: the problem of synchronic unity

The students’ own theories about the variety of their social and historical selves were sought in the course of the discussions that followed the completion of their written autobiographies. Before discussing the unitive strategies employed in the autobiographies in the final part of the chapter, therefore, the students’ own theories about their several social worlds and selves are outlined and discussed.

When discussing the question “Are you a different person when you are in different social contexts? (such as being on your own, at home with parents, or with close friends)”, students’ replies indicated that many of them perceived themselves as existing in between four to seven distinct social worlds. The most commonly acknowledged social domains were:-
1) Being alone.
2) Being alone with just one or two very close friends.
3) Being alone with a "mentor" figure, who might commonly be a special teacher, an older brother or some other "comradely" figure to whom they looked up slightly.
4) Being with a group of good friends.
5) Being with their family.
6) Being in the classroom or other formal school contexts.
7) Being with the "lads" at school or elsewhere.

One fifteen-year-old, for instance, identifies four distinct social worlds in a single terse sentence:-

I think I am actually a very different person when I am on my own, at home, at school, or with close friends.

A class-mate adopts a simple two-fold schema:-

I think I am quite different around different people. For instance, I act childish when I am around close friends, but at school I act quite serious.

The students' conduct in the rough-and-tumble of school social life amongst peers is characteristically very different from their conduct in the more formal and public context of the classroom:-

When I am at school with my friends I am at my loudest, most talkative, funniest and rudest. This is not because I want to show off to my friends, but simply because I can get away with things that I would normally not get away with. However, I am talking about time out of class*; when in class* I try to concentrate on my learning rather than socialising with friends, in order to achieve the best marks I can for prep* (homework assignments), Monthly Assessment* (monthly grading in all academic subjects) or even an exam. (*original Benthamite words deleted in the interests of anonymity).

For many, being at home is often, though not always, a quieter and less energetic environment than their school existence. Some enjoy the change of pace as a respite from the hurly burly of school life, but others find they have withdrawal symptoms from the excitement of school social life and find home, in contrast, rather boring. Many students feel more relaxed and more themselves at home; they are aware that,
however and energising it may be, being at school means putting on a “performance”. These differences are illustrated in the following three extracts:-

"At home I am grumpy, boring and mature, whereas at school I am the opposite, especially around close friends. This is because we have a lot of fun mucking about with each other and always crack jokes about each other."

"Around other people at school I am very self-conscious, but at home I tend to relax and forget about such things, and the same with close friends because they accept me for who I am."

"I think that when I am on my own at home I am very different to when I am at school. At home I tend to be a lot quieter, perhaps because I’m worn out from school, or just because there is no-one to be loud with. At school I find that because there are so many people, you have to have more energy to do all the things you want to do, whereas at home it’s very quiet. With only four other people there it is not necessary to make a lot of noise and be active 24/7*. Being at home relaxes me because there isn’t so much going on around me."

(* "24/7", a popular American abbreviation meaning “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week”)"

Some students who would be models of quiet courtesy at school, feel free to let themselves be rude or bad-tempered at home:-

I think I do become a different person when I am at home, as I feel I can be quite rude (at least to an extent) there. I know how everyone in my household reacts to certain forms of taunting and you can be truly honest in your comments to them...When I am at school I tend to work hard as often as I can.

Others - mainly students from Chinese and Indian cultural backgrounds - are characteristically respectful to elders, and also be very conscious of trying to be a “good son”:-

When I am at home, definitely, I am a very good son who has never done anything wrong.

Living in a household with servants, a boy who is extremely hard-working and meticulously polite at school says that:-
I tend to act lazy at home and I make others do my chores for me. However, I am extremely respectful towards older people in my house, such as my grandparents.

One or two students feel that they can talk to their parents “like friends”, though they recognise that there are certain barriers too:-

At home and with my friends I am pretty much the same. I can talk to my mum as if she were a close friend (obviously not on all the same topics or in the same way). I can have a laugh with my dad as if he were one of my mates because he is young at heart and because we are on the same wavelength.

However, for most students, you can be most yourself and share your more intimate secrets more easily with a close friend:-

“When I am with close friends I have a lot of fun and laugh a lot. I enjoy myself and talk about issues which I can’t discuss with my parents because they are not in my generation.”

“When I am with close friends, I am different again. I can tell them things that I would find difficult to tell even my parents, and so they provide an outlet for my emotions.”

Close study of the kinds of discussions and conversations already quoted suggests two important general conclusions. First, all the students recognize that their lives exist within a variety of different social worlds, and secondly, that each student views these different worlds as being arranged hierarchically with regard to their relevance to their sense of personal identity. It is suggested here that most individuals have a characteristic “social centre of gravity”; some feel “most themselves” when alone, others with a very select group of close friends. For some students, the family is all, whilst for others it is the base camp from which their more public explorations of the world begin and end. More extravert and public still, some students feel most themselves when in a crowd of loud peers, whilst in other cases, achievement and recognition in the public world beyond school is paramount. Most students feel “most themselves” when they are on their own or with close friends, and not when they are in the classroom, or “with the lads”. They characteristically refer to the identity which emerges when they are in the social world in which they feel most comfortable, as “the real me” or “my inner self”, a usage that may be both as commonly used by
“ordinary” people as it is equally commonly misunderstood by social scientists. The strictures of Derrida (1981/1972), Denzin (1989) and others about “real selves” and “inner selves”, it is suggested, may be misplaced. For instance, commenting on Derrida, Denzin argues:-

Derrida has contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of the person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs, and the process of signification." (Denzin, 1989: 14).

Derrida’s and Denzin’s “understanding” may, in fact, be more metaphysical and confused than several of the students who participated in the present study. By the age of fifteen, most students have developed a clear sense, not only that they exist differently in different social worlds, but also that they have a “social centre of gravity”, a recognition that they feel “most themselves” in some social contexts rather than others. Phrases such as “the real me”, it is suggested, express the individual’s social and personal preferences. When students talk about “the real me” or the “inner self” they are not committing one of Derrida’s Cartesian solecisms, but are, instead, telling you about the social context in which they feel most “at home”. Different students feel “most themselves” in different social contexts, and such differences may indicate a spectrum of personal preference akin to the preferences for extraversion and introversion proposed by Jung (1923), rather than manifesting ontological confusion or deviant Derridean metaphysics.

The average student seems to be both socially versatile, and to have a preferred “centre of social gravity” where the “real me” emerges and they feel most completely “themselves”. The following student, rather poetically, describes “the real me” as a rarely seen “mythical beast”:-

From reflecting on my autobiography, I have discovered that I am a completely different person in different situations. Most people do a bit of character-morphing. However, I seem to be able to change and adapt to whatever the occasion demands as often as I change my clothes. Who would guess that the very self-assured, extremist young man in class could become a quiet introverted boy as soon as he gets out of the school gates with his mother? However, the real me, the one that only comes out when I am alone, is almost like a mythical beast because it is so rarely seen in public.
None of the students found the multiplicity of their social selves problematic. For many it was simply a fact of life, and for others, the variety of social selves was as source of pleasure:-

Despite my loudness, when I am on my own, I am a quiet boy who enjoys this - probably because my friends at school are all "lads", so when I am with them I get little rest...At home I am a bit quieter than when I am at school or with friends. In class I concentrate and work hard...I change my attitude to life depending on the circumstances, and I love the fact that my life is varied. I am very glad I can be who I want and when I want, but still be Ralph Golding.

The existence of different social selves in a variety of very different social worlds is not perceived as a problem by most of the students, and it certainly does not seem similar to the kind of critical and reflective soul-searching which McAdams (1993) describes as being characteristic of the middle-aged person’s harmonisation and integration of their different “imagoes” or “sub-personalities”. The adolescents’ untroubled acceptance of their various social selves may represent a preliminary or more elementary form of integration than that which is characteristic of middle age. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 10.

The existence of a variety of autonomous social worlds was confirmed by conversations with both current and recent old students, by occasional admissions in some of the autobiographies (though these were not numerous), by the researcher’s own observations, and also by the radically different character of documents which the students produced for public consumption by the school community at large, of which the student-produced Yearbook, discussed in the previous chapter provides a good example.

Although the students reveal a highly developed awareness of a variety of different social worlds and consequent social selves in their discussions and conversations, the majority of these different social selves made no significant appearances in the written autobiographies. This striking fact raises a question: Why do the students’ different social or “synchronic” selves do not feature more prominently in their life stories?
Why do so few different social selves appear in their life stories?

Although beyond the scope of the present study, five reasons are offered to suggest why, despite their awareness of different social selves, these synchronic social selves rarely appear in the written autobiographies:

First, the autobiographies are selective constructions in which the authors choose only those experiences and events which they believe to be of greatest significance to their personal sense of who they are. School events, whether official or unofficial, do not feature extensively in students' autobiographies at all. When they do so, the school event usually provides the setting for an experience which has a special meaning whose personal significance lies beyond the exclusive confines of the school world. The omission of the various school-based social selves from the autobiographies may indicate that they are largely peripheral to most students' sense of who they are. A selective autobiography is not a social diary.

Secondly, it is clear from most students' views (examples of which are quoted above), that although they may enjoy enormously their high-energy social world with "the lads" - whether in school or out of it - it is not, perhaps surprisingly and ironically, where they feel "most themselves". The social world of peer group relationships is an arena that calls for an element of self-conscious public performance, which, however successful and enjoyable it may be, is also recognised as being very energy-consuming and often superficial. At home, in contrast, such strenuous efforts do not have to be made, so the home environment is perceived as one in which many students can relax and be "more themselves", even if this is to a lesser degree than with their closest friends. The absence of their "public" selves from the autobiographies may also indicate, against Goffman (1961, 1963), that personal identity is not usually determined by broad institutional contexts.

Thirdly, a student's recognition of their variety of social selves may raise uncomfortable ethical issues concerned with personal integrity. One of the student writers quoted above clearly enjoys the choice of social selves: "I am very glad I can be who I want and when I want", but for the Houlden Caulfields (Salinger, 1951) of
the student world, such socio-diversity might be seen as a lack of fundamental integrity and therefore labelled - as by Holden Caulfield - as “phony”. It is interesting that the author of the previous quotation who celebrates so enthusiastically the variety of his social selves concludes, nonetheless, by insisting on their essential unity and integrity: “I am very glad I can be who I want and when I want, but still be Ralph Golding.” (researcher’s italics).

Fourthly, it may also be the case that the boys’ honour morality precludes or discourages the acknowledgement of different social selves which may compromise a basic moral integrity. A gentleman must be a gentleman through and through, and act appropriately whatever the circumstances. “Appropriate” behaviour is defined by the prevailing social code, rather than by personal whim or advantage. The gentleman may, of course, accept a whole range of socially- circumscribed contextual modifications to his behaviour and deportment, such as not swearing in front of ladies, but swearing like a trooper in his club. Such modifications, however, are socially required rather than personally chosen. Only the cad, the creep and the “suck-hole” make such modifications for the primary purpose of personal advantage. The gentleman must not only always be himself, but also give deference where it is due. The adoption of a prescribed deferential or “laddish” social role does not compromise the person’s basic moral integrity; it demonstrates their faithful adherence to The Code. An honour morality can thus enable a member to combine, without compromise, absolute personal integrity with a very wide variety of apparently different social selves. It is perhaps just such an understanding that is implied in some of the apparently paradoxical injunctions in The Code, the unofficial norms and values which govern student life at school. Two of the most widespread and important rules of The Code say that you must “Be yourself”, but also tells you: “Don’t be cocky”. The former is a rule that prescribes basic ontological integrity, whilst the “Don’t be cocky” rule prescribes behavioural deference which is socially required, but which has no ontological implications. In an honour morality, therefore, a multiplicity of social selves need not undermine personal integrity.

Finally, the realisation of important conflicts between ones different social selves, and the self-critical and reflective attempts to reconcile and integrate them may, as
McAdams (1985) suggests, be a more advanced developmental task reserved for middle age. The adolescent’s lack of self-criticism in this regard may perhaps be regarded as an interim integration which will be subject to later revision. Nonetheless, whether interim or not, it is clear that adolescents are readily able to integrate a wide variety of social selves into a convincing and coherent unity.

8.8 Sticking identity together with words

The time has come to turn from the students’ discussions about their multiple social selves to their autobiographies, and to examine some of the specific methods used by writers to create a unified sense of themselves in the process of narration. Close analysis of the life stories reveals that a variety of methods are used to integrate the multiplicity of former, present and future selves.

In the analysis that follows, the techniques of unification described are verbal patterns. In a variety of ways, the patterns described by the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns seem to function as “glue” which sticks the disparate temporal (and sometimes social) selves of the narrative into a unified, continuous and coherent life story. The issue of how far it is the case that the writer’s or speaker’s words produce the cohesion, as opposed to merely manifesting a prior sense of unified identity (which has already been effected by other means, such as unconscious emotional processes), is a matter of considerable importance and interest, but one which lies far beyond the scope of the present work. A critical dialogue between, say, discursive psychology and psychoanalysis might be fruitful in this regard. Whatever the outcome of such a debate, the characteristic verbal patterns which indicate (if not produce) unification of the sense of self in the sample of autobiographies can, at least, be identified and described.

The formative or unity-confirming role of such language patterns might suggest that these verbal patterns could be seen as examples of the persuasive or potent uses of language. The Speech Act Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) has suggested that words may have functions beyond mere description and denotation. From a quite different philosophical tradition, Foucault (1980) has also argued for the formative
power of discourse which systematically forms the objects of which it speaks. Whilst the analyses of Speech Act Theory have traditionally offered a somewhat fragmentary collection of linguistic tools to the putative analyst of discourse, Ricoeur (1992) has argued persuasively that the extended nature of a life story offers considerably more scope for a sophisticated variety of unitive and integrative language patterns. Narrative, he argues, has the capacity not only to humanise the impersonal passage of time, but also to unify and integrate - in terms of the plot and character of a temporally extended narrative - the many disparate aspects of an individual’s experience.

More sophisticated still, a large number of theorists have also followed Erickson (1980) and Bateson (1972) in their analyses of personal language patterns (and the effects of those patterns on subjective consciousness). This research has taken place mainly within the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy, with Erickson himself (1989), Bandler and Grinder (1975a, 1975b), Dilts (1990), Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson (1967) pre-eminent in the field. Each of these theorists has produced analyses which indicate how particular language patterns may achieve specific effects in organizing the consciousness of those who use them. Although the discussion of this sophisticated and detailed corpus of work lies beyond the specific remit of the present research, it has offered the researcher suggestive pointers in analysing the ways in which language might have powerful effects on a person’s sense of who they are.

The analysis offered below is the result of an inductive interpretation of the students’ autobiographies. It aims to provide a detailed view of some of the specific ways in which students unified and integrated the disparate selves and experiences narrated in their life stories. Many of the patterns described in the later Taxonomy of Narrative Differences have the additional effect of reinforcing a person’s sense of personal unity, but these are dealt with separately in the next chapter.

The variety of unifying patterns presented below offers the user enormous scope for variety and subtlety in the precise effects produced. It is possible, for instance, to distanciate and belittle a former self, whilst simultaneously linking this former self to the present narrator; the very fact of repudiating a former self may, paradoxically,
simultaneously imply a linkage. For instance, the phrase, "I hated myself for doing that" implies both a separation and linkage between a former self and the present self of the speaker or writer. The power and importance of implication and presupposition are thoroughly analysed by the large body of research deriving from the work of Erickson and Bateson alluded to earlier, of which the Taxonomy provides some specific examples. Many of the patterns outlined below produce their unifying effects by implication rather than by explicit statement. Limitations of space permit only the most common patterns to be outlined and briefly discussed.

8.9 Taxonomy of unifying patterns

Foundational patterns

1) Simple conjunction

The "simple" ability to link memories, experiences and thoughts together into a continuous whole is a foundational skill without which no sustained sense of self would be possible. The very simplicity and apparent triviality of being able to link one thought to another, one memory to another, one experience to another in "simple conjunction" should not lead to the enormous potency and importance of this means of connection to be underestimated. A very simple and primitive sort of life story, and with it, a simple but coherent sense of identity, could be constructed through the use of this technique alone. To link into a simple and unselective chain all the memories and experiences which a particular person recalls could produce a rudimentary and coherent sense of self. Although disorganised and potentially lacking intelligent selectivity, such a chain could nonetheless form a unified whole. The ability of narrative to link one event in one's life course to other events is thus the foundation of a unified sense of self. Although it would be inchoate and unsophisticated, it is argued that this capacity provides one of the two necessary and sufficient conditions for the formation of a unified and unique sense of self.

The simplest form of unifying technique to be described below is that of simple conjunction; one set of statements about a person's experiences is joined to a set of
statements about a different personal experience. The use of “simple conjunctions” such as “and”, “but”, “so” and “therefore”, offers the most elementary way of unifying otherwise separate statements. The simplest form of conjunction would be the very primitive “chronicle” structure that has the form, “and then… and then…and then…”. This conjunctive function may also be achieved in a more sophisticated way through a variety of adverbial clauses (“After the horrific experiences of my prep school, I approached Bentham’s with some trepidation.”) as well as by other more complex conjunctive grammatical devices. The act of incorporating several disparate personal events into a single unit, whether or not this is aided by the explicit use of conjunctions, implies that the events so incorporated are part of a unified whole.

Conjunctive patterns are so common and pervasive that illustration is otiose. The first paragraph of the first autobiography on the top of the pile at the time of writing opens with the following conjunctive sentence:

I grew up in Essex (somebody had to) and still live here to this day.

In a single sentence, early childhood and present adolescent existence are incorporated into a unified whole, and are linked by the simple conjunction, “and”. The next section begins:

After a year in Ireland, it is quite safe to say that we were happy to settle for England once again.

The adverbial component, “After a year in Ireland” seamlessly joins the year-long rain-sodden sojourn in Ireland of the student’s earlier self with a welcome return to living in England by the student’s later self.

2) Indexical “I”

Harré’s work (1998) rightly draws attention to the fundamental importance of first person indexical pronouns devices in the construction of personal identity. By using the indexical pronoun “I”, the person can perform an act of identification in which they associate and identify themselves with the content of the statement to which the
pronoun is attached. By uttering the sentence "I am tall, dark and handsome" the speaker can claim ownership of the qualities represented by the words "tall, dark and handsome". In this way, first person indexical pronoun devices (whose specificities vary according to the particular language being spoken or written) provide another very basic type of "glue" by which statements about a person’s memories, thoughts, experiences and attributes are affixed to a particular person.

For Harré (1988), *spoken* first person indexicals “anchor” what is spoken to the *bodily location* of the speaker. Since each person has only *one* physical body, and since that body has a *unique* spatio-temporal trajectory, argues Harré, the use of first person indexical devices is sufficient to guarantee the singularity, unity and uniqueness of personal identity. As an account of the “objective” or “philosophical” concept of personal identity, this explanation has considerable elegance and persuasiveness. However, as an account of the “subjective” type of personal identity, it is, as was argued earlier, insufficient. This, it will be recalled, was demonstrated by the cases of *Jimmie G* and *William T* discussed earlier by Sacks. Even though such patients possess a singular body and a unique spatio-temporal trajectory, their radical loss of memory means that they are unable to sustain the kind of continuous and consistent personal *narrative* which would alone guarantee their *subjective* sense of personal identity.

First person indexical devices like “I” and “my” are thus, along with conjunctions, one of the most basic tools a story-teller has for “owning” and thereby *unifying* the multitudes of disparate experiences which are described. Like the various conjunctive devices outlined in the previous section, indexical devices are so pervasive and foundational that it is hard to conceive of a sense of identity existing without them. All of the autobiographies are littered profusely with first person indexicals. In the following sentences extracted from the life story of the student who spent a rain-sodden year in Ireland, a variety of past and (in the last instance) future personal experiences are owned and incorporated into a unity through the use of first person indexicals. (At one striking moment, he changes from a singular to a plural first person indexical). The indexicals are italicised by the researcher for the sake of clarity:-
I grew up in Essex (somebody had to), and I still live here to this day...

I can vaguely remember receiving a rather gooey chocolate cake...

I distinctly remember travelling abroad to South Africa with my family. I remember it so clearly because it was my first time in an aeroplane....

I ejected a pool of vomit which soaked a poor air-stewardess's feet...

I have been able to summarise my life as a whole, and considering how much has happened so far, I am excited to see what life has in store for me and the people around me. We still have a long way to go.

The use of first person indexicals thus enables the user both to identify with particular experiences and attributes, and also to unify them through indexing them to a singular narrator. The use of such devices would seem, therefore, to be one of the most basic pre-requisites for the formation, not only of a person's subjective sense of personal identity, but also (as in Harré's analysis) to the formation of their objective personal identity too.

However, the degree to which the narrator of an autobiography identifies closely with the former selves they describe vary considerably. There are different degrees of identification and distanciation shown towards former, present and future selves. The range of degrees of identification may be seen as a spectrum, with total identification at one end, and total distanciation at the other. In the former, the subject appears to be so identified that they relive the recounted past event, in the latter, the narrator creates a definite separation between the present self and one or other of their former selves. At the most extreme end of this spectrum, former selves are not only distanced, but also disowned, repudiated and perhaps belittled. In between the two extreme ends of this spectrum, an almost infinite variety of gradations and approaches exist. This refinement of the indexical function, with its capacity both to unify and to differentiate, is explored more fully in the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences in the next chapter.

The two techniques outlined above thus provide a fundamental basis for the construction of a personal narrative which is unified and unique. The linking of accounts of personal experiences into a connected whole, and the owning and unifying
of these accounts by the use of “I”, therefore also provide a rudimentary but sufficient discursive tool-kit for constructing a sense of self which is unified and unique. These two devices alone might thus provide a minimal but sufficient answer to the principal research question. When the students’ autobiographies are examined in detail, however, a wide variety of other sophisticated tools are also visible. These further patterns are now outlined.

Temporal patterns

3) Explicit linking of past and present selves

On occasions, the writer of an autobiography will step aside from the narration of a particular experience and make an explicit and self-conscious statement which links together two different selves, characteristically a younger and an older self. The effect of such a moment of explicit linking is to unify the distinct aspects of the person’s identity. This is very elegantly done in Robert’s autobiography when his present self gazes at a photograph of himself as a baby. His reflections on this early photograph of himself at the outset of his life story enable him to include in his story an earlier version of himself which existed before personal memory began:–

Everyone says that I was a very good baby and never cried. It seems that I was always smiling and full of life. A far reach from today! Looking through these photographs of my early years I appear to be very happy playing with push-along toys, balloons and musical instruments....

4) Cross-referencing previous or future experiences

In a rather less explicit but very common way, many authors, in recounting one experience, make a passing reference to another version of themselves, characteristically a younger self. Through the use of this cross-referencing (usually not as self-conscious and explicit as the former category) the accounts of memories from one period of the person’s life are stitched implicitly to accounts of experiences originating from a different time and place. For instance, Andrew describes several experiences of being bullied. Describing his early months at a new school he says:–
It was difficult making friends because the majority of them had known each other for years. Here again I was bullied by a particular boy, but now I was older, I slowly began to learn that it was not me who had the problem. I was tougher, not because it got any easier, but because I had learned to cope better.

The phrase “here again” refers to previous experiences of bullying - one of which was quoted in the previous chapter - and immediately implies a connection with these previous similar experiences. Later in the quotation, the two things that Andrew “learns” are cumulative insights and skills which pre-suppose the existence of a series of prior such experiences. All of these common but powerful “cross-references” between one experience and others have the effect of unifying and integrating them all.

Cognitive perspective patterns

5) Perspectival incorporation

More sophisticated and cognitively complex than “cross-referencing” is another technique in which the narrator characteristically views an early experience from the perspective of their older self. Usually adopting some kind of more “enlightened” perspective that is the fruit of age and experience, the person looks back on an experience of their younger self, reports the perspective or understanding of that younger self, and then implicitly or explicitly re-interprets the younger experience by incorporating the earlier understanding within the older narrator’s perspective. Paul, for instance, recalls the occasion on which, at the age of six, he was told that his grandmother had just died. He compares his reactions with those of his four year old sister and ten year old brother at the time. In recounting their reactions, he incorporates his younger self’s perceptions within the broader cognitive perspective of his current fifteen-year-old self:

...My father sat us all at the bottom of the stairs and explained to us that our grandma had died. I remember the reactions of my brother and sister very vividly at this moment. My sister was four at the time. She had no idea what had happened, and I remember her saying to my father while he was in the middle of talking to us, “Can you open my Pogs?” She did not know what was
going on; she was too young to understand what had happened. My older brother, on the other hand, who was ten when this happened, was in tears. He knew my grandmother the best of us three. I remember looking round at each of them, not knowing what to think. I just sat there looking at everyone else. I knew my grandma quite well. I didn’t react, though; unlike my brother, I didn’t know what it all meant. I did not realise at the time that I would never see my grandma again.

He “did not realise at the time”, but in narrating the events, he shows the reader that he knows now; the later perspective has incorporated the earlier.

6) **Unity through consistent epistemic style**

A quite different type of unity is produced if the author of the autobiography maintains a similar style of understanding throughout the whole, or significant parts of their life story. According to his autobiography, Harry is someone to whom things happen - sometimes quite dramatic things - but who never seems to recognise the seriousness or significance of the experiences at the time. “I had no idea”, “I didn’t realise”, and “I didn’t know any better” are recurrent phrases which characterise his personal style of self-(un)awareness throughout his life story as a whole. This slightly “dopey” epistemic style provides both a thread of unity, as well as a highly distinctive characteristic of his life story. In contrast, other writers such as Peregrine, seem to be acutely and ironically self-aware from their very first appearance in their life stories. Between the extremes of witlessness and acute irony, the epistemic possibilities are, of course, endless. Peregrine is destined for the stage, and the opening of his life story illustrates his well-honed actor’s sense of how to make a dramatic entrance:-

The time is 4.00 p.m., the date is Saturday, 23rd of June 1986. In a small corner of Queen Mary’s Hospital in Hampstead, a young woman has just given birth to her first child. Surrounded by flowers, bottles of champagne and large glossy cards, she cradles her child adoringly in her arms. The ward is silent and empty. There is a deep feeling of love and tranquillity as the woman dabs her eyes with the corner of her sleeping baby’s clothing. The only sound is the whirring of the ventilator fan and the light breathing of her little boy.

But the boy wasn’t me and the young woman wasn’t my mother. In startling comparison, I was born with hundreds of unwelcome relatives excitedly chatting and waiting for my flustered mother, high on Horlicks, to give birth. If I had been a little girl, the relatives would no doubt have muttered their
congratulations and then slunk away disappointed. Fortunately, however, I had optional extras installed, and so my relatives all produced large bottles of champagne, which, knowing my family, was almost certainly black market, and toasted the little fifth baron and my mother, who was being hailed as a saint.

This just goes to show that for some unknown reason, possibly genetically, I have never been able to do something quietly. Not even when I was fourteen minutes old. This embarrassing predicament has followed me round ever since.

7) “Book-ends”; Seeing life as a unified whole through “framing”

Another way in which a life story may be framed as a unified whole is through the use of an initial introductory section and final concluding section which act as a matching pair to enclose the intervening life story as a unity. In just the same way that a collection of individual books may be held together on a shelf by a pair of “book ends”, so an autobiographer’s collection of experiences may be held together by an appropriate beginning and ending designed for the purpose. Barnaby, for instance, who entitles his autobiography “Insomnia”, begins his life story with an account of his birth which tells us:-

Even as a baby I am told I was restless, only ever wanting to eat in the middle of the night and never sleeping until I had woken my mother or brother more than once.

At its end, Barnaby’s life story returns to the same theme, with a quotation from Robert Frost’s poem, *Stopping by woods on a snowy evening*:-

And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep.

The life story thus both opens and closes with discussions of persistent sleep problems, and this enhances the unified effect of the story as a whole.
Towards the end of his *Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein talks of “viewing the world as a limited whole” (Wittgenstein, 1921/1971: 149). Whatever Wittgenstein’s original intentions, autobiographers can adopt a similar “bird’s eye” perspective and produce a compendious overview upon their lives which has the effect of presenting the life as a unified whole. By “stepping back” from the details and specificities of their lives they can take an overview which, whilst the perspective distances them from the details, also simultaneously unifies what it perceives. This viewpoint may be taken at the outset of the story, as in this example from Freddie’s life story:

My eyes saw the first light of day ten minutes past the twelfth hour on 22nd March, 1989, 35 miles outside London in the busy maternity ward at St. Luke’s Hospital, Cranleigh. Fourteen years later I sat down at a computer and began writing this, the story of everything that happened between the day I first cried and the day I began this laborious yet somehow thrilling task. This is what I have encountered. Beware!.....

A similar unifying “bird’s eye view” is achieved in this representative concluding envoi from Guy’s autobiography which was quoted earlier:-

My life has hardly started, therefore I cannot commit it all to paper. In a little over two thousand words I have been able to summarise my life as a whole, and considering how much has happened so far, I am excited to see what life has in store for me and the people around me. We still have a long way to go.

**Characterological and motivational patterns**

9) *Unity of “character”*

In just the same way that an author can maintain a distinctive epistemic style which gives a sense of unity to their life story, one of the most obvious and powerful ways in which an author can enhance the impression of having a unified identity is by telling a life story in which the “character” who represents them is unified and distinctive. The creation of a unified character (i.e. a character within a story) is the result of a
complex array of narrative techniques, which are presented in the next chapter. When this is achieved successfully, the sense conveyed is that, although there may have been all sorts of changes and developments during the life course, the character has somehow remained recognisably “the same”. Presenting oneself as a stable character has a dual purpose - it presents the self as distinctive, but it also presents the self as unified by virtue of possessing such a stable character. The presentation of a unified character is something that may run throughout an entire life story, and is therefore impossible to illustrate by mere extracts.

Very many of the life stories, however, succeed brilliantly in creating distinctive and unified central characters. Peregrine, the dramatic opening of whose story was quoted above, retains the upper-class thespian’s sense of drama and showmanship with which his infant character first appears in his story. In Dan’s story, he is a small but plucky boy who may encounter difficulties and upsets, but whose trials, determined efforts and sense of responsibility win him success and recognition. Rahim is the quiet and understated hero who makes his first appearance travelling across the world on his own to camp in the Canadian wild-woods. “Challenge” is a word that recurs frequently in his story, which is just as well since he must later face three armed gunmen and a plane crash alone. Whatever the outward drama of his “challenges”, however, he deals with them in an even, quiet and self-contained manner. Andrew tells us that he nearly dies before he has even been born. In contrast to Rahim, however, Andrew’s narrative “character” is less self-possessed and taciturn in communicating his dramatic experiences, and the reader’s heart-strings are tugged more plangently during Andrew’s moving tale.

10) Thematic unity

One of the most unusual themes around which any of the student autobiographies was constructed has already been mentioned, that of “insomnia”. Many other autobiographies, however, are similarly focused around one or two particular unifying themes or interests. For Jock, it is a love of racing cars and cricket. For Ed it is the loss of his five-year old girlfriend and the introverted character and compensatory passion for sport which followed the trauma. For Rahim, as mentioned already, it is a
continuing series of “challenges”, most of which, despite their difficulty, are turned into achievements. For Andrew, it is a matter of turning brutal catastrophe into dazzling victory. These themes (and their variations) run through many of the life stories and, like the leitmotifs of a Wagner opera, despite their different themes and subjects, are nonetheless integrated into a unified whole.

11) Teleological unity; Organisation of the narrative around a unifying end point or final goal

Several of the life stories, although they may contain many other events and experiences, are dominated by a single over-arching aim or goal which gives a certain unity and direction to the life story as a whole. The account of his birth with which Peregrine opens his story is carefully staged and contains an arresting and dramatic twist. From this dramatic opening of his life story, his extraordinary life proceeds towards his first actual taste of grease-paint, after which almost all the experiences narrated relate to his developing career as an actor. His autobiography effectively finishes with him on stage taking a bow to thunderous applause. (At the time of writing, Peregrine had already appeared in a number of films, so his dramatic career looks set to continue.)

In a quite different, and much less public mode, Rodney’s thoughtful and honest autobiography is permeated at a number of levels by an somewhat anxious need to work hard and so to be accepted and valued as much as his twin brother; he may thereby appease his nagging doubt that he may be “hopeless”. Whether, aged six, it is catching trout with his father for the first time, or winning a prep school swimming race, or by his academic achievements at Bentham’s, Rodney is always trying hard to achieve his personal goal; to demonstrate that he is not “hopeless”.
Narrative structural patterns

12) Use of unifying refrains, quotations etc

From ancient times, the individual stanzas of some songs have been linked together through the use of a chorus or refrain that is repeated between the verses. In some songs, this refrain may be identical each time, whilst in others, the refrain alters as the song proceeds. In either case, the repetition of the refrain lends a certain unity to the song as a whole. About a quarter of the autobiographies make use of such repetitive unifying structures. For the stage-struck Peregrine who lives for the thrill of being on stage, each chapter of his narrative finishes with an appropriately selected song from a famous show, such as “Che sera, sera, Whatever will be, will be”, or “There’s no business like show business”. The autobiographies of two Japanese students, in contrast, are punctuated at important intervals by quotations from their parents or grandparents. The effect of all these carefully chosen quotations is to unify the separate sections of the life narrative.

13) Structural unity through the overt organisation of the life narrative.

Quite a number of the stories are organised into distinctive idiosyncratic structures whose separate chapters are clearly displayed as being integral parts of the same overall unified structure. Organising the life story into a structural unity in which the sections or “chapters” are presented as constituent parts of a larger whole is a very powerful way of reinforcing the unity of the whole life story. Freddie creates a simple, distinctive and witty dual structure for his autobiography; “Holidays” and “School”. The “highs” of his life occur during the holidays, whilst the “lows” are constituted by being at school. Rahim has a very clear and well-integrated chapter structure, each one with carefully chosen names. Most dramatic and idiosyncratic of all, Peregrine, with characteristic dramatic flair, not only divides his material into chapters with suitably dramatic and eccentric titles, but also exploits the chapter structure he has created to characteristically eccentric dramatic effect:-
This chapter has thus discussed the principal research question, "How do the students construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?" and has dealt with the first aspect of this question; namely, the narrative methods by which life stories are unified. Close analysis of the students' life stories revealed at least thirteen different narrative techniques by which students constructed and presented their sense of themselves as unified. These thirteen important narrative patterns were described and illustrated in the form of *Taxonomy of Unifying patterns* which resulted from an analysis of the student's life stories. The next chapter proceeds to examine the second aspect of the principal research question: *In what specific ways do the authors display differences in their life stories?*, and does so by presenting the *Taxonomy of Narrative Differences* which summarises autobiographies' many narrative differences.
CHAPTER 9

BEING DIFFERENT: AS NARRATIVES, WE ARE EACH OF US UNIQUE

We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative - whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative", and that this narrative is us, our identities... Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives - we are each of us unique. (Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, 1985: 105)

9.1 Introduction

Two of the previous chapters have drawn attention to some of the ways in which the students are the same. The features of the moral and social Code which they all share was outlined earlier, and this was followed by an analysis of some of the other ways in which the students' autobiographies exhibited similarities. The present chapter draws attention to some of the ways in which the students' life stories are different. The chapter argues that one of the important ways in which the uniqueness of subjective personal identity can be achieved and represented is through the construction of an autobiographical narrative. The autobiographical narrative cumulatively constructs a vast array of distinctive personal features and experiences into a unified and highly differentiated whole. The enormous potential and flexibility of narrative is easily able to represent the infinite range of possible human uniquenesses.

The chapter falls into two main sections. In Part One some of the intellectual issues which the study of unique personal identity raises are discussed, and the utility of adopting a narrative model of identity is recalled. These brief intellectual discussions are followed by a presentation and analysis of the students' own views about what makes them unique, so that their ideas may be brought into the academic dialogue. The first part then continues with a discussion of the practical issues which face the researcher who wishes to display adequately and fairly the very large array of personal differences which a quarter of a million words of autobiographical writing have presented to the researcher. Having discussed a number of strategies for displaying
some of the students' autobiographical material, the first part of the chapter concludes by presenting a selection of extracts from the students' life stories on three broad themes, in order to give the reader a brief taste of the wide variety of the material available to the researcher.

Having given the reader some examples of the considerable diversity of the students' autobiographical writing, Part Two proceeds to outline in a more systematic way the many categories of difference which the students' autobiographies present. The exposition of the array of differences exhibited by the students' autobiographies takes the form of a descriptive Taxonomy of Narrative Differences, which seeks both to summarise the data and to analyse it in such a way that some of the most widely employed techniques of narrative differentiation are made clear. In this way, the Taxonomy displays and draws attention to the extraordinary range of differences which even a modest number of life stories can instantiate.

The chapter thus moves on to the second of the two questions into which the study's principal research question was divided: *In what specific ways do the authors of the autobiographies display differences in their life stories?*

It may be recalled that the approach to data analysis taken here (which was outlined in Chapter 5) is an inductive and simple one:-

Each life story was read repeatedly until its distinctive sense of subjective identity could be grasped. Having attained some understanding of the distinctivenesses of each individual life story, the second phase of the analysis consisted in re-reading the life stories many times to compare and contrast the many ways in which the stories were differentiated from each other. At the end of this second phase of the analysis, a large number of differentiating categories (sixty three in all) were isolated and listed, each being supported by several specific illustrative instances drawn from the autobiographies.

This done, the third phase of the analysis involved standing back from the individual patterns and categories which had been collected to see if they might be organised into
higher order categories for the sake of clarity. The result of this phase of the analysis was the assembly of the individual differentiating features into a taxonomy which, it was hoped, might both summarise the analysis of the life stories as well as draw attention to the enormous range of ways in which the life stories were differentiated from each other. Once produced, the taxonomy might serve, in the manner of Brown et al. (1987) and Gilligan (1990) et als’ “Reading Guide”, as a useful heuristic tool for guiding other readers in their search for the unifying and differentiating features of life stories.

PART 1: DISCUSSING AND DISPLAYING PERSONAL DIFFERENCES

9.2 Goffman’s sneer and Augustine’s gasp; attitudes to uniqueness in the social sciences

The prevailing trends in the mainstream of research and theory in the social sciences have tended to be preoccupied with the discovery or advocacy of the shared commonalities of human life. In a wide variety of theoretical modalities, whether as G.H.Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism, Gergen’s (1985) Social Constructionism, or Harré’s (1994) discursive psychology, the primary interest has been in laying bare the shared features of social life to which the individual human being is subject. As was observed by Jarvis (2001b) earlier, he expressed a concern that “ever since the Enlightenment, we have distilled out differences and ended up with similarity.” (Jarvis, 2001b:1)

As was seen in Chapter 2, the description and analysis of personal uniqueness does not seem to have had a high priority in the mainstream of twentieth century social science, whose interests have tended to be more nomothetic than idiographic. It has been a more common preoccupation in the social sciences to focus attention on societies, groups and shared discourse, attending to individuals only in so far as they served as exemplars of generic social or psychological phenomena. Until relatively late in the century, the study of particular individuals had largely tended to be the province of historians, biographers and novelists. The tide began to turn with the personological tradition represented by Murray (1938), and was followed by Erikson’s
(1958, 1969) and (later) McAdams' (1985, 1993) particular biographical studies. More recently, biographical approaches have played an increasingly important and accepted role in many areas of the social sciences, with scholars such as Atkinson (1998) and Josselson and Lieblich (1993, 1995, 1996) involved in the intensive "study of lives", and others (such as Alheit, 1995, 1998, 1999) making important use of biographical approaches in studies investigating lifelong learning.

Although previous chapters of the present study have included an examination of the highly specialised social world of the school and the shared features of individual life stories, the primary interest of the research has been in the unique individualities of the students who contributed their life stories. The study's particular institutional school setting has been chosen to throw into sharp relief the construction of personal uniqueness within the context of a social institution which, according to Goffman (1961/1963), might be most likely to preclude or impede any such thing.

The present autobiographical research is thus not only a case study which explores the life stories of a particular group of students living within the confines of a highly academic residential school which shares many characteristics with Goffman's "total institution", but also a kind of test case which bears on the wider issue of whether a unique subjective sense of personal identity may be constructed within a social context which might appear radically to preclude it.

Whether because of their affiliations with post-structuralist thought (so, Denzin, 1989), or because of a more positivistic scepticism (so, Goffman, 1961, 1963), many prominent researchers have been actively sceptical about the possibility or even validity of autonomous human uniqueness, preferring to focus on the social and discursive forces and constraints to which individuals are subjected. On the other hand, professionals such as psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, counsellors or adult educators may be obliged, by the very nature of their professional work, to take an interest in the individuality of their particular patients. Such professions, however, have often been seen as peripheral to the mainstream of the social sciences. (McCleod, 1997).
Goffman provides a telling example which typifies his sceptical attitude to the possibility and validity of studying the kinds of subject-centered personal identity envisaged by Erikson (1959, 1968), McAdams, (1985, 1993) and Atkinson (1998). In *Stigma* (1968), Goffman explores what he calls the "the management of spoiled identity", during the course of which he embarks on an extended discussion of "personal identity". In the course of his discussion, he mentions the idea of personal uniqueness briefly, but does so with what appears to be a condescending sneer:-

The term unique is subject to pressure by maiden social scientists who would make something warm and creative out of it, a something not to be further broken down, at least by sociologists... (Goffman 1968: 73).

His discussion of "personal identity" which follows this telling remark considers three possible senses in which "uniqueness" might be contrued; on the one hand, it may involve the objectively observable identifying marks of physical appearance, or the equally objective "full set of facts" about a person. On the other hand, it might involve the more subjective-sounding "core of his being". Having raised the latter possibility, he immediately dismisses it without further explanation or discussion; presumably, the entertainment of such intolerably subjective notions would lay him open to his own charge of being the kind of blushing virgin social scientist who tries to "make something warm and creative" out of the idea of uniqueness.

For the dramatic contrast it offers, it is instructive to compare Goffman’s apparently dismissive and patronising attitude to the phenomenon of personal uniqueness with that of the founding father of Western autobiographical writing. Augustine’s attitude is almost diametrically opposed to that of Goffman; Augustine seems almost to gasp in awe and amazement at the mystery of the unique and unfathomable depth, range and inscrutable variety of the human personality, and finds it puzzling that others do not pay this mystery greater regard:-

Men go out to gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses, but they do not pay attention to themselves.

All of these things go on inside me, in the vast halls of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth and the sea, ready at my summons, together with
everything I have perceived by my senses, except the things which I have forgotten. In it I meet myself as well. (Augustine, Confessions, X:8. Augustine, 1961:216)

The present study’s attitude is closer to that of Augustine than that of Goffman, and has collected many life stories that, even though Goffman (1963/1968) may disparage the “warm and creative”, are nonetheless “warm”, and often “creative” too. In consequence, the study, in order to be faithful to its data, has felt obliged by the astonishing quality and variety of the life stories, to find a methodology which could accommodate such data, rather than playing Goffman’s role as the hard-nosed social scientist and rejecting them.

9.3 Students’ theories about uniqueness and personal difference

“Maidenly” or not, however, there is no reason to suppose that a scientific interest in uniqueness is automatically suspect; ironically perhaps, the “harder” sciences of molecular biology, genetics and cell biology are less prone to sneering about uniqueness and individual differentiation; human fingerprints have been long known to be unique, as is a person’s immune system and genetic blueprint. At the time of writing, the uniqueness of an individual’s irises was currently being utilised in technology being developed to improve the security and speed of airport check-ins). To meet the conceptual challenge raised by adopting an “Augustinian” rather than a “Goffmanian” attitude to people’s unique identities, Chapter 2 considered a number ways in which the uniqueness of a person’s sense of who they are might be conceived and represented. A number of alternatives, such as Rogers’ (1951, 1961) “self-concept” and McCrae and Costa’s (1987) “five factor” theory were considered. It was argued, however, for the purposes of the present research, McAdams’ life story model of identity offered a more satisfactory way of conceiving and representing people’s identities. It was further argued that such a biographical approach to data collection was better able to do justice to the complexity, context and detail of personal identity data. Before these data are presented, however, the following section considers briefly the students’ own views on what makes them unique and different from others.
Students’ “trait” and “type” self-descriptions

After they had written their autobiographies, the students who participated in the study were asked the question: What makes you different from everyone else? Interestingly, the range of answers they give might be interpreted as demonstrating that the students offer a range of theories which parallel those of the professional scientists. A number of the students prefaced their answer to the question by acknowledging the many similarities and samenesses which they shared with others before they went on to describe some of their distinguishing features. The following instances adopt a very general observer-centered perspective:-

"I am Mr.Average."

"I'm not that different from anyone else who is a teenager."

"I know I am not different from anybody else in the school, in fact I am very average at everything."

When it came to describing their distinguishing features, the replies reflected some of the principal models of personal identity current within the academic world. It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that both idiographic and nomothetic approaches to the description of personal difference exist within the social sciences. McAdams’ (1985) narrative model of identity is an example of the former, whilst the trait, type and five-factor models adopted respectively by Cattell (1965), Eysenck (1975) and McCrae and Costa (1987), would be examples of the latter. The question: What makes you different from everyone else?, thus receives a wide variety of types of answer from professional scientists. Some students answered the question by giving the sort of “I am...” statements about personal attributes or attainments that were central to Rogers’ “self-concept”:-

"I am different from everyone else because of my size."

"I have never been great at sport."

"I am good at sports."

"I have my own distinct way of dressing."

"I am Mr Average."

Other students had recourse, like Cattell (1965) or Eysenck (1975), to home-grown “trait” or “type” descriptions:-
“I am naturally rude.”
“I am very lazy”
“I am more quiet and shy than other people”
“I am more conscious of my appearance than most people.”
“I enjoy being on my own”
“I fail to foresee future consequences”
“I have an easy-going nature.”
“I am good at handling stress.”

Some, like Harré (1998), identified their distinctivenesses by locating themselves comparatively against a variety of spatio-temporal, social and moral matrices:-

“I was born in a different country...with a different culture and religion.”
“I am a foreigner with a different mother tongue and culture.”
“I have a very low EQ.”
“I am more quiet and shy than other people.”

Others refer to their “personality” or their “mind” as a source of uniqueness. When the totality of the students’ replies to the question, “What makes you different from everyone else?” were analysed, it could be seen that students demonstrated that they had two quite distinct modes of response. In the first, the student characteristically gave a brief answer to the question, which tended to consist of a single general statement such as “what makes me different is my personality” or “I try not to be a sheep and do the same as everyone else”, often followed by two or three specific attributes or traits, such as “I get distracted very easily” and “I am very lazy.”

Such brief and de-contextualised descriptions were of a very high degree of generality, and thus bore a striking family resemblance to nomothetic types of “trait”, “type” and “five-factor” models of personal difference. Hogan (1987) and McAdams (1992) argue that such de-contextualised and brief descriptions represent a “psychology of strangers”; “they encapsulate those most general and encompassing attributions - simple, comparative, and virtually nonconditional - that we might wish to make when we know virtually nothing else about a person.” (McAdams, 1992: 353).
Students' ideographic and biographical self-descriptions

In some of their other responses, as well as in their autobiographies, students also provided a quite different idiographic type of answer to the question. In the second type of reply, they recognised that their distinctivenesses arose cumulatively from their unique personal history and experiences, as well as from the sedimented accumulation of their innate and acquired attributions:

"I think that everything makes you different from everyone else. The way you act, the way you speak, the way you look, even a little thing such as the way you walk."

"I always like to think that I am different to everyone else but I can never put my finger on exactly what it is that makes me so unique. Maybe it is my very relaxed attitude towards life, my confusing and hectic family, or my cheeky, witty and rude comments, which no one should ever take seriously. In fact I have decided that it is not a single one of these that makes me different, but every one of them put together."

Like Sacks (1985), Ricoeur (1992/1994) and McAdams (1985), many students recognise that their own biographically-situated experiences and meanings are a major basis of personal identity:

"I am quite different from everyone else because I have been through different experiences than everyone else."

"I am different from everyone else because of what I have been through compared to everyone else, and I always think totally differently to everyone else."

"What really makes me different from everyone else in the world is my special experiences which I have been accumulating for fifteen years."

"I think that I am unique because there really is only one of me. There may be other people with the name Harold Stancliffe, and there are certainly other people with my gifts, but none of them think like me or respond in the same way like me, and, most importantly, none of them feel what I do."

The de-contextualised generality of the students' earlier "trait" statements quoted earlier was quite different from the later references to a quite different biographically-situated, highly contextualised, specific, detailed, and subject-centred self-description.
which was characteristic of their autobiographies. It seemed as if the students were capable of describing themselves in both general “objective” ways, as well as specifically contextualised “subjective” ways.

This difference between these two different approaches to self-description, the first nomothetic and the latter idiographic, is striking. It suggests that the students (unlike a number of social scientists?) are capable of recognising the validity of two entirely distinct ways of talking about personal identity which may be useful in different circumstances.

Having outlined briefly the students’ full repertoire of different ways of representing their personal identity, it is now time to examine in more detail the ways in which the students represented themselves as unique in their life stories.

9.4 Displaying the Data: problems and solutions

At this point, the researcher is presented with the issue of deciding how best to display the complex and voluminous autobiographical data collected during the study, and to do so in a way which does justice to its highly individual and distinctive nature. In this regard, there are particular difficulties in any type of idiographic research; decisions have to be made about how intensive and detailed the treatment of each individual case can be. It will be recalled that, in terms of research design, Harré (1998) has expressed a parallel dilemma which exists for the researcher who must weigh the benefits of an intensive against an extensive design. The design of the present study has aimed to examine both the participants’ social context as well as their individual life stories. As Chapter 5 made clear, each individual autobiography was considered and interpreted intensively in its own right, before any comparative generalisations or other analysis took place. The issue that faces the researcher in the present chapter, however, is not so much one of experimental design, but is, instead, the much more practical issue of how to display the analysed data in an appropriate and adequate way. The latter criterion of “adequacy” is an important one, and may be resolved into two principal components. The data needs to be displayed in such a way that, as far as is practically possible, the individuals may speak in their own words.
Secondly, the data needs to be displayed in such a way that it can address the study’s principal research question: *In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?*

The principal *practical* difficulty involved in displaying the data *adequately* lies in their sheer volume and diversity; the life stories and other autobiographical data run to nearly a quarter of a million words. The sheer volume and diversity of all this highly idiosyncratic data clearly raise important practical issues about how it might be presented. This primary *problem* of data display, with fitting irony, may well be a function of the very condition which the study seeks to explore; *uniqueness*.

The principal aim in displaying the life story data is to enable the reader to gain a fair impression the extraordinary range of idiosyncratic differences which they present. There are a number of possible ways in which this aim might be achieved. The first and most obvious way of displaying the manifold differences presented by the students’ autobiographies would be simply to transcribe and display *all* of the autobiographies in an unabridged form, and to let the unsorted welter of material speak for itself. Although simple and direct, this approach would have the disadvantages of resulting in an insupportably long thesis, and would also fail to offer much in the way of analysis.

A second, and, in many ways, ideal approach would be to print all of the autobiographies in an unabridged form, but this time, each individual autobiography would be accompanied by a detailed analytical commentary, highlighting the unique and unifying features of each and every life story. Though *theoretically* superior in every way, this approach would be even more prohibitively prolix than the first alternative.

A third alternative would be to select a modest number of *themes* which were then illustrated through the extensive use of illustrative extracts from several autobiographies. This method of data presentation has the advantages of using genuine extracts from the life stories, as well as displaying many idiosyncratic differences. Unfortunately, however, only a *small number* of themes could be extensively
illustrated and discussed in significant detail, and therefore many of the other factors which differentiate the autobiographical material would have to be omitted.

A fourth approach - at the opposite end of the spectrum to the first - would, after intensive and rigorous analysis, be to isolate a large number of the ways in which the life stories are differentiated from each other, and to outline these with minimal use of illustrative examples drawn from the autobiographies. Since about seventy unifying and differentiating factors have been isolated, even this more generalised approach would be almost tiresomely long. However, this latter approach has three major advantages. First, it offers a wide-ranging summary of the many differences which can be discerned in the students’ autobiographies. Secondly, the presentation of the results in this more schematic form also offers a degree of analysis of the types of difference present in the life stories. Thirdly, such a generic analysis would provide a clear answer to the principal research question. The principal disadvantage of this method of data display which relied exclusively on generalisations made about the data, would be the exclusion of significant extracts from the “raw” autobiographical data itself.

The solution to the problem of data display that has been adopted in this chapter is something of a compromise. The remainder of the first part of the present chapter selects three broad “themes” and illustrates each with extensive extracts from several of the autobiographies. In this way, the reader may be able to compare and contrast the extracts and so gain a “first hand” impression of the diversity and differences available for inspection in the wider sample. The second part of the chapter then summarises and categorises the manifold types of difference to be observed in the sample as a whole, using specific additional illustrative examples and references to the autobiographies where space permits.

In the first section, the three broad themes selected to illustrate the characteristic range of differences to be found in the life stories are deliberately broad and generic; “birth stories”, “high points” and “low points”. In most cases, the extracts are presented with minimal commentary; it is hoped that the writers’ differences will speak for themselves. Differences in plot, character, tone, theme and style are readily visible in
all of the extracts. Detailed analysis of, and commentary on the manifold types of difference follows in the second part of the chapter, which presents the *Taxonomy of Narrative Differences*. This *Taxonomy* summarises and analyses the many types of difference discovered in the students’ autobiographies as a result of the study’s process of intensive comparative analysis.

9.5 **Speaking for themselves: extracts on three autobiographical themes**

*Birth Stories*

Several students presented accounts of their own births. The differences in the stories are not only frequently striking, but are also frequently very characteristic of the personality presented later in the ensuing autobiography. The opening of Peregrine’s stage-struck autobiography will be recalled from the previous chapter. So that it may be easily compared with the other extracts, it is, for the reader’s convenience, repeated here. Peregrine’s well-honed actor’s sense of how to make a dramatic entrance is very much to the fore:-

The time is 4.00 p.m., the date is Saturday, 23rd of June 1986. In a small corner of Queen Mary’s Hospital in Hampstead, a young woman has just given birth to her first child. Surrounded by flowers, bottles of champagne and large glossy cards, she cradles her child adoringly in her arms. The ward is silent and empty. There is a deep feeling of love and tranquillity as the woman dabs her eyes with the corner of her sleeping baby’s clothing. The only sound is the whirring of the ventilator fan and the light breathing of her little boy.

But the boy wasn’t me and the young woman wasn’t my mother. In startling comparison, I was born with hundreds of unwelcome relatives excitedly chatting and waiting for my flustered mother, high on Horlicks, to give birth. If I had been a little girl, the relatives would no doubt have muttered their congratulations and then slunk away disappointed. Fortunately, however, I had optional extras installed, and so my relatives all produced large bottles of champagne, which, knowing my family was almost certainly black market, and toasted the little fifth baron and my mother, who was being hailed as a saint.

This just goes to show that for some unknown reason, possibly genetically, I have never been able to do something quietly. Not even when I was fourteen minutes old. This embarrassing predicament has followed me round ever since.
In contrast, Tim’s terse autobiography is understated and unemotional in tone. Few other characters are depicted in his story; those that appear are either mentioned only briefly, or alluded to in indirect ways. His descriptions characteristically stick to objective facts, the personal significance of which is not often explored. Whereas Peregrine is acutely self-aware, Tim is not. The possibilities for drama (Stock Market crash and worst storm in recorded history) in the following extract are simply thrown away. Peregrine might not have felt able to resist their dramatic potential, but Tim doesn’t go in for self-dramatisation:-

My life began in February 1987. I was born in Guy’s hospital in London. All I know of 1987 is that the Stock Market crashed and Britain was subjected to one of its worst storms in many years. Whether this was a sign of my coming into being or not I will never know.

In contrast to Tim’s unemotional and non-committal attitude in his narrative, Andrew’s life story is a tale of unusual and extreme drama, with Andrew cast in the role of a hapless victim of disaster, “emergency” and persecution. “More sinned against than sinning”, he nonetheless “struggles” his way to eventual “triumph” through the force of his own extraordinary determination and stickability. The drama of his life begins early:-

I was told that my entry into the world was a struggle. My mother had been in labour for forty-eight hours and I had to be delivered by emergency caesarean section. It was fifteen minutes before the paediatricians were able to revive me. Despite this, during my early childhood I was a healthy, very happy and contented child, so I had after all triumphed. And so the fourteen years that have followed have been like my birth; struggles and triumphs.

Far different from the atmosphere of emergency, storm and stress that surrounded Andrew’s birth, Robert begins his life with a delightful sense of his life’s quirky incongruities, which will later repeatedly characterise his slightly off-beat nature:-

On the 7th. September 1987 I was born into the world exactly a week before I was due. Mum knew that I was a boy (having had the results of tests during her pregnancy) but she had not told my father, as he wanted to wait until the birth to find out whether I was a boy or a girl. Hence, to my Dad I was a complete surprise, shattering his idea that my name ought to be Fiona (cringe)….Due to a lack of blankets at the hospital, I appear in the first photographs wrapped in a pink blanket! Not my style.
After twenty-four hours in hospital, we returned to my first home in the village of Neston near Cranleigh. My mother was determined not to repeat the mistake she made with my sister who needed complete silence in the house to get her to sleep. So, during my early months I slept in a "Moses basket" and was always surrounded by everyday sound. This not only ensured that I slept soundly as a baby, but was also to prove useful in later life. Apparently my favourite place was on top of the washing machine when it was going!

The final example in this “birth story” section features Dennis who will be encountered again later. Dennis describes several events in which he seems almost deliberately to do the opposite of what everyone else around him is doing. He seems to revel in his contrary nature which, if his account of his breech birth is to be believed, was in evidence from the moment he was born. His autobiography begins abruptly, and as follows:

The first problem was that I was the wrong way up, and sitting the wrong way round. I was very comfortable, resting there in the womb, but unfortunately for my mother, her belly would have to be sliced open. Typically my mother’s contractions started in the middle of the night at 2am, and I was born through a caesarean section at 8am.

High Points

All of the students who contributed their autobiographies to the study could recognise experiences in their lives which stood out because they were particularly happy, joyful or exciting. Characteristically, these experiences would involve the fulfilment of some desire or goal that was personally meaningful. The sheer variety of such “peak experiences” (Maslow’s term is discussed in more detail in the Taxonomy) was considerable. Bakan (1966) suggests that each person will have characteristic preferences for one of two classes of motivational goals, either “communal” or “agentic”. Those who fit into the former category might be more interested in relationships with people, whilst the latter might emphasise the importance of personal achievement and power in their lives. This proposal is discussed further in the Taxonomy below. Whatever its other merits, the two categories offer a convenient and simple schema for displaying some characteristic differences in the types of experience which individual’s find intensely satisfying. The first cluster of extracts, which might be loosely classified as “agentic” in Bakan’s terminology, show their
writers deriving intense satisfaction from a personal achievement which extends the scope and potency of their power to act. The quiet and gentle Chris, for instance, describes the occasion, when, at his Primary school, he confronted and finally mastered his "stomach churning dread" of P.E. lessons with their torture chamber of gymnastic instruments, wall bars, vaulting horse, and, worst of all, "the rope". In an account headed "One small step for a man, one giant leap for me", he offers the following account of the experience:-

There was one lesson a week that I used to dread completely, P.E. It haunted me every week. Every time I thought about it my stomach would cramp up as if all the air was being sucked out of it. P.E. included climbing up the wall bars; not very enjoyable if you are scared of heights and if you constantly slip. Jumping over the horse was also far from fun as I was never able to clear it in one go. Finally, there was my evil nemesis, the rope. I had seen so many people conquer the rope that I knew that I could do it, but time after time I would reach up, grip the rope tight with all my might, and lift my body off the floor. Feeling and looking like a conker hanging from a piece of string, my hands would sweat so much that it was impossible to maintain a grip, and so I would slide down again (not that there was much to slide down) and, as usual, I would have failed. Claiming that I could do it to my classmates but that "I didn't ever feel like climbing the rope in P.E. and preferred to do it in my own time", I knew that one day I would do it. That day came.

As usual, the teacher would pick some of the children at random to show everyone else what they had learned to do during the lesson. Luckily for me, she usually chose those with their hands up, who were, quite predictably, the ones who were good at bending their bodies into obscure shapes and performing to the rest of the class. But on one day, despite there being a sea of hands in the air which even Moses would have found hard to separate, Mrs. Briggs (my teacher) said, "Let's have someone who we haven't seen for a bit". My heart froze, as her piercing eyes swept the floor, until they finally rested on mine. "Chris, how about you?" she exclaimed, "Let's see you climb the rope". All eyes turned, and so did my stomach. I stood up and made my way over to where the instrument of torture was hanging. I felt so alone; nobody really wanted me to succeed. They all had their fingers crossed that I would fail, which would fuel their mocking and scornful comments.

I reached up, took a firm grasp of the rope and hooked my legs around the bottom. I was in conker mode! There was a pause whilst I hung there, then using all my strength I moved my hand up two centimetres, and then my feet followed. This routine was repeated for about ten minutes until I was about thirty centimetres from the top. This was when I made my mistake; I looked down. The people on the ground were all staring up. I froze, and then I heard one voice say "Come on Chris, you can do it". My heart leapt and I left my troubles behind as I continued on my mission. As I reached out to touch the
roof I heard several shouts of “You’re nearly there”. I touched the roof; its polystyrene panels meant so much to me now. I had done it. Then without further hesitation I began my descent, but fumbled with my hands and I slid, my hands getting hotter by the second. The floor broke my fall and my hands were badly rope burned, but that mattered little as I had finally conquered my Everest. From that day I knew that if I tried my hardest to do something and had some encouragement, then I would succeed in most of the things I attempted.

The experience of learning to ride a two-wheeled bicycle without stabilisers is a high point for three of the students, serving not only as an important developmental milestone, but also, as in the next extract, as an icon of personal achievement. Ashley is a quiet and self-possessed student who, in general, prefers to be alone when he enjoys some of his life’s most important experiences:-

I was very young, I must only have been about three and a half, but I was a fairly competent cyclist already. The prospect of riding without stabilisers was a very daunting one for me; I found it hard to stay upright whilst moving my legs in an attempt to pedal. One day, however, I managed to pull off this dangerous stunt and it was just as if the penny had dropped, it was seemingly miraculous. One minute I was falling off the lean green cycling machine and the next I was riding with the skill and excellence of Mr. O’Neill!* I remember looking down at the cross bars and seeing the rough concrete path whiz by in a blur of grey, black and white. This thought sticks in my mind and whenever I achieve something to this day, I think of this. (*allusion to the researcher who regularly cycled around the school grounds).

For Will, however, his important achievement is not physical, but intellectual. He describes the nervous anticipation he feels whilst he awaits the results of the Common Entrance examination which will evaluate his academic performance to date, and also determine whether he wins a place at Bentham’s or not. The metaphysical overtones of his language (he speaks tellingly of the “Last Judgement”, “God”, and his “mission”) convey his sense of the acute personal significance which these exam results had for him:-

I was full of anxiety and uncontrollable nerves, which would violently shake me into fits of shivering and cause me to show my fear. I heard the recognisable voice of Mr. Wates, my maths teacher, call for the next boy to come in. One of my friends patted me on the back and wished me good luck. I replied, “I’ll need it for when I get home and have to confront my parents.”
I entered the room and saw Mr. Wates sitting calmly at the table with a letter in front of him. He looked at me with his deep in-set eyes and said "Please sit down." As I did so, he pushed the open letter towards me. It seemed a year before he spoke to me again. My mind was trying to take in the fact that all I had been working towards for the last five years of my life was contained in that little envelope. For me this moment resembled Judgement Day. I was standing in the presence of God, who was wearing a frown on his face. This did not look good to me. He then proceeded to say simply "Open it", and as I did so, I chanced a glance up at his face. He was smiling in a kind and knowing sort of way. I opened the letter quickly and tore into the sheet of paper which had on it the most beautiful sentence ever. It said: "Well, done, you have been accepted into Bentham's. We look forward to meeting you next term. The letter then went on to show a line of As and Bs. I was completely speechless as I placed the sheet of paper down on the table, wearing a huge grin across my face.

"Most impressive, Will; I always expected much from you." I thanked him as I ran out to join the line of people waiting by the pay phone. My life was now a success as I had proved my worth in the ultimate test of endurance and intelligence. This was "mission complete".

The three extracts given so far reflect moments of personal achievement in which the writer demonstrates an important solo achievement which Bakan (1966) and McAdams (1985, 1993) would see as characteristically “agentic”. For other writers, however, the most precious moments are crucially concerned with a moment which blossoms into a special quality or intensity of personal relationship. Rodney has a twin brother with whom he has a close but competitive relationship. He hates to be alone. A number of experiences narrated in his autobiography are permeated by an underlying anxiety that he might be “hopeless”, and may thus cause him to forfeit the right to be valued and approved of by the significant adults around him. Although focused around the achievement of catching a fish, the high point and crucial significance of Rodney’s account of his “peak experience” is really the high quality of relationship with his father that it represents:-

I remember my peak experience as if it were yesterday. I must have been six years old. It was a Wednesday afternoon and my brother had been invited to a friend’s party. I was not invited, not being a particular friend. I was upset, not because I wanted to be invited to the party, but because they were being taken to see the latest cartoon movie called “The Jungle Book” at the cinema. To cheer me up, therefore, my father took me off fishing with him. I had never been fishing in my life before that time, even though it was (and still is) a great hobby of my father’s. For almost as long as I can remember, I can visualise him packing his fishing equipment ready for a week’s Fly fishing. Being only
six I felt this a great honour to be allowed to go fly-fishing with him. I almost felt like an adult. I remember my father giving me a little fishing rod that he said was once his; this made me feel even more special. I can also recall him saying before we left, "If you like fishing after today, you can have that rod", to which my reply was "I already like fishing, daddy."

We had about an hour’s drive in the car, during which time I recall non-stop uninterrupted discussions about fishing in which my father told me everything I needed to know. When we arrived it was about three o’clock. It was a beautiful summer day on the River Chess. I was told that this was the best trout river that my father had fished, and it was ideal for a beginner like myself. As we got out of the car, I remember my father’s look of pride as he saw me trying to lift out of the car everything that I now understood was essential for today’s fishing. A great sense of joy was in the atmosphere as father and son walked down the muddy path for what was to become the peak experience of my life.

Throughout the afternoon he taught me to cast properly. Both of us were lucky to have a lot of patience! My father remained calm as most of my casts managed to get the line entangled into as many different types of knot that have ever existed. I, on the other hand, remained very content because I was spending quality time with my father. It was at this moment that something extraordinary happened; my father announced that I was now ready to cast into the river on my own. I was worried that if I entangled my line one more time, my father might have a nervous breakdown. As I prepared myself for this all-important task I heard my father say "Go on Rodney, catch a fish." At that moment, I flung the rod forward and saw the cast come to lie rather pathetically on the water. I had been told that the place was not a good lie for a fish to bite, but my father told me it was a brilliant cast, and told me to keep it in the water, just in case a fish should bite. As I waited, a huge pull on the line almost pulled me in after it. My father leapt up from where he was sitting and came to my aid. He shouted with a cry, "It’s huge, Rodney!" The amount of adrenalin going through my body was enormous. Finally we caught the fish; it was a three pound brown trout. I returned home a very happy boy.

David is more undemonstrative, and even taciturn, but the “turning point” of his life, as well as its peak experience, also involves people; after a fairly solitary younger childhood, he describes very briefly his discovery of friendship:-

The turning point of my life was about a week before we went back to school and one of my friends was having a party at LaserQuest in Basingstoke. At this point I think we all realised how good friends we were, and we joked around lots. We had a great time there and I felt like I had found a whole new way to look at things.

The distinctive and eccentric Peregrine has his peak experiences on the stage. His finest moment comes when he plays the part of a silver-clad android on roller blades
in the musical adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* called “*Return to the Forbidden Planet*”. The extended and dramatic saga of this production with its many theatrical “ups” and “downs” is too long to quote at length, but the following extract concludes both Peregrine’s account of the episode and also provides the climax to his autobiography as a whole. Although his performance was very highly acclaimed and considered to be a very exceptional technical achievement, his ecstasy as he takes his final bow is tied up with the more “communal” theme of feeling loved by the audience:–

Then, at the Finale, when I entered to bow, the audience went wild, and before long we were facing a standing ovation.

That was totally brilliant. The best feeling I have ever got was from that audience, going utterly mad because they loved us all that much. If having an ego is a drug, then I’m an addict and that night was a serious overdose. I can still remember from that time how we got four curtain calls, and had a large part of the audience coming down onto the stage to congratulate us. Over a hundred pupils, two esteemed housemasters, the Headmaster, a chemistry master and even the head of the R.S. Department were still on the stage even after the curtain had gone down.

That night, and the thought of it, always raises my spirits. It’s an experience I will never forget. Everyone clapping the hardest they can, for me.

*Low points*

For many students, it is an encounter with death that provides the commonest cause of their life’s lowest point, but the range of such experiences is very wide. For some students it involves the death of a close family member, such as a parent, grandparent or sibling. For others it involves the death of a pet. For yet others it may be a close brush with the prospect of their own death. Whatever the severity of the external instantiating event, the range of responses to the unhappy event is also very wide; some students are devastated whilst, at the opposite end of the spectrum, others boast about not crying or feeling upset at all.

Rahim, a quiet, courteous and self-contained student from Pakistan has not one but two dramatic brushes with death. His confrontation with three armed gunmen is dealt
with later. In the following extract he is involved in a near-fatal plane hijacking
incident that, however objectively dramatic it may have been, is recounted in a
realistic way that avoids any sense of deliberate self-dramatisation. Rahim is returning
with a school swimming team from a contest in Colombo. The usual five hour ‘plane
journey returning to Pakistan has already stretched to six hours, and the plane’s
passengers are beginning to wonder what it happening:-

Then we heard this announcement: “Ladies and Gentlemen, you may have
realised that the plane has been circling in the air for the last few hours, and
you may be wondering why. Well, that is what I am about to tell you. Pakistan
is currently in a state of political chaos. In case you have not recognized me,
this is the Pakistan Army General talking to you. Let me tell you what is
happening. Just a few hours ago, the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, sacked
me from being army general for no particular reason. He knows I am on board
this particular plane, and so in fear of retaliation from me and mine, he has
instructed the control tower to deny this plane landing permission. Please do
not panic. We are thinking of alternative places to land, but the problem is that
we do not have much fuel left. I will keep in touch with you as the situation
develops, but please do not be afraid. Just pray to God to help us."

Everyone was silent for a while. We were all lost in our own worlds, all of us
thinking of the worst possible outcome. He had said that there was not a lot of
fuel left on the plane. What if they don’t let us land and the plane crashes?
What will happen to all of us? Will we all die? My mind was full of questions
with no answers. I was scared.

I prayed to God to save us. I guessed everyone else was doing the same. The
swimming coaches as well as all the other members of the swimming team
were still in a state of shock. The next few minutes were going to be crucial,
and they would decide whether we were about to die or not. I wondered what
my parents were thinking at the time, and if they knew what was happening. I
thought of my grandparents, my little brother and my sister, all my friends. I
felt like crying. I wanted this terrible nightmare to end, but it would not. It just
continued.

It had been more than ten minutes since the announcement, and everybody
was beginning to get very worried. Then we heard the same voice again:
“Ladies and Gentlemen, I apologise for what has happened. The Prime
Minister wants me dead, and the men at the control tower are not giving us
landing permission under any circumstances. In fact, there are oil trucks
parked in the middle of the runways to stop us landing. We have enough fuel
for another twenty minutes. I don’t want to depress you too much, but at this
moment it looks as if we will not live long. Good luck. Amen.”

People around me started crying. Some turned on their mobile phones, trying
to contact heir loved ones at home. Others were just sitting in a state of shock.
I felt as if I were in a depressing scene in a movie. I could not believe that I would ever see my family or friends again.

Another announcement came: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Allah has answered our prayers. I have been in contact with my men. They have managed to take control of the airport in Karachi. We have fuel to fly for another seven minutes, and so the next few minutes are crucial. We are landing now, so please get ready and fasten your seatbelts." I wanted to scream with happiness, but I knew the nightmare was still not over.

I felt the plane descending rapidly; there was not much time left now. Suspense was building up among the passengers as the plane went down. Then suddenly I felt a jolt. The plane's wheels had touched the ground, and we were home. We all gave a sigh of relief. A miracle had taken place. We had been minutes away from death, but we had lived through it.

Some minutes later, re-united with his parents, he says, somewhat apologetically:-

Although it may have looked a childish act, I could not get myself to stop hugging them for a long time.

When he was six years old, Tom had the worst experience of his life when he saw his pet dog killed in a road accident. The experience, he claims, taught him "the meaning of a life":-

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon when my brother, my sister and I said, Let's go to the park and play football!" So everyone got ready and we brought our bikes from the shed. Before going out of the gate, we waved at our dog who was about a year old. His name was "Buster" and he was the cutest living thing, especially when he licked your face.

We got on our bikes and we started pedalling as fast as possible because it was very hot and we wanted to get some fresh air. It felt really nice. I thought the whole journey was going to be normal until I heard the creaking noise of the garden gate as it swung open. I immediately turned my head to see what was going on, and I caught sight of Buster, who was squeezing his way through the gate that lead to the road. I was so terrified at the sight that I was almost paralysed. I quickly tried to shout for help so that someone would stop him, but my words wouldn't come out clearly. I screamed at my parents, but it was too late - Buster sprinted towards us across the busy road, and the next thing I knew was that a huge van ran over him and was accelerating away as if nothing had happened. What could I do? I ran up to the small, crunched body which was so bloody that I was unable to figure out where his head was. It was a disgusting sight and I burst into tears. My sister was crying too, just like me. We tried to carry the little body back to our house. I knew it was too late, but we had to try and do our best, but it was too late. From this accident, I
found out how important a life is and how guilty you become. Now and again we go to his grave and apologize for what we have done.

Andrew is travelling with his mother and young brother when they are involved in a car accident. In the following account, the sense of confusion and drama is intense, and the choice of *vocabulary* is more dramatic than that used by Rahim in his account. The lorry is "huge", and the cavalcade of rescue vehicles is redolent of many Hollywood films, though the event was clearly very shocking for the writer:-

As we passed the crossroads a huge articulated lorry pulled out in front of us and Mom could not brake quickly enough. I cannot even remember the point of impact because it all happened so quickly. The lorry had spun our car into a field and before we knew it, the car was lying in a field at the side of the road. People were quickly at the scene getting my brother and I out of our seat belts. We were taken to safety in the back seat of someone else's car. My Mom was unconscious and bleeding and it was too frightening for us as children. Almost immediately, I could hear the sirens of police cars, ambulances and a fire engine, and then the whirring of a helicopter. The front of the car was completely smashed in, and Mom was trapped in her seat. Her knees and her head were bleeding from being hit on the windscreen. The door was smashed so it could not be opened. The firemen had to cut her out of the car.

Later, visiting his mother in the hospital he sees his mother asleep and thinks:-

She looked like a monster with all the blood that was dried around the cuts in her face and head.

Quite different from the tone of gothic horror that pervades Andrew’s dramatic account is Alex’s quiet, factual and restrained account of his own car crash. Alex was only three when he and his older brother were also involved in a car accident whilst his pregnant mother was driving. The factual, understated and gentle tone of this account avoids drama and gothic horror, but that very gentleness gives the story a terrible poignancy:-

From out of nowhere, as we were going around a roundabout, a car came flying around as if it were a Formula One racing car. The car hit us head-on and then flipped over onto its back. I was instantly knocked unconscious and suffered whiplash. My brother didn’t seem to have any visible injuries though the shock of it must have been bad enough. But my poor mother, her legs were trapped inside the car and both her feet had been broken. There had been no news of the baby’s condition yet.
My brother and I were transported to hospital in a separate ambulance from our Mum, and we didn’t get to see her for quite a while. When we did get to see her she was really poorly and extremely upset. She told us that Grace - that was the name we had decided for the baby - hadn’t survived the accident. We did eventually see her and she was so sweet and little, and her skin was so soft.

In contrast to the poignant sensitivity of the last extract, a few of the students seem to adopt a more resolutely robust attitude to death:-

If I had to say what the worst part of my life was so far, I would say that it was my grandpa dying. ...One evening, just before I was to go to bed my parents broke the news to me. It took me a few minutes to take the news in before I started crying. But funnily enough I stopped in just ten minutes.

Jack, who, after an earlier and prolonged period of “depression” after the death of his grandfather, adopts a philosophical tone when his grandmother dies:-

It came as a hard blow to me, even though most of my close times with her were whilst my brother and I tried to cheat her playing “Scrabble”, but the funeral was a very emotional experience for me. One good thing that came from this was my innocence about death had ended and I became more philosophical about it in general. It had to happen after all.

PART 2: TAXONOMY OF NARRATIVE DIFFERENCES

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...*

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portugese*)

9.6 Nature and purpose of the Taxonomy

As was outlined earlier, the contents of the *Taxonomy of Narrative Differences* described below are derived from the sample of forty-two life stories written by the students who participated in the autobiographical part of the research. Each life story was read repeatedly until its distinctive sense of subjective identity could be grasped. Having attained some understanding of the distinctivenesses of each individual life story, the life stories were read many times to compare and contrast the many ways in
which the stories were differentiated from each other. At the end of this detailed analytical reading, a large number of differentiating categories were isolated and listed. That analysis forms the basis for the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences outlined below.

For the sake of clarity, a process of further reflection sorted the sixty-three constituent categories of the Taxonomy into four super-ordinate categories. It was hoped that the classification of the individual differentiating features into a structured taxonomy would both summarise and display clearly the enormous range of ways in which the life stories were differentiated from each other. The four super-ordinate categories used in the taxonomy are those of plot, character, theme and style. Each of these super-ordinate categories accommodate several other sub-categories which represent specific ways in which life stories were differentiated from each other. The super-ordinate categories and their constituent categories are hereafter referred to, respectively, as narrative “modalities” and “sub-modalities” (The origins of these terms are outlined in the following section.) Unlike “trait”, “type” or “factor” theories, each “sub-modality” usually represents not a single simple factor, but a continuum or spectrum of actual or possible differences. When all of the sub-modalities are considered together, therefore, the number of actual or possible differences which the taxonomy as a whole can represent is very large indeed. Most of the taxonomy’s “sub-modalities” are capable of representing either a very large, or, in most cases, an infinite number of variations. Therefore, although the taxonomy is based on a finite but large number of actual differences displayed by the research sample of students’ life stories, the taxonomy is, as a whole, cumulatively capable of representing an infinite number of possible differences.

The thirteen categories which appeared in the previous Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns are also capable, as discussed earlier, of differentiating as well as unifying life stories. If the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns from the previous chapter is considered together with the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences in the present chapter, then the number of possible permutations which the Taxonomies could represent would be very large indeed, which means that the Taxonomies might serve
as a descriptive tool capable of accommodating at least as many different unique narrative identities as there are people on the planet.

For readers who enjoy playing with numbers, the previous sentence's claim can be quantified. The researcher's mathematical colleagues suggest that if it were to be assumed that each of the sub-modalities incorporated within the two Taxonomies were to have only three possible values (so that, for instance, the sub-modality of "Overall plot tone" had the three simple values of "optimistic", "pessimistic" and "neutral") then the total number of possible different permutations representable by the Taxonomies would be \(6.76 \times 10^{24}\), an almost astronomical figure that far exceeds the world's current population by at least a factor of \(10^{14}\). Even this astronomical figure is much too conservative. Most of the sub-modalities in the Taxonomy are capable of representing not three, but an infinite number of differences, so the actual mathematical number of permutations representable by the Taxonomy is also infinite. Leaving aside these number games, the essential point remains the same: a narrative model for personal identity can easily represent a very large number of personal differences, and so is well equipped to describe both the personal uniquenesses of the forty-two students, as well as many other individuals.

9.7 Towards a taxonomy of narrative "modalities" and "sub-modalities"

The literature of Neuro-linguistic programming (e.g. Bandler and Grinder, 1975a, 1975b; O'Connor and Seymour, 1990) suggests that peoples' perceptual experiences may enter consciousness in a number of distinct "modes", with the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modes being the most common. In the course of everyday experience, the perceptual information from the senses enters the brain and enables the mind to form a highly selective "representation" which has visual, auditory and kinaesthetic components. Further research and practice (O'Connor and Seymour, 1990) within this tradition, however, has suggested that each of these three basic "modalities" may be further differentiated into "sub-modalities". For instance, a mental picture of an experience may be in colour or black and white; it may be blurred or sharply-focussed; it may be bright or dark; the picture may be moving or still; the picture may be seen as if through ones own eyes, or it may seem as if it is seen through the eyes a
third person. In this way, each of the major sensory “modalities” may be further differentiated into “sub-modalities”. Neuro-linguistic programming has, in this way, developed an analytical schema capable of providing an analytical taxonomy for people’s mental schemas of considerable acuity and specificity. Unlike neuro-linguistic programming, however, the primary focus of the present study is not upon perception and cognition in general, but upon a particular specialised narrative type of cognition by which identity is represented. The taxonomy of narrative differences which appears in this chapter might be seen as an attempt to provide, in a parallel manner, an analytical framework of basic narrative categories and sub-categories through which a person’s narrative identity may be analysed.

9.8 Finding a structure for the Taxonomy

Throughout the centuries, many thinkers have tried to analyses the basic ingredients of a good story. Since at least the time of Aristotle’s Poetics, many analysts of narrative structure have debated its fundamental constituents vigorously and extensively. Theorists such as Propp (1968), Bremond (1973), Kermode (1979), Frye (1957), Ricoeur (1992/1994), Greimas (1966, 1988), Todorov (1977), Bruner (1986, 1990), Campbell (1962, 1964, 1968) and Burke (1945) were, in particular, consulted during preparations for the present study. Aristotle, still a starting point for many theorists, suggests that plot, character and theme constitute the matter of a narrative, whilst language, melody and spectacle constitute its manner. Ricoeur (1992/1994), like Propp (1968), Greimas (1966, 1988), Bremond (1973) and many other theorists, has tended to concentrate mainly on the first two of these items, and speculate about the relationship between them. Summarising the labyrinthine debates on both the structure of narrative, and the precise relationship between plot and character, Bruner, however, concludes that the “arguments are more interesting than conclusive.” (Bruner, 1986: 16).

The majority of the theoretical debates about narrative structure, though interesting, are therefore far beyond the scope of the present study, whose approach is more inductively than theoretically driven. The present study’s approach to narrative analysis, it will be recalled, has primarily been guided by the students’
autobiographies themselves, rather than by the theoretical debates about narrative structure. After trying to understand each of the autobiographies in themselves, the life stories written by the participants were analysed again, this time asking the question: In what specific ways do the authors of the autobiographies display differences in their life stories?

The aim of this analytical process was simply to describe and only then to attempt to classify some of the characteristic ways in which individual stories differed from each other. The researcher had formed no prior particular analytical schema in his mind when this descriptive process of analysis was undertaken, and the guiding principle was to allow the data, as far as possible, to speak for itself. In this analytical process, the characteristic differences and patterns of the researcher’s particular collection of life stories were allowed to emerge in the process of interpretation and analysis, aided by the kinds of critical questions raised by some of the narrative theorists previously alluded to.

At a much later stage, an attempt was made to categorise some of the numerous types of difference that had emerged in the process of comparing the life stories. This categorisation was undertaken for practical reasons only; the emerging list of ways in which stories could exhibit differences was becoming dauntingly unwieldy. In the end, a much-simplified version of Aristotle’s narrative schema was adopted to provide a framework of basic or super-ordinate narrative categories under which the other specific narrative features might be classified.

As organising categories in the final cosmetic “tidying up” of the Taxonomy, Aristotle’s first triad of plot, character and theme were retained unchanged, and his second triad of language, melody and spectacle were amalgamated under the single category of “style”. These categories were employed, it must be stressed, simply to display the detailed findings of the analysis more clearly, and to make the findings practically usable in the business of further analysis of life stories. No theoretical claims are made for the current arrangement of the taxonomy beyond these. The descriptive taxonomy thus provides a kind of analytical framework for a number of
“sub-modalities” within the general “modalities” provided by the Aristotelian narrative categories.

9.9 The Taxonomy of Narrative Differences

PLOT

a) Content: “What I’ve been through.”

1. A unique package of experiences.

As both Harré (1998) and Jarvis (1987, 1999) have argued in their different ways, each person’s life is unique and individual because each person has a unique location in time and space, and thus has experiences which, both objectively and subjectively, no-one else has. Not only has no-one else occupied a position identical in space and time with the one which I occupy, but also even if they were to do so, (for instance, in one of those reality-defying examples beloved of philosophers such as Parfitt, 1984/1986) that person would not be the subject of my experiences. I, and I alone, am the subject (the perceiver and interpreter) of my own experiences. This collection of experiences is unique since, in the entire history of the universe, no-one else has been the subject of these particular events and experiences, at these particular times and places; as the Andrews Sisters’ song put it succinctly: “There’ll never be another you”. Furthermore, in presenting a narrated version of these unique experiences, narrators add an additional layer of uniqueness and idiosyncracy through the manner in which they edit, arrange and present their personal selection of the highlights of their personal experiences. In two different ways, therefore, both the “package” of unique actual events, and the narrated version of them are unique; a person’s life, and the story of it are both unique. This compendious feature of life stories, pertaining as it does to the whole life story, cannot be illustrated by isolated extracts.
2. Distinctive defining moments

When the person reflects upon the meaning and significance of different events and experiences in their life course, some are usually accorded greater importance than others. The most dramatic of such moments is what Denzin (1989) and other have termed a "turning point", an event which the person perceives as pivotal in the course of their life, an event which punctuates the life into a decisive "before" and "after". Such "punctuations", however, need not be confined to Denzin's (1989) "turning points"; McAdams (1985) suggests that several other types of experience, which he calls "key experiences", may also serve to punctuate the life course in different in important ways. Each experience of special personal importance may add an additional facet to the person's unique sense of who they are; not only is a person's life course unique as a whole, but its specific punctuations by these moments of heightened significance, is also unique.

The autobiographies provide evidence of a variety of distinctive defining moments which include peak experiences, early experiences, nadir experiences, stasis experiences, important emotional learnings, as well as other specific memorable or dramatic experiences.

As reported earlier, decisive "turning points" were rather less common than Denzin's work seems to suppose, with just under half of the students identifying an experience which they saw as a decisive and pivotal moment after which their life was never the same again. For Ed, for instance, that moment was when he, on his fifth birthday, proposed to "the most beautiful girl in the class, whom I loved" and experienced a rejection that he felt so deeply, that ever after he became a very introverted person. For Eric, the decisive moment was the death of his mother, whilst for Japanese students Yake and Toro, it was the moment at which they left their Japanese homeland and were sent as boarders to English prep schools. For Chris, it was the day when, after months of "stomach-churning dread" of P.E. lessons, he succeeded in climbing a rope (and his own "personal Everest") in a gym lesson.
3. Specific peak experience

All of the autobiographers include at least one account of what Maslow (1968: 111; 1971: 105) has called a “peak experience”, characteristically an experience of happiness, satisfaction, contentment or joy. McAdams (1993) believes that such experiences are particularly revealing, and the present study confirms his claim. In their chosen peak experiences, each writer frequently chooses something of particular and intense personal significance, and their choice often exhibits, at the moment of its fulfilment, one of the person’s most important or cherished needs or desires. For instance, for David, something of a loner for much of his earlier life, he discovers the joy of being part of a whole group of good friends on a prep school outward-bound weekend.

Jack, whose earlier life is fractured painfully by his parents’ broken marriage, subsequent further broken marriages, and an apparently cruel and persecutory older sister, is full of joy when the family come together at the marriage of his eldest sister. In top hat and tails ("like a hippo in a morning suit") he is deliriously and tipsily happy to act as an usher. The moment comes when his sister and brother-in-law-to-be make their vows. Hardened cynic that he is, he finds tears streaming down his face: “Though I tried, the tears would not stop coming”. He watches the groom “with an expression on his face as if nothing could hurt him”, and, as his now transformed erstwhile persecutor “sings Voi Casepete in a clear classical voice”, he feels “proud” and weeps “from joy and not from sadness.” For a while at least, he is happy to have a family which is together, and in harmony.

4. Particular early experiences

Many writers, from Freud (1910, 1933, 1940), through Bowlby (1969, 1973) to McAdams (1993) have argued for the decisive importance of early childhood experiences on the developing personality. Denzin (1989) suggests that an autobiographer’s interest in childhood origins is a generic feature of what Denzin sees as the characteristically “Western” type of autobiography. A fuller discussion of Denzin’s claim takes place in Chapter 10, but for the present it is clear from the
students’ autobiographies that many writers attach a special importance to their recollections of early childhood experiences.

There are, however, wide variations in both the style and content of the early experiences which individual’s select for inclusion in their autobiographies. For some, the early memories are vague and dream-like; for others they are vivid. Some writers, like Doug, dwell almost exclusively in their earlier childhood memories, whilst others, such as Rahim, omit them altogether. Rahim has always been, it seems, mature and grown up. The early experiences recounted are often very revealing, in many cases offering a vignette of a particular writer’s character or later interests. Jock’s life, for instance, opens beside a racing track; his father is “mad on motor racing”, and so baby Jock is beside the track every weekend. The smell of petrol and oil permeate the house. Not surprisingly, by the age of three, Jock, too, is keen on all things motorised, and so begins a lifetime’s interest in motor racing.

5. Particular nadir experiences

Most writers also identify experiences which were particularly painful, and which, in consequence, mark a low point in their lives. Such experiences frequently involve the loss of something precious, usually in the form of the bereavement of close family member, a friend or, in two cases, the tragic loss of pets. The death of a parent - as in the case of Eric - has an enormous impact, but so do many other sorts of things. Ed, it may be recalled, suffered the pangs of unrequited love when he proposed to a girl on his fifth birthday. Ed is someone for whom close bonds are very important. He meets Sam, the person who becomes his best friend when they are both only three years old, but Sam dies at the age of eight. The pain of this loss, coming, as it does after being rejected by his erstwhile five-year old girlfriend, makes Ed wary of forming close friendships thereafter.

6. Other specific memorable or dramatic experiences

Several autobiographies contain accounts of experiences which are very memorable or dramatic, but which do not fit easily into any of the previous categories. For instance,
three armed robbers break into the compound surrounding Rahim’s house in Pakistan, and beat up the maid and security guards. Working alone in his room, Rahim, who knows nothing of this drama, comes downstairs for a break from his school work and can find no-one around. Moments later, one of the armed robbers sees him, and Rahim begins to run. “Stop, stop, or I will shoot”, shouts the gunman. Somewhat understatedly, Rahim’s narrative continues:-

But I did not stop. I guessed that my parents had locked themselves in a room and I knew that if this robber caught me, I would be used as a hostage for my parents to come out and for the robbers to get away with everything they wanted. I was determined not to let the man catch me. I ran faster and faster. I was really frightened.

Such an experience was clearly memorable for Rahim, though he sees it as neither a “peak” nor a “nadir” experience for him.

7. Defining stasis experiences

Less dramatic, but equally important for quite a large number of the students, are the experiences which provide the ongoing and stable background to whatever more dramatic experiences may be going on in the foreground of their lives. The importance of such experiences of stability and stasis are recognised by many of the students. For Rahim, as for many others, that ongoing thread of reliability is provided by his parents who act as the base-camp to which he always returns after the “challenging” experiences of his globe-trotting life (the three armed gunmen incident is not the only dramatic event of his life; worse is to come later in his story).

Unlucky-in-love Ed both opens and closes his life story with an acknowledgement of the stabilising importance of his parents:

Luckily for me I was brought up by two parents who cared for me all the time; they never allowed me to go astray.....Whatever comments people may have on my life, I have encountered enough to keep me level-headed for the rest of my life.
8. Important emotional learnings

One of the researcher’s many surprises was to note how frequently the students chose to write about experiences from which they felt that they had learned important emotional lessons. Rodney, at the time a ten-year-old with a very poor opinion of himself, wins a school swimming race and learns an important lesson that will carry him far beyond the end of the swimming pool:-

I was not hopeless and that I could be good at anything if I put my mind to it.

Eric, who lost his mother at the age of thirteen, is numbed with grief, and his life gets somehow “stuck”. During the research period, he witnesses, live on television the devastation, on September 11th, 2001, of New York’s World Trade Center (a place he had visited in happier days with his parents). Though profoundly shocked at the destruction and loss of innocent life, the event seems, for him, to catalyse some sort of closure on his own bereavement. Reflecting on those events he learns two lessons:-

First, I learned the preciousness of life, and secondly, I resolved that I would live life completely and achieve what I want to do.

In what unpredictable ways the phoenix of new life rises from the ashes of the past’s death and destruction!

b) Overall organisation, interpretation and evaluation of experiences

This section discusses some of the ways in which the overall structure and organisation of the life stories could be distinguished from each other. Most of the narrative features mentioned in this section cannot easily be illustrated through the use of particular isolated extracts, since the features discussed are properties of the life stories as a whole.
9. Degree of structuration of the narrative

Some life stories are very highly organised indeed. The authors of the most highly organised narratives invent their own structures for selecting, organising and displaying their material. Some of the structuring devices employed include the clear division of the life story into episodes or chapters which are recognisably part of a planned and coherent whole, and give evidence of the careful choice of a particular number of chapters, use idiosyncratic classifications of their material and select personally significant or witty chapter titles. Peregrine’s flamboyant and witty chapter titles will, for instance, be readily recalled from the previous chapter.

At the other end of the spectrum, some authors tell life stories whose overall plan and structure is not at all clear. The events narrated follow one after another with neither the reasons for their selection, nor the perceived connections between them, being made clear. The autobiographies of Peregrine, Barnaby and Freddie are examples of the former highly structured end of the autobiographical spectrum, whilst Peter provides an extreme example of the latter. Loewinger (1976) and McAdams (1985: 119ff) have suggested that the complexity and structure of narratives may indicate a corresponding degree of ego development, but the discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of the present work.

10. Overall direction of plot line (upwards or downwards)

In a discussion of narrative form, Gergen and Gergen (1993: 207) propose that the overall plot of people’s life story narratives might be represented in graphical form as a single line which moves forward through time, and rises or falls according to its subject’s successes and failures. As will be recalled from Chapter 7, they further propose that there are three very basic types of “story line”; the upward diagonal line of the progressive narrative, the downward diagonal line of the regressive narrative, and the horizontal straight line (placed variously high or low on the graph) which they call the stability narrative. On the basis of an earlier empirical study (Gergen and Gergen, 1987), they argue that all actual life stories are composed of complexly combined elements from these three basic types of plot line. As reported in Chapter 7,
and as further discussed in Chapter 10, the present study would criticise both the
design and the findings of the Gergens’ study. Nonetheless, for the analytical purposes
of the taxonomy, however, the three types provided a useful starting point for asking
questions about the overall shape of the narrative’s plot, even if no narratives actually
followed such simplistic trajectories. It was found that although a good number of the
students’ life stories have their downward turns, the overall trajectories of many
stories have either an upward or a stable trend.

11. Overall gradient of plot line (degree of drama)

The work of Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) mentioned in the previous section
suggests a second type of question that may be asked about the characteristics of a life
story’s emplotment. The gradient of the plot line’s slope, they suggest, provides a
ready visual metaphor for the degree of dramatic intensity which a life story displays.
Examining the “gradient” of a story’s plot line can help to clarify and encapsulate a
narrator’s idiosyncratic styles of self-description. The plot lines of some life stories
are characterised by frequent highly dramatic and extensive changes in perceived
personal fortune; other stories, in contrast, move steadily and placidly along without
such sudden, dramatic and precipitous changes in plot gradient.

For instance, the contrast between Eric’s happy and uncomplicated life before his
mother died, and the sudden dramatic downward turn of his life thereafter might,
metaphorically, be mapped as a steady high horizontal line followed by a plummeting
decreasing line. Robert’s line, in contrast, has less precipitous movements; although it
has ups and downs, the line of his life traces a more steady, gradual and undramatic
ascent.

12. Overall type of plot trajectory (pre-generic form)

A number of scholars (e.g. Campbell, 1968; Frye, 1957; Hanskiss, 1981 and Elsbree,
1982) have proposed detailed schemas for identifying particular types of generic story
forms. Though fascinating, such schemas have proved to be contentious. Their value
for the purposes of this taxonomy lay in their capacity to generate questions about
possible patterns of emplotment which could then be used to interrogate the students’ life stories. Some of the theories about story forms which were considered during the analytical phase of the study are discussed in the next chapter.

Anticipating the conclusions of the next chapter’s discussions, it might, in summary be said that Frye’s (1957) much-misunderstood analysis proved to be most fruitful in stimulating the researcher’s awareness of possible characteristic arrangements of plot, character, tone and authorial perspective. Frye’s subtle taxonomy proposes that there are two important yet distinctive types of plot “movement”. First, a plot’s trajectory can go up or down, exhibiting the familiar comedic or tragic movements (in this particular respect, there are obvious similarities to the narrative types proposed by the Gergens). Secondly, it can also be more or less “displaced” between the polarities of ideal form and gritty contingent reality. The latter dimension recognises the degree to which a story’s plot may be structured by literary, historical or imaginative templates which do not derive from direct personal experience. Frye’s schema proposes an additional third dimension; a story’s narrators or central characters may be differentiated by their relative moral and ontological status; some characters are presented as being superior, inferior or equal to other characters and their readers.

Frye’s famous fourfold schema of comedic, romantic, tragic and ironic “pre-generic” plot types is the most frequently cited aspect of his analysis. These four “pre-generic” types, he argues, are not in themselves genres or story forms; they serve instead as a broad taxonomy by which other more specific genres may be classified.

Applying Frye’s taxonomy of four “pre-generic” plot types to the plots of the students’ life stories, it is possible to say that more than two-thirds of the plot types employed by the student autobiographers may, in Frye’s terminology, be classified as comedic. Just less than a quarter of the autobiographies might be classified as exemplifying his heroic romantic plot type. Several other autobiographies have extended passages in tragic or ironic form, though only one sustains its ironic tone to the end. None of the students’ life stories adopted a tragic form; for all their tragic losses and bereavements, both Eric and Ed take steps to re-build their lives, and so their life stories finish with upward turns. This would suggest that they should be
classified as exemplars of Frye's *comedic* type, which, does not imply that such stories need actually be *funny*. Rahim, Roddy and Andrew seem to cast their lives into a more questing and *heroic* mould, in which the central hero (variously dramatic or modest) faces a seemingly endless series of “challenges” (one of Rahim’s favourite words) and difficulties, which, through determination, resourcefulness and courage, they overcome triumphantly. In Frye’s schema, this questing, more repetitively undulating form is called a *romance*. Frye’s analytical schema, along with several others mentioned in this section, is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

13. *Overall plot tone*

McAdams’ narrative schema (1993) gives an important place to the overall *tone* of a life story. Like Erikson (1959) and Bowlby (1969, 1973), McAdams believes that this tone is laid down as a result of very early experiences in infancy when infants, on the basis of their earliest experiences of life, are working out whether the world is a friendly and trustworthy place, or whether, on the contrary, it is not. When the world is found to be trustworthy, the infant, McAdams (1985, 1987, 1989, 1993) argues, will later be pre-disposed to tell a generally *optimistic* life story, whilst if disappointment has characterised their early experiences, a more *pessimistic* narrative tone will result.

There is no doubt that most of the life stories have a *prevailing tone*, though in most stories, that tone is far from continuous and monotonous. Ralph is generally laid back and optimistic throughout the course of his life story, and, when upsets come, he is never downcast for long. In contrast, a general tone of troubled concern, which he connects with the “love/hate” quality of his family relationships, permeates the whole of Julian’s life story.

McAdams’ larger thesis about the *developmental origins* of this tone (which finds many precursors, for instance in the work of Bowlby and Erikson) is beyond the scope of the present research, though it is interesting to note that the tone of many writers’ *earliest* narrated experiences often correlates strikingly with the tone of their *later* narratives.
A number of the students’ life stories incorporate distinct sub-plots. In many cases, the sub-plot features another person who has a strong influence on the narrator. White and Epston (1990), influenced by Foucault’s (1970, 1980) analysis of the “constructive” aspects of power, apply Foucault’s insights to their analysis of the structure of life stories. They suggest that in addition to the “dominant narrative” of a person’s life, there may be other embedded or implied stories which have a less obvious, but nonetheless important influence on the main story. In this Foucauldian, rather than literary sense, a *sub-plot* within a person’s life story may represent something or someone who has an independent, separate and potent existence within the orbit of the author’s life and who interacts dynamically with the narrator’s life. The “subject” of such a sub-plot may appear clearly “on stage” during the drama of the author’s narrative, or may exert its powerful influence from a position off-stage.

It may be recalled, for instance, that Jack’s older sister, for instance, is the focus of an important and memorable sub-plot in his life story. An earlier extract from Jack’s autobiography described her “clear classical voice” singing so beautifully and movingly at his eldest sister’s wedding. For the most part, however, she appears in quite different guise. Her constant cruelty to her naïve younger brother was a major influence, he claims, on his development. She is the cause and agent of many of his most vivid moments of childhood terror when, for instance, she falsely intimated the death of his parents on a number of occasions, some of which were outlined earlier. Her “rude, spiteful and devious nature” which, at one time he “used to hate with all my heart”, has exerted the greatest possible influence on his personality, making him much more “thick skinned”.

Jack’s “sister from hell” is contrasted with Alex’s “brother from heaven”. Though a more shadowy presence than Jack’s sister, Alex’s stylish and independent elder brother, through his friendship and encouragement, gives his younger brother the confidence to develop his own individual tastes in clothes, friends and music. Much more shadowy still, but nonetheless very powerful, is the *off-stage* presence of Jock’s very gifted older brother. Whilst they are both pupils at the same Prep school, Jock
achieves little and has "behaviour problems", spending, on his own admission, a lot of
time on the "naughty mat" or "under the clock". Only when his older brother leaves
prep school does Jock begin to emerge from a filial shadow which seems dark and
oppressive; like the massive "dark stars" known to astronomers only by the
gravitational pull they exert on smaller visible objects, the sub-plot of Jock’s
"invisible" elder brother exerts a strong influence on his sibling’s story.

15. Use of common episode templates

Some of the individual episodes recounted in the life stories suggest a number of
recurrent narrative patterns. By "narrative pattern", the researcher aims to designate a
simple and recurrent narrative motif or shape, not in itself sophisticated or developed
enough to count as a full plot type. There is insufficient space to develop this analysis
at length, which is capable of considerably more investigation and development, but at
least four narrative patterns in students’ accounts of autobiographical episodes were
observed sufficiently often for the researcher to give each a nick-name. The first
pattern commonly occurs in students’ descriptions of early childhood. In many cases
such descriptions assume a two-part structure which can be schematised as a transition
from a state of blissful innocence to a state of bitter experience. Following William
Blake’s two famous sets of poems, his Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience,
the researcher accordingly named this pattern "Blake’s pattern"

A second pattern was named "apple-carts" after the common English phrase
"upsetting the apple cart", a proverbial expression for a sudden and complete reversal
of a person’s fortunes. This repeated pattern characteristically denoted an episode in
which a description of a very stable period of the author’s life was suddenly and
completely overturned by some dramatic event. A third meta-pattern, named "Hobbes
pattern" (in honour of its sixteenth century philosophical namesake’s famous dictum
that the life of man in the state of nature was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”),
denoted a type of episode which described a continuing bleak, gloomy and grim
period in the writer’s life. The final pattern ("Amazing Grace") denoted those sections
of a life narrative in which a description of misery, woe and disaster were,
unexpectedly, followed by a sudden rescue or release; in the words of the old
revivalist hymn, "Amazing Grace": "I once was lost, and now am found, was bound, and now am free".

Although such patterns or motifs could be recognised in a large number of life stories, the actual content contained within each pattern, however, was entirely idiosyncratic.

16. Use of idiosyncratic structuration

The Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns described in the previous chapter dealt with a number of distinctive ways in which authors were able unify their life stories through the use of a range of distinctive structuring devices. Amongst these was the use of repeated refrains and quotations, as well as a variety of structuring devices such as the division of the life story into clearly related and connected chapters. These same features, however, can be used not only to unify, but also differentiate a story and create highly distinctive and idiosyncratic effects.

Peregrine's chapter headings will be readily recalled from an earlier section of the taxonomy which dealt with such unifying devices. However, the content and the style of these particular chapter headings reinforce not just the unity of his life story, but also its distinctiveness too. For instance, the title of his fourth chapter, it may be recalled, was "On discovering the phrase: Camel's testicles in Brine". The chapter title, however much it helps to unify the various chapters of his flamboyant life story, also has an undeniably idiosyncratic quality. The thespian Peregrine, even on his "contents page", likes to keep his audience guessing. Again with characteristic aplomb, Peregrine uses the same chapter title to achieve a second coup de theatre. The reader discovers that Peregrine, always the consummate performer, knows he must leave his audience wanting more. On reaching his fourth chapter, the reader discovers that the dramatic and intriguing chapter title presides over a blank final page. Thus the reader, like the eponymous "Camel's testicles in brine", is left suspended.

Peregrine's suspended testicles conclude the first major division of the Taxonomy, which has been concerned with a variety of plot devices used by the student authors to achieve their distinctive and unique effects. This first section has discussed the first of
the four major "modalities" of the narrative taxonomy which has been derived by describing and analysing the student autobiographies in some detail. The analysis has revealed sixteen "sub-modalities" within the Plot "modality". The remaining three modalities of Character, Theme and Style have a further forty or so sub-modalities between them. Space precludes detailed treatment and illustration of each of these further categories, some of which are self-evident. The treatment of the remaining sub-modalities is therefore rather briefer.

"CHARACTER" and "NARRATOR"

In an autobiography, unlike other types of story, the author is also the chief "character" of the stories recounted. This means that the author may appear in the life story not only as one of the actors or "characters" in the unfolding drama, but also in the separate role of "narrator". This possibility gives rise to two distinct modes in which the identity of the subject can be present in their own story. Aristotle's analysis, being originally designed for the analysis of tragic drama rather than autobiography, does not envisage this second narratorial type of authorial presence. Though the two roles are clearly and inextricably inter-related, an attempt has been made in this taxonomy to classify separately the characteristics of the author as "character" and the author as "narrator".

a) The author as "Character"

"Grid references"; identifying character by reference to objective markers or matrices

At some point or other in their life stories, most authors identify themselves by reference to a few of the many external norms, institutions, and other possible matrices.

17. Position in a network of family or dynastic relationships is one commonly used reference matrix. Peregrine, the aristocratic student with a title quotes his aristocratic title, significantly enough, on his autobiography's title page, before elaborating on his
pedigree and distinguished aristocratic forebears soon after. Other students, like Clement and Ben, give precise details of their parents’ names, social positions and occupations. Most students identify themselves as sons, grandsons and siblings connected with the usual varied networks of family relationships.

18. Ethnicity; nationality/religion/culture or language are categories which are prominent features in the autobiographies of those students who come from outside the British Isles. Rahim returns often to his home in Pakistan, and is proud of both his nationality and Islamic faith. Stephen, who lives in Hong Kong is equally proud to be Chinese and, when he first comes to England for his schooling, looks forwards to having an opportunity to “show off my intelligence to the English boys.” For the two Japanese boys, their first day at an English prep school is traumatic; “I could not speak any English”, confesses one. Almost beside himself with grief, the boy cherishes his father’s parting words on that occasion; *gannbareyo* (“you can do it, go on”) are transcribed in their original Japanese to preserve their original force and ethnic character.

19. Age category or status. A number of the students identify themselves by generic *age* categories such as “child”, “baby” or “adolescent”. Paul opens his autobiography by announcing that “I am like any normal teenager”, whilst Andreas places himself in a transitional period between several states:-

I am leaving my childhood behind where there were no problems and I never had to worry about anything....But then you wake up one morning and it’s “Oh shit!, I’m going to be an adult just like dad, and have a job, and earn money and have girlfriends and have kids, and then feed those kids...

20. Official school roles or position. Being made a prefect, getting into a higher form, or being given a particular position of responsibility are often important defining moments for a student’s sense of who they are. The most important moment in Dan’s life arrives in the form of a “smallish brown envelope” from his prep school headmaster. After considerable nervous waiting whilst he stared at the envelope, he tore it open and “uncertainly pulled the letter out.” Towards the end of the letter, he reads the words he had longed to see:-
There amidst the other good wishes stood the sentence which changed my school life forever: "I am delighted to offer you the position of Head Boy for the forthcoming year."

At this moment he “reached the most wondrous summit from which I stood and admired the view.” Dan’s sense of identity clearly owes a lot to being given this official position.

21. Intellectual abilities; exam performance, academic success, IQ. Several students quote all the grades they attained in the Common Entrance examination that secured them entry to Bentham’s. Others refer to their attainment of academic scholarships, as well as their general levels of intelligence, both intellectual and emotional. From such references, it is clear that several students’ identities incorporate the tokens of academic success that they have won in the wider world.

22. Recognised sports performance or achievement. Many students participate in a variety of sporting activities. For some, winning a place in a regional or national team marks a significant achievement which becomes an important part of their identity. For others, getting into a school or house sports team also confers upon them a place and a status that becomes part of their sense of who they are.

23. Reference to calendar date. For a few students, specific calendar dates are the temporal matrix which serves to identify and fix the significance for particular events in their lives. For Clement, for instance, the most important upsetting moments in his life story are characteristically heralded with a flourish of verbal labels which give each event its precise day, date, month and year of occurrence.

24. Reference to “real world” events. The references to specific events in the public world of national or international life are rare in the autobiographies. Some students, however, make reference to specific events when these coincide with some moment of personal significance. It was mentioned earlier that Tim, for instance, noted that his birth coincided with the stock market crash and the worst storm in recorded history.
Likewise, September 11th. 2001 with its associations with the death of loved ones, had
many resonances for the bereaved Eric.

25. Identity through relationship to transcendent spiritual realities. Explicit
religious references (for instance, to God or saints) are rare in the students’ life stories,
but when they occur, they are of considerable importance for a student’s sense of
identity. The best example of this phenomenon is provided by Ben, who believes that
his personal uniqueness comes, ultimately, from God:-

Finally, I come to what makes me unique. To do this bit, you have to be at
least slightly religious. It is as my priest says, “God created everyone in his
own image, each with one of his many talents.”

When discussing the question of who has been a great influence on his life he says:-
Somebody who has influenced my life a lot up to this moment are Saint
Anselm and Saint Dominic…

26. Use of other peoples’ words to express identity; use of others’ quotations. When
discussing the means by which a person gives their life story unity, the use of
quotations from songs, poems and other people who have had personal importance for
the student were discussed. Such quotations, coming as they do from outside the
individual autobiographers themselves, may also serve a second purpose by anchoring
and identifying the user with the external source of the quotation. Barnaby, for
instance, by his repeated use of quotations from a variety of poems by well known
literary figures, reinforces his own identity as a poet, for whom the personal
“versification” is very important.

The Distinctiveness of bodily identity in the narratives

27. Body size and shape

The physical attributes of the person’s body can be important self-defining
characteristics, particularly when these are in some way unusual. Jack, who is, on his
own estimation, one of the “three biggest people in the year”, earlier described himself
at his sister’s wedding as “a hippo in tails”. At the other end of the scale, Rodney sees
himself as “small, weak and puny.” Although references to such physical attributes are not frequent in the life stories, they may, in cases like that of Rodney, reflect an important element of the writer’s sense of personal identity.

28. Body as a location of important self-defining physical experiences

Although all writers are embodied beings, for a few writers, their body, and things that happen to their body, serve as a central focus for many of their self-defining experiences. For instance, all of David’s early memories involve bodily injuries - being knocked out by the whiplash of a tree-branch released by playground bullies, having his arm dislocated by a playful uncle, and being blinded by his grandmother’s camera. Ed deals with the grief of losing his young girlfriend and his best friend by building his body, whose training regimes, muscular attributes and physical performance are subsequently documented in considerable detail.

29. Clothing and appearance as important markers of identity

Appearance is important to adolescents, though it seems to occupy a surprisingly modest role in the autobiographies (only two of the writers mention spots, for instance!). At the age of 12, Ashley, for instance, is suddenly embarrassed to realise that he is sitting with the “toddlers” at the barbers, and that he is dressed like a “little boy”. At that moment, a decisive change occurs: the world of “side-partings, track-suit bottoms and GAP zip-up fleeces” which betokens his younger “goody-goody traditional schoolboy” identity is replaced with something tougher and older; oversized T-shirts, combat trousers, and the accoutrements of “skate-boarding, rap and rock.” His change in clothing, hair-style and general appearance represents, for him, a decisive change in identity. Other students may choose to invest their identity in different fashion styles - the “grunge” look, the “rap” look or the “skate-boarder” look.
The character’s psychological characteristics

30. Temperament and acquired characteristics and traits

Some of an individual’s dispositions seem to be intrinsic qualities, either because they are innate matters of temperament, or because early or long use has ingrained them indelibly into the person’s character. In this category of attributes might be included such qualities as shyness, sportiness, self-consciousness, tactlessness, a good ability to handle stress or a tendency to insomnia. All of these self-attributions are presented by some of the autobiographers, demonstrating their capacity to perceive and incorporate temperamental character traits into their sense of identity.

31. Skills and attributes

In contrast to innate temperamental and other profoundly habituated qualities mentioned in the previous section, many writers adduce a strong identification with less characterologically fundamental attributions such as learned skills. An acquired sporting skill is one of the most commonly mentioned type of skill in the autobiographies. Such skills include the ability to play hockey, football, cricket, swimming, diving, sailing, karate, fencing, skiing and hang-gliding. Students frequently identify strongly with such skills. For Jock, winning a place in the county cricket team was his first step in learning to believe in himself as a person as he began to emerge from the shadow cast by his brilliant brother. For Clement, playing a day’s cricket at Lords, and getting his picture in the MCC Yearbook was also enormously important for his sense of self-worth. When he wins his first swimming race, Rodney realises that he is no longer “hopeless”. Ben’s salvation, on the other hand, lay in his musical abilities. For most of his junior school life, Ben believed that “I had no talent, I was no good at sport ether, and nothing I could do was right”, the only “glimmer of light” in those oppressively dark “endless days of degradation” was his incipient love of music. In playing Bach or Brahms on the piano he gained his sole consolation, feeling “as though my soul had somehow been elevated above mundane matters”, as if he had found “a better place in which to roam.” These examples demonstrate the
importance which the acquisition of particular skills can have for the adolescent’s developing sense of identity.

32. Degree of characteristic agency or passivity

Bremond’s work (1973) on the nature of narrative distinguishes sharply between the active and passive aspects of the characters in a story. Indeed, Bremond sees this as one of any narrative’s most basic narrative analytical categories. Bremond proposes that activity and passivity should be seen as opposing binary categories. The students’ autobiographies in the present study, however, suggest a spectrum of differences rather than a simple binary opposition. A few students characteristically and habitually portray themselves as initiators of action, whilst others portray themselves as being the habitual passive recipients’ of others’ actions. For most students, however, their stories present a characteristic mixture of both modes. The spectrum of possibilities seems to take the form of a continuum, with characters who habitually take initiatives at one end, and those who are habitual victims at the other. Some students deliberately take up challenges, whilst others cope as best they can when the un-asked-for challenge occurs. A few bully, whilst a small number of others are bullied. The individual stories, nonetheless, usually present a characteristic and complex profile of agency and passivity which seems to differentiate their identities very clearly.

b) Narrator’s distinctive style or “voice”

As was explained earlier, One of the special characteristics of autobiography as a genre is that the narratorial “I” can assume not only the identity of the central character within the story told, but can also become the voice of the narrator or teller who stands outside the story told.

The relationship between the two can vary considerably with the relative age, moral and social status of the “character” being depicted. There can also be wide variations in the degree of identification by which the narrator relates to a present or former self. At times, the “character” representing the self currently depicted in the life story may
be identical with narrator, at other times the two may be sharply differentiated and contrasted.

The reading of written autobiographies raises further complex semiological issues concerning the referents of the narrator and the central character which cannot be fully explored here. In the case of a written autobiography (as opposed to conversational or spoken “autobiographical” statements) there is no physical body present to act as the central referent for “I” statements (This fact may present further difficulties for Harré’s “indexical hypothesis”, though none for Barthes). However, unlike spoken statements, the referent for “I” statements in a written autobiography is, perforce, “virtual” since the original author is usually not physically present to the reader. In a written autobiography, “I” may therefore represent one of the narrator’s past, present or future embodied selves, or may be the narrator’s “voice” which may, or may not be identified with any of these former temporal selves.

33. Epistemic quotient; the narrator’s degree of self-awareness

One way of assessing the nature of the relationship between narrators and the characters they construct is to ask: How “knowing” and self aware is the narrator? A narrator’s level of self-awareness may be a matter of degree. Some autobiographers with a high degree of self-awareness (a high “epistemic quotient”) can express their own self-understanding clearly and precisely. In contrast, others (with a lower “epistemic quotient”) may betray by their actions things of which they seem unaware. There is a major difference between witting and un-witting revelations, or, to use Wittgenstein’s (1953) terminology, between “saying” and “showing”.

The opening paragraphs of Peregrine’s theatrical autobiography demonstrate a keen and highly articulate self-awareness, whilst Harry’s autobiography is liberally peppered with phrases like “I didn’t know”, “I didn’t realise at the time”, “I had no idea”. At one or two points, Harry’s apparent lack of awareness of the significance of what he is writing is breathtaking. One passage combines first love, football, the end of the school year and his parents’ divorce into a seemingly unreflective whole:-
Carly was very pretty, the prettiest girl in the school, and we both fancied each other. It was my first proper interest in girls and at break time after maths when everyone was outside we stayed behind in the class and kissed for a long time. England were knocked out of the World Cup and I was bitterly disappointed with the end of the year coming. At the end of the year Carly left and my dad gave an announcement to our family that he wanted a divorce.

34. Degree of openness or opaqueness to the reader

Some autobiographies seem actively to invite the reader’s engagement and involvement, whereas others do not. In The Poetics of Prose (1977), Todorov tries to analyse some of the ways in which simple descriptions of objective events can be inflected in such a way that they become transformed into elements of a particular person’s psychological processes. Bruner (1986) develops these ideas in his exploration of how narratives manage to attract or repel the subjective engagement of the reader or hearer. The fascinating and complex details of their explorations lie beyond the scope of the present discussion, but both theorists propose that effective narratives invite the engagement of their readers through such devices as the use of modal verbs (such as “must”, “might”, “would”, “could”), frequent reference to intentional and attitudinal states (such as hoping, planning and intending), as well as a certain amount of implicit indefiniteness which requires the reader to supply specific details and background information for themselves in order to make sense of the story. The factual statements of professional scientific discourse, in contrast, avoid all these things, and consequently discourage personal, as opposed to merely intellectual engagement.

In this respect, the students’ life stories exhibit striking differences with regard to the degree to which they invite or repel the reader’s engagement. A comparison of two brief extracts on a similar theme may illustrate the point. Andrew’s account of an unpleasant early school experience is full of subjunctivising language patterns which employ personal evaluation, feelings and other intentional states which engage the reader’s sympathies:-

St. John’s School had the best reputation locally and because we lived close by, I did not have to join its long waiting list. Here the children were more boisterous but also more cruel. What happened to me in school reflects what
happened to me later in life. I think my size attracts people to take advantage of me. One afternoon two boys started calling me names and, because they were taller, I felt scared....

Because of Andrew’s choice of words we begin to be drawn into his way of seeing his situation, surrounded by “larger” children who are “more boisterous”, “more cruel” than “I” am. He lets us into his thoughts and his reasoning (“I think...”), as well as his feelings (“I felt scared...”). In contrast, Tim’s account avoids all emotional and intentional references and sticks to the facts. At the end of the extract, we still know nothing of Tim’s thoughts and feelings.

The village school was called St. Peter’s Infant School. My three years there passed rather quickly. The only thing that happened was when I tripped over and landed on my forehead.

The first extract invites the reader to share in the writer’s intense apprehensive emotional state as he contemplates his new school; the second account gives the reader only the kinds of bare facts that could be observed by a visiting Martian anthropologist. In the first, the writer is open about his emotional reactions and this engages the reader’s subjectivity, whilst the second extract’s objectivity distances the reader by its objective impersonality.

35. Degree of identification between an author’s “narrator” and “character”

The narrators of some stories identify very closely with the characters who represent a younger version of themselves in the life story. At the opposite extreme, other narrators distance themselves firmly from their former selves. There would seem to be a spectrum; at one end, the identification is so marked that the recounting of an event appears to be an actual re-living of the past. Less extreme, some narrators identify closely and consciously with earlier selves, whilst others seem to identify closely but unconsciously with an earlier self. Towards the opposite end of the spectrum, some narrators distance themselves from their former selves, some reinforcing this distanciation by inflecting it with additional moral and social evaluations - which may go so far as to actually patronise, disdain or repudiate their former selves. This moral or social self-evaluation is properly the subject of the next two sub-modalities.
Doug is one of those who *identifies* very strongly with himself as a young child. The peak experience of Doug’s fifteen-year-old life is the moment when he succeeds in riding his two-wheeler bicycle *without* safety wheels for the first time:

The bike came with a blue helmet with ‘Cool Dude’ (something I most definitely am) written on it.

At the exhilarating moment when his dad lets the bike go Doug is

actually doing it myself, with no-one to hold me up. I was actually doing it myself, and it was the best feeling ever.

He comments on the previous episode with a telling choice of the words:-

I was so excited that I would finally be like a grown up.

The words “would” and “like” in this quotation seem to reinforce his identification with a sense of himself as a child who has still not yet become an adolescent or adult.

**36 & 37. “Position” and corresponding Attitudes of the narrator**

The emphases in these two related sub-modalities are not on the *degree* of identification expressed or implied between narrator and character, but rather than on their *relative moral* or *social standing*. On his maiden voyage by two-wheeler, Doug not only *identifies* with his younger self, but also shows little sign of *patronising* his earlier self. On the other hand, as a narrator of his own life story, Ewan not only *distances* himself from his self-depictions but also often *patronises* his earlier selves. Ewan the *narrator* seems to see himself as superior to the *character* of “young Ewan”. For instance, after describing some of his experiences as a young boy who played with his little brother, he sardonically shrugs off the childhood days he shared with his sibling with the patronisingly simple phrase: “We were the age of hamsters.”

The social and moral position that the person believes themselves occupy relative to *other people*, as well as to their own younger or future *selves*, can be expressed in
terms of what Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) have called the person’s social and moral “position”. Depending on their perception of their relative “position”, the person is likely to adopt a corresponding set of matching attitudes to other people, as well as to their own former and future selves. These two aspects of a person’s subjective sense of their own identity - “position” and corresponding “attitude” - describe some of the ways in which each person “positions” themselves with respect to others in their social interactions, and as they assign a moral status and corresponding rights and duties to themselves and others. To patronise oneself (as Ewan does) involves the present day John “positioning” himself in a superior position to that of his younger self. His present self, in consequence, adopts a superior and patronising attitude to his younger self. In a similar way, recent analysis of the conversations of serial killer Fred West (Matthison, 2000) have revealed interesting anomalies in the killer’s “positioning” strategies. To the considerable puzzlement of the police and psychiatrists, West, unlike many psychopaths, clearly knew the difference between right and wrong, truth and lies, and was also capable of having an emotional life. Although in many other respects his conversations were like that of other “ordinary” people, his conversations “positioned” most other people in an abnormally lowly position relative to himself, and in consequence, it seems, he therefore found his victims’ lives of little account. The “positioning” patterns of his narratives were thus very revealing about his character and reasoning. In the same way, the relative social and moral “positioning” of the narrator and his “characters” in the students’ life stories, along with the accompanying attitudes shown, serve as a very telling indicator of the person’s sense of identity.

38. Degree of Agency

In just the same way that the author’s character in the life story can be portrayed with varying degrees of activity and passivity, the narrator can also assume a characteristically active agential stance. Chris’s character quite often plays a long-suffering or victim role in the events of his life story, when, for instance, he is bullied or when he fears the public humiliations of rope-climbing in his P.E. lessons. As a narrator, however, he reclaims a potent sense of agency in even the most abject of his experiences, through his ability to control the way he interprets and learns from such
experiences. This position is classically stated by Spinoza: “An emotion, which is
suffering, ceases to be suffering when we form a clear and distinct conception of it.”
(Spinoza, Ethics; Of human Freedom, proposition III; 1955: 248, translation
modified). The use of a knowing or an ironic narrator’s voice, for instance, can create
the liberating effect of personal agency in even the most helpless of childhood
experiences, something which Ben and Ewan use to particularly good effect. Ben’s
ironic descriptions of feeling a misfit at his previous school because he could not play
rugby saves him from despair; it later provides him with the sardonic motivation to
play at being keen on the game, which gives him both the freedom and leverage to
become a good player.

39. Distinctive cast of other characters

Each story has its own characteristic social gestalt, composed of the cast of characters
who appear in the various dramas depicted in the individual’s life story. Many stories
feature close friends and members of the immediate family circle very prominently.
Some stories, like the films of Cecil B. De Mille, feature a “cast of thousands”, whilst,
at the opposite Kafka-esque extreme, others seem positively to exclude or delete the
specific names and identities of almost all the other people. Peregrine’s life story, in
contrast, is supplied with an extensive cast of distinctive individual characters which
includes a psychiatrist, several peers (in both senses of the term), alongside his family.
Guy, however, seems to delete entirely the names and the identities of most other
human beings from his stories. At best he alludes to the existence of other human
beings on the planet. Talking about the day he left his infant school, he recalls “the
children’s Bible with their names in” that he received on that occasion, but none of his
childhood friends, nor any other children at all, are mentioned in his narrative, so the
reader is left to puzzle who, precisely “their” names might be. Characteristically, his
account of the occasion only implies, but never actually mentions the presence of any
other children, and this de-populated type of social gestalt is characteristic of his life
story as a whole.
40. **Overall characterisation of the past and present selves**

Using a variety of descriptive means, narrators usually present themselves, whether in their earlier or later guises, as having a quite distinctive character. Ewan, with characteristic condescension, labels his younger self as being "a mindless drone", for instance. Both the Japanese boys, on the other hand, present themselves in the role of the *dutiful sons* who obey their parents in going to school in England, and then reinforce the identification by working very hard. Dan portrays himself as someone who *tries hard* in the face of difficulties, but who is successful in the end, whilst Roddy is a *hero* from the start, soon achieving the status of "world champion" in his own eyes, and who duly enjoys the world's approbation when it comes to the same opinion later. Peregrine presents himself as an aristocratic, neurotic and eccentric thespian, whilst Rodney and Ben began life as misfit *ugly ducklings* who steadily metamorphosing into *swans*.

41. **Presentation of “origin myths” accounting for an aspect of personal identity**

A striking feature of several autobiographies is the use they make of what Denzin (1989) and others have called an "origin myth"; an explanatory "just-so" story, usually set in the autobiographer's early life, that offers a putative account of the *origins* of a later interest or facet of character. Robert's three-year-old self receives a Christmas present in the form of a *yellow bi-plane* which plants the seed from which his lifelong passion for aircraft will grow. The toy bi-plane becomes the seed that will later develop into an abiding passion which will motivate him to join Bentham's RAF section of the School Corps, before propelling him into a flight simulator and thence to his first flying lesson in a real Piper Warrior II. It will finally also fuel his desire for a career as a pilot. In contrast, Dennis' difficult "breech birth" which causes his mother to have an unpleasant caesarean operation in the small hours of the morning, sees this as but the first link in a chain of events in which he characteristically and blithely creates problems for other people around him.
42. Presentation of iconic episodes of personal identity

Having presented themselves as having a particular type of distinctive character, several autobiographers describe episodes which encapsulate or illustrate the key characteristics previously avowed. These “iconic episodes” are, in many ways, similar to “origin myths” in that they sum up an important feature of the narrator’s identity. They differ from “origin myths” in that they do not necessarily appear as historical precursors of the characteristic, but rather as “icons” or encapsulating images of it. For example, Dennis presents himself as a difficult and contrary person from the very first moments of his awkward breech birth, as was seen in the previous section. Later in his life story, however, he supplies several other examples of this self-avowed contrariety. Without any sense of apology, he recounts the tale of a nursery school trip to a farm which is wrecked by his terror of cows munching and dogs barking. His screams force the entire school to abandon the trip and return to school after only a few minutes at the farm. His description of this event, like his account of his difficult breech birth, stands as an iconic episode which testifies to his “contrary” identity.

43. Distinctive use of opening and closing “framing” statements to convey character

In the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns outlined in the previous chapter, the capacity of “framing statements” to incorporate the disparate events of a life into a unified whole has already been noted. The opening and closing statements of an autobiography can also be used to convey a distinctive sense of the narrator’s character. Ewan, ironic from the very start of his “Prologue”, uses self-consciously ironic inverted commas dismissively when he describes his autobiography as “the most useful insight into a boy’s life in the end of the 21st century”. The sardonic tone of this initial framing statement is maintained throughout the ensuing life story, and the autobiography finishes with the equally sardonic and terse words:

That is the end of my life up to the end of Prep school in 9 pages.
THEME

Following McAdams' (1993) interpretation of this Aristotelian component, “theme” is taken to mean the characteristic motivations which animate the life story as a whole. “Motivations” in this context are taken to include all the dispositions which move or motivate people to act, and therefore include such things as general sense are seen as including a person’s passions, attractions, attachments, preferences, goals, intentions, interests, priorities, values and choices. As thinkers from Augustine (1992) to McClelland (1984) have argued, a person’s “motivations” (passions, attractions, attachments, interests, preferences, priorities, values and choices) are often important indicators of idiosyncratic personal identity. “Theme” is defined by McAdams (1985, 1993) as the narrative equivalent of a person’s actual emotional and motivational life. The intentions, motivations and personal goals that structure an individual’s actual life might appear as characteristic themes in their life story. “Theme” is thus the narrative analogue of the living person’s “motivation”.

44. General categories of motivation

It is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss the wide variety of motivational taxonomies that were considered during the course of the present research. McAdams (1985: 70) reviews several schemes before entertaining a schema based on Bakan’s work (Bakan, 1966). As discussed earlier, Bakan suggests that each person will have characteristic preferences for one of two classes of motivational goals, either “agentic” or “collective”. In the former category may be found those who are more interested in relationships with people, whilst those in the latter category might emphasise the importance of personal achievement and power in their lives. The present researcher was surprised to find this classification system served as a very useful heuristic tool when examining the students’ autobiographies, the study providing clear examples of both characteristic patterns of motivation. The Motivational Theme Test which the researcher developed as part of the research design correlated well with the content of the students’ autobiographies, and also seemed to support Bakan’s dual taxonomy. Such broad trends in motivation, however, cannot be easily illustrated by isolated anecdotes here. The issue of the overall validity and plausibility of Bakan’s particular
schema for the classification of motivations is clearly beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, the data of the study would certainly validate the existence of distinctive and stable motivational styles in the students’ individual life stories.

45. Specific major life goals

There is evidence in several of the autobiographies that both lives and identities are directed towards, organised by and identified with particular life goals. According to the Roman poet Virgil, we are drawn by our deepest desires: "Trahit sua quemque voluptas." (Hughes, 1985: 61). According to Augustine (O'Donnell, 1992), we are defined by them too. Robert is devoting his life to becoming a pilot. Ed has devoted his life to mending a broken heart by building a strong body. Jack and Julian want to get their “relationships” right. Peregrine will not rest until the theatre is his home. It seems from many of the stories, that as Augustine (1992) suggests, the things we desire most intensely are likely to become important determinants of identity.

46. Characteristic social preferences

According to Jung (1923) and to subsequent research (see Myers, 1962), there are characteristic temperamental differences with respect to a person’s social preferences. Although most people enjoy a varied mixture of social contexts ranging from solitude to crowds, some people prefer to be alone or in the company of a small group of intimate friends, whereas other prefer larger and noisier social groups. Jung called these social preferences, respectively, extraversion and introversion, and argued that such preferences were stable and probably innate. Whatever their origin, such characteristic patterns of social preference are discernible in the autobiographies, and supported by the findings of the “Follow-up Interviews”. Ashley wants to be alone for the most important moments in his life (such as when he receives and enjoys his Common Entrance examination success). Roddy, in contrast, seems happiest in crowds, and relishes the applause and admiration of cohorts of his peers. In both these cases, as in the majority of the others, it is possible to trace stable and characteristic patterns of social preference.
47. **Degree of independence or dependence on others**

A different aspect of the social world which can be found in the students' life stories concerns the degree to which the central character is dependent or independent of others. Some authors readily acknowledge the enormous importance of particular other people, whilst, at the opposite end of the spectrum, others seem to reject the influence of others. For instance, many experiences reported in Rodney's life story - most notably his account of going fishing alone with his father - portray a strong need to be close to, and to have the approval of significant others. Ashley, on the other hand, characteristically wants to keep his mother in the dark about his Common Entrance exam results, and celebrates his success entirely alone. In later discussions, Ashley explicitly rejects the idea that he has been influenced by anyone in particular, whilst Rodney confesses that he finds it almost impossible to be alone without anybody to relate to. They, like many other students, display different attitudes to dependence on others in their life stories.

48, 49, & 50. **Narrator's emotional style: intensity, contrast and colour**

In these combined sections, the emotional moods of the narrator are distinguished from the overall emotional tone of the plot of their life story. The emotional tone and trajectory of a life story's plot were encountered in an earlier section of the taxonomy; the present sections focus on the emotional characteristics of the life story's narrator. The emotional tone of the plot and the emotional tone of the narrator may, or may not be related. For instance, whilst the plot of Eric's life story has a tragic tone, a shadow cast, no doubt, by the death of his mother, his later narratorial emotional style is optimistic and up-beat. The emotional tone of the plot of Rahim's experiences with gunmen and plane hijackers is intense, but his manner as a narrator is calm and reasonable.

Although all talk about "emotional tone" is inevitably metaphorical and subjective, it is possible to distinguish a number of emotional sub-modalities. Even the most modest of television sets possess independent controls which allow the viewer to adjust the levels of the picture's brightness, contrast and characteristic colour spectrum. Such
distinctions are also commonly represented in everyday speech about emotional states; a person may "see red", be in a "black" or "blue" mood, or be "green" with envy. Jane Austen saw her novels as "light, bright and sparkling", whilst Kafka saw his writing in a contrastingly darker hue. The emotional tone of a person's life story seems, from the life stories collected, to demonstrate parallel sub-modalities. Three sub-modalities are envisaged which distinguish the narrator's emotional style:

48. "brightness" or emotional intensity.
49. "contrast" or acuteness of emotional variability.
50. "colour" or characteristic emotional tone.

It is suggested that each of these emotional aspects, though distinct, is also inextricably related; for this reason, they are discussed together in the present section.

Some life stories are characterised by their "brightness" and vividness, qualities that make them stand out from the stories of others. Rahim's stories of escaping a plane crash or armed gunmen fall into this category. In contrast, none of the episodes in Tim's life story - even though one of them involves emergency hospitalisation - have this kind of "bright" or "high energy" effect. Andrew's stories, on the other hand, are full of the most extreme emotional contrasts. The gruesome account, quoted earlier, of Andrew's virtual crucifixion at the hands of older boys who bullied him for wearing the wrong sort of "skimpy" underwear, is followed by episodes of utter happiness and blissful enjoyment of life. The emotional contrasts of his life story are, thus, very stark. Compared with Andrew's story, Rahim's narrative, although the latter contains many extremely dramatic moments, presents fewer extreme contrasts of emotional tone. His story is pervaded by a more even emotional tone of "challenge" and adventure. This evenness, despite its very dramatic moments, presents fewer and less violent contrasts than Andrew's life story.

As was mentioned earlier, ordinary speech is also replete with colour metaphors which represent types of emotional colouring. One person may be in a "blue", or even a "black" mood, whilst another may "see the world through rose-tinted spectacles. After bereavement, the whole world may seem grey, whereas the days of
our youth may, in retrospect at least, seem gold. In just these sorts of ways, different life stories may have a characteristic emotional colouring. Julian’s life story is at the “blue” end of the emotional spectrum throughout, whilst Roddy’s robust and continuous optimism throughout his life gains him the study’s “rose-coloured spectacle award”.

The “blue” tonality of Julian’s autobiography seems to be problem-soaked from beginning to end. He begins heavily with a recital of his difficult relationships with his family. On the first page of his life story he describes how, as far back as he can remember, his sister has always been, apparently, “overly-possessive” in the face of Julian’s attempts to be “perfectly generous”, and he admits that he still has “shouting and screaming matches” with his mother. By the second page he is recounting guilt-ridden betrayals of trust in which he steals money from his mother’s purse. Later, an uncle dies of bowel cancer which is discovered too late, and he finishes his story by wishing that he was still at his previous school. He concludes:-

I have trouble adapting to new environments and it takes me a long time to settle. I still feel I would be better at my old school. However, I feel I must refrain from hanging over the past.

The emotional tone of Roddy’s life story is altogether more bright and sunny. In contrast to Julian’s troubled and pessimistic emotional outlook on life, Roddy adapts very easily and quickly to new environments, and seems to succeed in all he attempts. When he is “only six years old” he gets invited to stay in Sweden for the weekend. His mother is apprehensive about him being away on his own at so young an age, but Roddy is undeterred:-

I wasn’t scared at all when my mother dropped me off at my friend’s house, because in my mind I was just going to a friend’s house for the weekend. After having a sandwich we got in the car and left for the airport. After a one and a half hour flight we landed in Sweden.

I had always thought that Sweden would be very wet and cold, but when we left the airport I knew differently. The sun was shining, there was not a cloud in the sky. Even though I did not appreciate it so much when I was six, the countryside was too beautiful for words.
That night, Roddy, who had never been fishing before, makes his own fishing rod out of a stick, a wine-bottle cork, some fishing line and a hook. The following day, armed only with a loaf of bread and his newly-constructed fishing rod, he goes out with his friend to fish:

The following day, Ingmar and I got our fishing rods and a loaf of bread, and went out to the end of the jetty, and sat down with our feet hanging over the end of the jetty. We put the bread on our lines and we very quickly got the hang of fishing; by midday we had caught fifteen to twenty fish each. We ate all the fish for lunch, and being that we had caught the fish ourselves, they were especially delicious. For the whole of the first day we fished, and we didn’t get bored because we were catching so many fish.

At the end of his stay, Roddy returns home to his mother:

I had a big grin on my face.

The emotional “brightness”, “contrast” and “colour” exhibited by a life story is, as the two examples just given may illustrate, can present a very distinctive sense of identity. The narrator of Julian’s story is persistently grey, gloomy and heavy in emotional tone, whilst the narrator of Roddy’s story is bright and sunny. In a further contrast, Rahim and Ben are more sober and determined in their characteristic commitment to life’s challenges, whilst the autobiographies of David and Tim seem somewhat colourless and dull. The range of emotional tones and colours which characterise the students’ different life stories is considerable.

51. The subject’s overall evaluation of their life course

In their life stories, students may indicate how they evaluate the overall success or failure of their life course. They may do this implicitly by the way they structure their narrative, or they may do it explicitly in self-conscious evaluative statements. Regarding the former “structural” type of evaluation, Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993) suggested that a person’s life course might be represented in the form of a line on a graph. These “life lines”, they argue, might then approximate to one of the three basic narrative forms proposed by their analysis; the upward slope of the progressive narrative, the downward-sloping regressive narrative, or the steady line of the stasis narrative. When these three distinct configurations were discussed earlier, attention
was drawn to their implications for a life story’s plot trajectory. However, an author’s use of such configurations may also serve to summarise or express a writer’s overall evaluation of their life. When an author casts the overall plot into one of these narrative forms (or any of the other more complex and subtle variants available) they have already made an implicit evaluation of the experiences they describe. Some autobiographers, for example, may judge their lives as successful and therefore depict this in the upward trajectory of their life story, whilst others may perceive only failure and frustration, which they show in their life story’s downward path. These structurally-implied evaluations may be supplemented and reinforced by more explicit evaluative statements:

“It is true to say that so far my life has been a fantastic one. I have never had any major problems in my life.”

“I enjoy my life, and I’m very grateful for it. I think you will agree with me that my life has been pretty good so far, and you’re probably thinking that I have nothing to complain about if my worst experience is getting stuck under a boat for a bit. This is probably true.”

“My life has been full of incident, joy, success, anxiety and torture. I have lived with the greatest of people and it has lacked nothing. For this I am eternally grateful to my parents who have worked so hard to give me a proper upbringing. They have excelled themselves in being the warmest and kindest parents.”

52. Inclusion of specific ethical evaluations of particular experiences

In addition to the overall evaluative perspective which was examined in the previous section, the students quite often express an ethical evaluation of a specific event or occurrence. Julian feels “immense guilt” when he is discovered to have broken his parents’ trust by stealing a large sum of money from his mother’s purse. In a chemistry lab prank, Clement accidentally gasses a friend with chlorine. It produces a red face and watery eyes in its victim, but the Clement “ felt awful. I felt like I had killed him. Even though he was fine in about half an hour, I still felt so bad. The guilt ate away at me for days, so I offered to be his personal fag* (*unpaid personal servant) for a week.”
53. Disowning or “explaining away” moral responsibility

The kind of specific ethical evaluations envisaged in the previous section involve the author taking responsibility for a past action; the act is “owned” by the narrator. Such moments stand in marked contrast to those moments in some of the autobiographies in which authors disown or seek to extenuate their responsibility or culpability for a specific occurrence. At his prep school, Jock excuses his former disruptive behaviour and poor academic performance as being due to the presence of his over-shadowing brilliant older brother. At the moment his older brother leaves the prep school which they both share, “something happened”. He starts to “behave” and to “become more popular with the teachers”, and opines:

Maybe I didn’t need to live up to his (i.e. brother’s) expectations by showing off so much now.

Clement, who previously and “innocently” gassed a fellow student with chlorine, blames his poor academic record at his previous school on the teasing of some other boys who teased him for being a “boffin” and a “try hard”, which lead to him joining their low academic expectations rather than beating them. In both cases, the autobiographers use their life stories to exonerate themselves from their potential responsibility and guilt for past mistakes or failings.

54. Acknowledgement of ethical horizons beyond the individual self

For MacIntyre (1981/1985), the “narrative unity of a life” is connected inextricably with the values and virtues which inform the particular life. For Ricoeur (1992/1994: 179) too, the narrative of a person’s life is constructed within an “ethical horizon” which transcends the self-contained unity of a particular life. Several of the autobiographies provide clear evidence of such “ethical horizons” whose reach extends beyond the immediate grasp of the individual autobiographer. Rahim wants to be like his grandfather, an adventurous, good-natured, hard-working and very successful businessman who also finds time to pray, to be with his family, and to give his time and money generously to various charitable causes.
Ben, part English and part Belgian, concludes his autobiography by looking to his own horizons:

As yet I still do not know exactly what I want to do. However, I would like to do something to serve this wonderful country that has cured me when I was ill, that supported my Grandmother with her husband’s huge legacy, that accepted my father as one of its own when he arrived penniless and fatherless from Papua New Guinea as an overseas student. Above all, I hope to be happy.

In passages such as these, the students situate themselves in moral landscapes with ethical horizons whose magnitude inspires the individual writer to aspire beyond their current identities, the vision of a possible future self acting as a spur to present action.

**STYLE**

The first three narrative elements proposed by Aristotle’s *Poetics* were plot, character and theme. These elements, he argues, define the matter of a narrative. The manner in which a narrative is recounted, he goes on to argue, is defined by three further qualities. According to him, the three main elements which contribute to the style of a written work are “diction” (or “language”); “spectacle” (or degree of drama) and finally, the “melody” (or “music”) of what is written. For the sake of simplicity, within the present Taxonomy of Narrative Differences, these three elements are amalgamated into the single narrative modality of “style”.

Autobiographies show very considerable variations in style. No analytical grid or taxonomy can hope to do justice to the subtle inflexions of a person’s characteristic ways of perceiving and expressing themselves. The recognition and description of a person’s style requires not only the careful study of the work of the individual concerned, but also requires that the reader’s interpretations and judgements have been informed by a wide range of other reading experiences which will then enable the reader to “place” and characterise what is distinctive about the individual life story he is trying to interpret.

The main headings in the schema below represent merely a few of the most striking ways in which the autobiographers differentiated and distinguished themselves.
stylistically from one another in the limited sample available for the present study. “Style”, of course, is a cumulative effect produced by a complex and inter-related array of characteristics and narrative techniques, some of which have already been outlined above.

Each of the features enumerated below represent an aspect of a writer’s style, which is also, pre-eminently, an expression of a writer’s distinctive personal subjectivity. A distinctive personal style is frequently part of both “objective” and “subjective” kinds of personal identity; it is a feature of both inner consciousness and outward appearance. Narrative style can have radical effects on the way a particular event is recounted, and the manner of a person’s style may influence the interpretation and presentation of the matter of the life story in a complex variety of ways. For instance, one student may recount experiences that are relatively commonplace in a very dramatic way, whilst another may describe an unusual or even traumatic experience in a relatively “matter of fact” way.

55. Degree of “drama”

The taxonomy’s earlier section on the sub-modalities of “plot” discussed the ideas of Gergen and Gergen (1993) on the overall gradient of plot line; the steeper the gradient, the more dramatic the plot. The notion of “drama” entertained here is somewhat different, and concerns the personal style of the narrator, rather than the gradient of the plot. Although the two ideas may be importantly related, the narrator’s style can enhance or diminish the degree of drama present in the content of the plot itself. Andrew, for instance, has a personal style of narration which lends intense drama to most of the events he narrates, many of which may be commonplace to others; it is a style that can make mountains out of molehills. His vocabulary is characteristically filled with extremes and sharp contrasts. His earliest memories of home are permeated with dramatic words like “enormous”, “huge”, “immensely”, “wonderful” and “perfect”. These terms contrast strongly with the description of his first school, which is peppered with words like “cruel”, “pain”, “victim”, “suffering”, “ridicule”, and “terror”. His style as a narrator is constituted by such verbal means, which can be entirely independent of the content of the stories he tells.
Other students' life stories exhibit quite the opposite tendency; they are more inclined to make molehills out of mountains. Rahim, for instance, is surprisingly and undramatically factual when recounting his survival of a near fatal plane crash:

Thinking that we were minutes away from death was frightening, but it was over now and we had lived through it.

56. **Degree of articulacy and precision**

Although *all* writers may vary in the clarity of their self-expression at different times, some writers are characteristically *clear* and *precise* in describing their experiences and expressing their ideas most of the time. This stylistic feature contrasts with those autobiographers at the other end of the spectrum who can be *opaque* and much less precise in expressing themselves most of the time. Many other writers, of course, have a style that meanders somewhere between these opposite polarities.

57. **Degree of prolixity**

Some writers are long and wordy, whilst others are brief, *terse* and laconic. There is a wide variety in styles, from the chatterbox to the taciturn. Differences in this submodality are reflected not only in the *style* of individual sections of the life stories, but also in the wide variations in overall *size* of the autobiographies, which varied from 300 words to 11,000 words in length.

58. **The pace of the narrative**

In the fast-paced stories, a lot of things happen in a small number of words. In a slow-paced narrative, a lot of words may be expended without much being communicated. In addition, the fastest-paced narratives may have an abrupt and breathless effect because they *omit* some important information that readers need in order to orientate themselves or make sense of the story. Alex's autobiography, for instance, is one of the most *breathless*. None of the constituent sections of his autobiography are

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supplied with linking explanations. Each begins abruptly and without prior introduction, of which the following is a good example:-

It wasn’t until at least two weeks after until I heard the news. The boss rang me up at home. I picked up, seeing as it was what I’d been waiting for quite a while now. I must say his tone of voice concealed it very well. “Alex, I’d like to…” I was completely thrown for about a milli-second. Then it came, “…congratulate you.”

Alex is just receiving his Common Entrance examination results from his prep school headmaster. The extract gapes with lacunae. “Two weeks later” than what? Who is “the boss”? Why is he ringing? For what, precisely, has Alex been “waiting for quite a while”? What did “his” tone of voice conceal? The multiple omissions of Alex’s narrative mean that the small number of words are not quite sufficient to support their content, resulting, for the reader, in a pace which is not just fast, but breathless. In an already long chapter, the reader will be spared some of the choice examples of the opposite phenomenon; the very long account that says very little.

59. The fluency of the narrative

Some life stories are told in a style which flows smoothly and easily, and lead the reader carefully and steadily by the hand through the events narrated. Other life stories proceed in fits and starts, sometimes leaving gaps and confusions which stop readers in their tracks. When Peregrine describes the circumstances of his birth, or Chris describes his epic climb up the rope, we are in the hands of skilled and fluent storytellers. In contrast, Alex’s breathless elisions in the extract discussed in the previous section create a more abrupt effect, though once the reader has grasped the general drift, comprehension becomes easier. Peter, however, gives his readers a bumpy ride:-

I had to get up early for a trip to France with my school. As we drove up I began to feel bad. I was going away to France and I had never been away on my own to stay with a strange Family who were foul to me so I went to stay with a different family which was not too bad.
60. **Stylistic mode**

The Western cultural *mileu* in which most of the writers are embedded offers a variety of stylistic *modes* which may be employed by a writer. Students may write in a variety of ways that include the poetic, prosaic, pastoral, journalistic, heroic, tragic, conversational, or even fairy-tale stylistic modes. Peregrine begins his life story, for instance, in *fairy-tale* mode, before snapping abruptly into a deliberately *bathetic* mode. Barnaby, on the other hand, one of whose major interests in life is “versification”, begins his life story in a *poetic* style that would not be out of place in Laurie Lee’s *Cider with Rosie*. The *sardonic* Ewan finds a *dead-pan* style that Jack Benny might have been proud of. The range of stylistic modes employed by the students life stories is wide.

61. **The use of characteristic words and phrases**

At a more *specific* level than that of *general* style, several writers have characteristic *words and phrases* that are repeated often enough to become fingerprints of identity. Rahim, for instance, uses the word “*challenge*” a great deal. Andrew, whose life story is a series of triumphant struggles against adversity, often uses phrases which have an *adversative* structure; the first half of a sentence characteristically contains a reference to something unpleasant, after which follows the word “*but*”. The second half of his sentences may then describe ways in which the adversity was overcome:

Here again I was bullied by a particular boy, but now I was older I began to learn that it was not me who had the problem.

These two examples must serve to illustrate a much wider range of characteristic and idiosyncratic vocabularies employed by the students.

62. **The use of characteristic metaphors and images**

Some writers have a penchant for structuring what they write through the use of distinctive personal *metaphors*. Roddy, for instance, not only frequently depicts himself in *heroic* mode, but a number of his stories are underpinned by “*battle*”
metaphors. His preparations for his first day at school provide a striking example of this:-

I reached down to tie my shoelaces. The laces were like snakes and my hands were the prey. I fought with them and after a long-fought battle, I came out the victor, having managed to tame my laces and tie them in a rather loose bow. I started walking down the long gravel path that led to the school. The gravel crunched under my feet as they touched it. It was like a battle in World War I as explosions went off.

The reader will readily notice the terms “prey”, “battle”, “victor” and “explosion” which characteristically pepper Roddy’s account like shrapnel. In contrast, Ben’s favourite metaphors are otherworldly. His belief in God is important to him, and he quite often structures his accounts with the aid of a dualistic “two worlds” metaphor. Playing music, for instance, transports him to another world:-

It is as though my soul had somehow been elevated above mundane matters. Later, his beloved grandfather becomes seriously ill and “grew away from this world.” In ways such as these are writers’ stories subtly permeated with characteristic personal metaphors which often communicate a distinctive sense of personal identity.

63. Sense of humour

Finally, the variety of senses of humour on display in the autobiographies is wide. Guy and Ewan are often sardonic. Barnaby can be sarcastic at times. Jack has a marked and ironic sense of the ridiculous - when he is not exercising his gift for gallows humour. Harry specialises in a kind of blundering but charming buffoonery, whilst Peregrine, in contrast, has a dramatist’s professional control of several comic effects, from high camp to arresting incongruity. Ben frequently portrays himself as gallumphingly socially clumsy through the use of a kind of slap-stick comedy at his own expense. Will is zany and scatty, whilst Robert has the art of deftly ironic incongruity down to a “t”. Ralph, a “boy’s boy”, if not a man’s man, is very “hard-core”, but also delights in sending up the machismo of his hard-man image. For his sense of the embarrassingly ridiculous, however, Freddie’s account of diarrhoea on
the Great Wall of China is hard to beat as a closing statement for both an autobiography and a Taxonomy:-

I was on top of the wall when the diarrhoea struck. To make matters worse, the nearest toilet was about a kilometre away, which I couldn’t have got to anyway. I will spare you the intricate details, as I am sure you can imagine what it is like to try and find a suitable place to relieve yourself when you are stuck on the top of a big wall. I can advise you that leaves are not good substitutes for toilet toll, and if you know of anyone who went to China last year who is wondering what the boy in the background of their holiday snaps was doing, now you know.

9.10 Conclusions

This final extract concludes the present chapter’s Taxonomy of Narrative Differences, which is an exposition of the wide range of differences which can be observed in the life stories of the students who participated in the study. The chapter has argued that one of the important ways in which the uniqueness of subjective personal identity can be achieved and represented, is through the construction of an autobiographical narrative. Each autobiographical narrative cumulatively constructs a large, complex and rich array of distinctive personal experiences which are narrated to form a unified and highly differentiated whole. The concept of “uniqueness”, however, goes considerably beyond the concept of “difference”. The highly differentiated nature of the students’ life stories, though likely to be unique, may not necessarily be so.

If the concept of “uniqueness” is interpreted in an observer-centered comparative way, then, like the concept of “infinity”, it lies at the extreme edge of empirical verification. In this sense, proving a person’s “objective” uniqueness would require the comparison of an infinite number of individual cases before a certain claim to uniqueness could be substantiated. If, however, as has been argued in the present study, the concept of “unique identity” is to be interpreted in the subject-centred sense of being “the subject’s own sense of who they are”, then it may also be argued that one, and only one person can be the subject of the personal experiences which are recounted in that person’s life story, so that each life story is unique. Moreover, as even the small sample of students’ life stories examined in present study indicate, the
The total number of individual differences displayed is very large indeed, and the Taxonomy, it is argued, has the potential to display an infinite array of personal differences. It is suggested, therefore, that these life stories are sufficiently differentiated and unified to claim, with some degree of justification, to be unique.

The Taxonomy of Narrative Differences presented during the second part of the chapter has described and analysed some of the most obvious ways in which the students’ life stories are differentiated from one another.

In the first instance, the Taxonomy has been used as a convenient way of summarising and displaying the very large number of differences between the students’ life stories. However, it has also been argued that the Taxonomy’s capacity to analyse and describe an almost infinite number of differences in biographical data make it a potentially flexible and useful tool for investigating the extreme variance and richness of life story material. The potentially infinite descriptive scope of the Taxonomy, which, it must be stressed, was based inductively on only a modest sample of students’ life stories, suggests that the kinds of biographical data upon which the study is based are of enormous complexity, richness and diversity. The richness of these biographical data suggests that they offer a very effective way of describing the differences and uniquenesses of individual persons. Furthermore, as a biographical approach to theorising the unique identities of individual persons, and collecting data about them, McAdams’ life story model of identity shares in this capacity to represent the infinite range of human uniqueness.

The Taxonomy of Narrative Differences and the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns, therefore, not only summarise and describe a very large number of personal differences which the students’ life stories exhibit, but, in demonstrating the huge range of possible differences which each separate constituent component of the Taxonomy possesses, also display the almost unlimited potential which life story narratives have for representing students’ senses of their unique identities and lives.
The Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns and the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences together, therefore, present the researcher’s detailed answer to the study’s principal research question:-

_In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?_

In their life stories, students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is _unified_ in ways which include those specified by the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns which was outlined in Chapter 8.

In their life stories, students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is _unique_ in ways which include those specified by the Taxonomy of Differentiating Patterns explained in the present chapter.

The short answer to the question of how students construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique is simply this; they tell _stories_ about themselves - the Taxonomies do but “count the ways”.

CHAPTER 10

THEMES AND VARIATIONS: DISCUSSING OTHER THEORISTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESENT STUDY

"To my friends pictured within"
(Edward Elgar; epigraph to the score of Enigma Variations)

10.1 Introduction

The interpretive perspective of the present study, shaped as it is by the hermeneutical approach of Gadamer (1975, 1976), Ricoeur (1992/1994) and Collingwood (1939), envisages the process of interpretation as a dialogical one in which the research data, other theorists' questions and answers, and the researcher's own repeated interpretive endeavours are engaged in a cumulative, re-iterative and dialogical encounter. To continue the dialogue, and also to repay his considerable debt to those who have been his intellectual mentors, in this section the researcher discusses aspects of the work of those scholars who were particularly influential on the development of the present study.

The work of a number of specific thinkers has raised questions about particular aspects of the process of identity formation which have been important for the conduct of the present study. These scholars include Denzin (1989, 1994), Erikson (1959, 1968), Frye (1957), Gergen (1987, 1993), Goffman (1961, 1963), Harré (1994, 1998), Jarvis (1987, 1992, 1999, 2001a), Marcia (1966, 1980) and McAdams (1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1993). Their questions and their insights have been an important part of the dialogical process by which the present researcher has interrogated and interpreted his data. In the present chapter, therefore, a selection of their ideas which were of particular importance in shaping the present study are discussed in the light of its findings, so that the "hermeneutical circle" may come full circle, and so that, in some small way, the present researcher may make his own small contribution to the debate which they have started, and leave a few small pebbles on the larger cairns left by
earlier travellers. Most of the issues raised in the present chapter would require separate studies to investigate them fully. The brief discussions which follow, therefore, in no way pretend to be thorough or complete. It goes without saying that many of the ideas and theories examined, though related to the interests of the present study, are nonetheless beyond its immediate scope, which remains that of a study of how, in the recounting their life stories, a group of adolescents in a residential school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique.

Since the study’s findings form the present researcher’s perspective, as well as providing the basis for his own claims, they are summarised at the outset of the critical discussion of other scholars’ work which otherwise constitutes the main focus of the chapter. The study’s findings are reported more fully in the final chapter.

The study’s principal findings concerned the identities of a group of students who lived and worked for a substantial part of the year within the confines of an academic residential school environment. As will be recalled from the previous chapter, the study’s principal research question was:-

\textit{In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?}

The study found that, in their life stories, all students constructed a sense of themselves which appeared to be \textit{unified} and \textit{unique}, and the wide range of ways in which their identities were so constructed in these stories was presented in the form of two extensive analytical catalogues of unifying and differentiating narrative patterns. These analytical catalogues constitute the study’s two \textit{Taxonomies} (details of which can be found in Chapters 8 and 9). The principal research question was thus answered by presenting the study’s \textit{Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns} and \textit{Taxonomy of Narrative Differences}. These \textit{Taxonomies} together described and summarised the large variety of ways in which the students’ life stories constructed a sense of themselves which was unified and unique.

The study also found that the students shared a remarkably \textit{consistent} perception of the norms and \textit{principles} that seemed to govern their local social world of peer-group
relationships. The norms, principles and values of their social world were articulated in the form of a set of widely accepted unofficial and unwritten “rules” which the researcher termed The Code, many of whose principles and values could also be seen in the moral lexicon of evaluative terms used by students, and by the place which “sport” occupied in their communal lives. The moral and social order which The Code governed was characterised as a typical “honour morality” whose hierarchical and masculine values laid great stress on being the right sort of “character” and thereby gaining the “respect” of peers.

Powerful as they may be in shaping the students’ social lives, however, neither the institution’s formal official rules, nor the informal and unofficial rules and norms of The Code appeared, surprisingly, to have significant influence on the unique personal identities presented by the students’ individual autobiographies.

Alongside these principal findings, the study’s findings also suggested the following conclusions:

- Although all students, even the youngest, presented a sense of self that was unified and unique, analysis of the data suggested a trend which associated a less well developed sense of unity with the younger age cohort, suggesting that achieving a unified and coherent sense of self may be an age-related achievement.

- Students’ autobiographies provided evidence of their awareness of a wide range of temporal (i.e. a continuous series of earlier and later) selves, but less evidence of a full spectrum of their different social selves, though when questioned about this omission, students’ subsequent reflections showed a ready awareness of a characteristic hierarchical array of different social worlds, and acknowledged that they may present different faces or selves in each.

- Students characteristically showed an awareness of a spectrum of between four to seven distinct social worlds, hierarchically arranged according to their
degree of social intimacy and privacy. At one end of the spectrum stood the “outside” public world and formal public life at school; at the other end of the spectrum stood their more intimate relationships with family and close friends.

- The students’ autobiographies characteristically depicted each student’s more intimate social worlds of family and close friends. Their public and peer-group worlds appeared much less frequently, and, although their existence may have been taken for granted, they did not appear to be considered important enough to take the centre of the stage in the autobiographies, and, consequently, in the students’ sense of their personal identity.

- Students claimed to feel “most themselves” in a wide variety of the different social worlds mentioned above. However, the majority of students claimed to feel “most themselves” when in their own company, or in that of close friends or family.

- From the evidence of the students’ autobiographies, neither the values and rules of the official school institution, nor the rules and values of their local peer-group world, nor the media and culture of the wider society in which they live, appeared to play a large role in each individual’s construction of their sense of personal identity.

- Contrary to Social Constructionist and Discursive orthodoxies, students’ senses of identity seem surprisingly resistant to macro-level direct institutional, cultural or social influence. Personal experiences at the very “local” level of close friends and family apparently provide the most significant ingredients from which a sense of identity is made.

- Since the characteristic emphasis in the students’ autobiographies was on the lessons and meanings they derived from their personal experiences, this finding reinforced strongly the importance of biographical methods of data collection (such as those of Murray and McAdams), biographical models of
learning (such as those of Jarvis and Alheit), and biographical models of identity (such as those of Erikson and McAdams).

- The striking omission of either The Code, or the school's official norms and values from the students’ autobiographies suggests that Goffman’s (1961, 1963) claims about the strong identity-forming effects of “total institutions” may need to be revised substantially, his account seeming to be “oversocialised” (Wrong, 1961) in the light of the present study’s findings.

- Although both McAdams’ life story model of identity, and his biographical research protocols proved to be invaluable as conceptual and data collection tools, the findings of the present study suggest that some details of the narrative schema through which he presents his model of identity, and some of the claims he makes about the developmental timetable which underpins it, may need to be revised.

- In particular, the findings of the present study suggest that identity formation occurs significantly earlier than the “late adolescence and early adulthood” McAdams proposes.

- A number of features of the developmentally-sequenced narrative schema that McAdams proposes are also queried. His omission of a “Plot” component as a basic element of his narrative schema seems puzzling, whilst neither his claims that “ideology” is a principal developmental task of adolescence, nor that “character” is a developmental task of middle-age, are supported by the findings of the present study. The data suggests that adolescents evince relatively little interest in “ideology”, whilst showing highly developed “character” much earlier than McAdams has supposed.

- Despite its absence from the students’ autobiographies, other data collected during the course of the study makes it clear that the majority of students who entered the school rapidly (within six months) learned the unwritten rules of
The Code which governed the students' social relations and self-presentation within the peer-group world that exists within the school.

- The rules and values of this peer-group world are sufficiently consistent and universal that they may be conveniently described as a single coherent moral order. This moral order takes the form of a hierarchical "honour morality" with its own "Code", its own moral lexicon, and a variety of cultural practices (such as "sport") which encapsulate and reinforce its hierarchical, aristocratic, "stiff-upper-lip", sporting, masculine and anti-academic values and virtues.

- The data collected in the study suggest that even within the confines of a small English Public School, several distinct types of autobiographical writing naturally exist. The large number and range of such indigenous autobiographical forms would seem to exceed the expectations of some other researchers such as Denzin, Hammerle and Harré. Shaped by neither a universalist "Western literary convention" (Denzin, 1989), nor a single generic form indigenous to a specific local culture (Harré, 1998), the different autobiographical forms seem to be determined by the specific local purposes for which the writing was intended.

- Although the study made use of Erikson's account of identity, three specific aspects of that account were brought into question by the findings of the present study. First, it is suggested that identity formation occurs significantly earlier than the "late adolescence and early adulthood" that Erikson proposes. Secondly, rather than achieving identity through accepting a pre-fabricated cultural niche of a social role in the adult world, the students' autobiographies suggest that identity formation is a more active and interpretive process in which they learn from their highly localised personal experiences. Finally, the concept of identity moratorium, implying as it does that adolescents live in an intermediate desert that exists between the worlds of "childhood" and "adulthood", fails to recognise the rich, complex and hierarchical spectrum of worlds that make up the social world of the adolescent. In their continuous engagement with these social worlds, the adolescent is continuously
developing their identity, which does not, from the evidence of the students' autobiographies undergo a vacant and uncommitted period of "moratorium".

In the light of these findings, this chapter now proceeds to discuss some of those thinkers whose work has most influenced the development of the present study.

10.2 Goffman on "total institutions" and their effects

According to Goffman’s (1961, 1963) analysis, living in any kind of residential institution approximating to what he has termed a "total institution" is likely to have radical effects on the personality of those who are its "inmates". It will be recalled that Goffman has argued that such places are "forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self." (Goffman, 1961: 12).

The findings of the present study suggest that Goffman may exaggerate this assertion, and that his account of the way a "total institution" influences its "inmates" is too simplistic and deterministic. The study suggest that although membership of the school community may have a strong influence on the ways in which students deport themselves in their social lives amongst their peers, membership of the school community seems to have relatively little effect on students' individual senses of their own personal identity. Students may learn, and live by, the unofficial "Code" whilst with their peers, but it rarely permeates their autobiographies. If "identity" is construed as a person's own sense of who they are, then the "total institution" investigated during the course of the present study is not an effective "forcing house for changing persons".

Therefore, despite the potency and pervasiveness of The Code in students' social lives at Bentham’s, it seems clear that The Code and its values are not strong influences on the individual identities presented by the students' life stories. The fact that, at Bentham’s, The Code can be dominant in the students' social world, but also seemingly insignificant in their individual autobiographies, testifies to inner worlds uncharted by Goffman's social analyses. It is argued below that Goffman never allowed himself a satisfactory concept of subjective personal identity, and that this
omission gives his micro-sociological work a major blind spot which renders it incapable of either accommodating or even acknowledging sufficiently the “inner” lives of social agents, or their interpretive autonomy.

In a discussion entitled “Personal Identity” to be found in Stigma (1968:68ff), Goffman attempts to distinguish a number of different types of identity. Three types of identity emerge from this discussion; “social identity”, “personal identity” and a third, unspecified, type of “inner” identity that involves “the core of his (sic) being”. For Goffman, the first conception of identity, “social identity”, seems to amount to the generic social categories and roles to which a person might belong, whereas his second conception of identity, “personal identity” is concerned with the way that “the individual can be differentiated from all others.” His discussion of this second concept makes it clear that the two primary considerations for assigning “personal identity” are the observer-centered objective ones of physical appearance and unique spatio-temporal trajectory. (There are obvious parallels here with Harré’s 1998 analysis.) The assumption behind both of these concepts (his “social” and “personal” conceptions of identity) is that social and personal identity are both viewed from the perspective of the outside observer; they are terms about the objective identifying criteria by which other people recognise a person. These terms are entirely distinct from the Eriksonian concept of “identity” adopted by the present study, which denotes a quite distinct type of subjective personal identity i.e. persons as seen by themselves.

Having discussed these two objective conceptions of “personal identity”, however, Goffman’s brief but telling discussion goes on to adumbrate a third quite different type of identity. He briefly gropes for some kind of subjective concept of identity:-

A third idea is that what distinguishes an individual from all others is the core of his being, a general and central aspect of him, making him different through and through, not merely identifiably different, from those who are most like him. (Goffman, 1968: 74)

However, Goffman immediately dismisses such a concept as being of no interest to his work. If this reading of Goffman be admitted, it seems clear that Goffman’s work has no subjective conception of identity. His analysis of the term “personal identity”
can be seen as distinguishing three quite distinct concepts; first, social-identity-as-seen-by-others; secondly, personal-identity-as-seen-by-others, and finally, personal-identity-as-seen-by-self. The former two concepts are primary “objective” or “outside observer” criteria of identity, whilst the last is the subject’s own subjective sense of their identity. With these distinctions made clear, it becomes relatively simple to explain in some detail both the agreements and disagreements of the present study’s data with Goffman’s claims.

Social identity

Within the day-to-day world of school social life, individual students are acutely aware of how they appear to others, and, after an initial period of adjustment and “settling in”, they learn the unwritten social rules and norms of The Code. Having learned The Code, students learn both to conform to it, and, in Goffman’s sense, to “manage” their identities effectively so as to avoid stigmatisation through local categories such as being “gay” or a “nerd”. They may, instead, aspire to achieve the higher social status of being a “hero”, a “rude boy”, or just a plain “good bloke”. In terms of “social identity”, the evidence of the present study indicates that the social world of the school has a considerable impact on the “social identities” of the students. The influence of The Code is clearly both widespread and powerful in shaping social identities and social relations.

Personal identity

For Goffman, “personal identity” seems to mean a “person’s-identity-as-seen-by-others”. Construed as denoting the way “the individual can be differentiated from all others” Goffman’s (1968) conception of “personal identity” is resolutely observer-centered, which distinguishes it sharply from Erikson’s (1959, 1963, 1968) conception of identity employed in the present study. According to Goffman, his concept has two primary identifying criteria; physical appearance and unique public career. There is little evidence that either of these criteria were given much importance in the way the students identified one another in their day-to-day social relations.
Despite all the predictable agonies of adolescent self-consciousness - indeed, perhaps because of them - stigmatisation by physical appearance (as opposed to moral character) was not very common. Some students admitted to a degree of personal differentiation by appearance, for instance, by wearing idiosyncratic clothes, such as “skater dude”, “grunge” “rude boy” or “pretty boy” styles of dress. For some students, physical appearance, whether in body-type or clothing, was clearly of considerable importance, but most students characteristically denied that such “superficial” things as fashion or facial appearance had any radical importance in matters of personal identity. On the contrary, they argued, it is a person’s “mind”, “personality” or “character” that makes a person different from other people.

None of the students interviewed differentiated themselves from others by citing their unique publicly-observable “careers” at school as Goffman’s definition of “personal identity” suggests. Perhaps in an enclosed community like Bentham’s where everybody knows everybody else, and see each other on a daily basis, such objectifying criteria may be redundant. At Bentham’s, “personal identity” (i.e. a person’s identity as seen by others) was more likely to be determined by such things as their position in the social hierarchy (their year group and house), their overall “character”, or their degree of sporting prowess. These latter items may well be particularly characteristic of the ways in which honour moralities identify people by the local moral criteria of character and social position.

Subject-centered identity

Goffman’s claims about the effects of “total institutions” part company most dramatically and significantly with the findings of the present study when the content of the students’ autobiographies are considered. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the content and structure of the life stories were not only very clearly and idiosyncratically differentiated from one another, but they also failed to include or recognise the institution’s socially-learned Code to any significant degree. The meanings, interpretations and selections which differentiate each student’s complex narratives are characteristic of their authors’ individual subjectivities, and not the shared social world of The Code.
Characteristically, as the previous section indicated, Goffman is not concerned with an individual’s “inner” subjective world, and it is just such a world that each autobiography explores. The failure of Goffman’s work to acknowledge this subjective world, or to explore how it might relate to the various social worlds which he does describe, is, as Burkitt (1991) and others have argued, a major weakness in his work. Much of Goffman’s micro-sociological work adopts a distinctive “dramaturgical” perspective in which “actors”, “performance” and “stagecraft” are the principal metaphors employed by his presiding “model of theatrical performance” (Lemert and Branaman, 1997). For many years, his critics (see Burkitt, 1991:57ff) have argued that one of the primary weaknesses induced by the adoption of this model is that by concentrating exclusively on roles and performances, the model ignores or dismisses the fact that even stage actors have personalities, characteristics and subjectivities which transcend the roles they play professionally; actors in a West End play wipe off the grease paint, take off their costumes, return home to wives, children and private lives when their performance is done. In the same way, it may be argued, social actors, though they may often play a variety social roles, are not exclusively constituted by them.

It is perhaps telling, therefore, that Goffman’s analysis of the term “Personal Identity” focuses entirely on such social and objective criteria of identity whilst dismissing the subjective sense of personal identity as being of no interest. Because of this conceptual omission, his analysis of “total institutions” as “forcing houses for changing persons” seems incomplete and inaccurate. His work ignores the active and dynamic role which individual subjectivities can play in constructing subjective personal identities which, as in the case of Bentham’s, students may simply ignore, marginalize, or even defy the powerful social tyrannies of The Code and the “total institution” itself. As Wrong (1961) has argued, social theories such as that of Goffman present an “oversocialised” conception of human beings, and one which does insufficient justice to their dynamic agency.

Further reflection may suggest other reasons why The Code does not affect a student’s sense of subjective personal identity. As Harré (1983) points out, honour morality codes are frequently “aristocratic” in tone, and although such codes are, in their own
terms often *absolute*, they are also very precisely limited and *circumscribed* in its jurisdiction. An honour code is concerned primarily with a person’s *integrity* and their *public* face, and therefore controls *social* demeanour and deportment, as well as the range of moral characteristics the person should be seen to possess. The aristocrat’s *private* life and identity, however, might be wildly idiosyncratic in the extreme, without necessarily compromising their public *social* status, as the fabled private lives of Catherine the Great and Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria - or even Queen Victoria - testify.

In this respect the Bentham’s *Code* may be similarly “aristocratic”; *The Code* contains not only a cluster of rules which enjoin considerable social *deference to superiors*, and which counsel concealing ones true feelings when teased, but it also contains a cluster of rules which command you to “*Be yourself.*” Though at first sight paradoxical, these clusters of commands are not necessarily contradictory. If the analysis offered above is accepted, the two clusters are easily reconciled. Students may live by *The Code* when in the peer-group world of the school, in which case they should know their place in the hierarchy and show both due deference to others, as well as demonstrate approved moral character traits. Outside the peer-group world of *The Code*, as well as within it, however, *The Code* also expects its members to have both *personal integrity* and a distinctive *individual identity* in ways which transcend the limits of the peer-group world. You must, at all times, *Be yourself*. Slavish social conformity without independent individual *integrity* would place one under suspicion of being insincere, spineless or manipulative and in danger of being placed in the category of being a “phony”, “lackey” or “drone”, and therefore not a person of “worth” at all.

### 10.3 Autobiographical Genre

Are there culturally distinctive autobiographical genres? A number of scholars have sought to uncover a basic *autobiographical genre*, particular to a specific culture, which might be seen to influence and inform any autobiographies produced within that particular culture. Denzin (1989) outlines certain characteristics of what he believes to be a distinctive “Western” autobiography. He argues that autobiographies are “conventionalised, narrative expressions of life experiences” (1989:17) and are
therefore subject to the constraints of a culturally-determined template. He argues that there is a distinctive “Western literary convention” of autobiographical writing that has existed since such biographies began to be written, and that this set of conventions is “universal”. This canonical autobiographical form incorporates such disparate elements as the existence of “others”, family beginnings, starting points and turning points. Gergen and Gergen (1993) assume a similar perspective to that of Denzin (1989) in their own study of gender issues in popular western autobiographies. Evidence provided in Chapter 7, however, suggests that at least some of these elements are not as “universal” as are often supposed; less than half of the research participants, for instance, can trace a “turning point” in their lives, and the starting points of their autobiographies are not universally those of early childhood.

On the other hand, other scholars (Harré, 1998; Hammerle, 1995) suggest the existence of a potentially much wider range of autobiographical genres, available for inspection by those who take the trouble to travel or read more widely. Each local culture, they argue, will produce its own indigenous autobiographical genre that will inform all the autobiographies produced within that local culture. Their examples and discussions seem to suggest that, whilst the existence of supra-national autobiographical genres are to be questioned, generic local cultural genres are not. There seems to be a potential theoretical debate here between those who tend towards a “universal formalist” perspective, and those who take a “cultural relativist” perspective. Such a debate is beyond the scope of this study, which, on the basis of evidence gathered during the course of the present research, would adopt neither perspective.

On the basis of the present study’s findings, two things are suggested with regard to the existence of culturally-given autobiographical genres. First, it is argued that discussions of autobiographical genre are often confused, being frequently insufficiently differentiated from discussions of narrative form. Whilst it may be the case that most autobiographies have a narrative form, it is not the case that all narratives are autobiographical. It may be the case that some of the features that Denzin (1989) and others attribute to autobiographical genre (such as the presence of
a "known and knowing author", or the prevalence of gender and class values, may be more widely distributed features of narration in general.

Secondly, although there are undeniably cultural variations in autobiographical writing, the work of Harré (1998) and Hammerle (1995) suggests that although there may be a wide variety of culturally-given autobiographical forms scattered across the world, their work may underestimate the capacity of even a small local sub-culture to generate many autobiographical genres. Their work has not always scrutinised the precise local circumstances and purposes that called the autobiographies into existence. The evidence of the present study suggests that even a micro-culture like Bentham's may support several different autobiographical genres which are deployed according to a specific situational intention rather than a single generic national or local cultural genre.

It will be recalled from Chapter 7 that the present researcher was able to trace the existence of at least three other indigenous autobiographical genres in regular use within the confines of the school; sports team brochures, UCAS “personal statements”, and the Bentham’s Yearbook written by school leavers.

Analysis of these data suggested that each distinct autobiographical genre was shaped by the specific purpose for which it was designed, rather than by its cultural location per se. Although each of the genres indubitably contained a narrated and edited selection of the students’ life experiences, the particular purposes underlying each of the local genres had a strong influence on the selection and presentation of the chosen material.

It will be recalled that the autobiographies occurring in the typical sports team brochures were written for inclusion in a glossy and high quality brochure which aimed both to publicise and raise funds for a major school team’s annual international tour, and that the autobiographies appeared amidst facsimiles of letters on official headed notepaper from public figures such as The Headmaster, the Prime Minister, other well-known political figures, and famous international sportsman. Although individual players drafted their own autobiographies, the house style of the publication
presented these as third-person biographies rather than autobiographies with a single paragraph is allocated to each individual, which was also accompanied by a small photograph of the player concerned.

The UCAS “personal statements”, in contrast, were produced by students in their final year as part of their university application forms. Having collected together data on past examination successes as well as references written by their teachers, one page of the form was devoted to the students’ own “personal statement”, an autobiographical piece of writing in which the student had the opportunity to demonstrate their distinctiveness, breadth of interests and academic superiority.

It will be recalled that the serious and even earnest tone of the UCAS “personal statements” stood in stark contrast to the autobiographical writings to be found in the “Benthams Year Book”, to which most final year students contributed a full page embarrassing, jokey and even ribald anecdotes about themselves. The contents of these pages were characterised by reminiscences of outstanding moments in their lives and personal confessions which might entertain or embarrass their author’s friends. Designed primarily for immediate consumption by peers, the material on most of the pages was energetic, often brash, and intended to be amusing.

The co-existence of such distinctively different types of autobiographical writing within a single small community suggests strongly that each genre is determined more by the specific purposes which motivate the writing, rather than the geographical location, per se, from which they come. It is interesting that all three genres are brief, and, in contrast to the life stories written for the study, make only restricted use of narrative. Despite their huge differences in content, style and tone, the three genres share a primarily rhetorical function, which is that of establishing a claim to academic, social or sporting credibility.

In all these respects, the sports tour brochures, UCAS “personal statements” and Yearbook genres stood in marked contrast to the autobiographies written specially for the present study, which were designed to allow students to explore and present their own subjective understanding of their own identity, and which were not read by
anyone other than the writer and the researcher. This further autobiographical genre - one modelled on McAdams’ (1985) research work - evoked an entirely distinctive type of writing which has been fully examined in the previous chapters. The manifold differences between all four types of autobiographical writing occurring within the same small social environment suggest, against Denzin (1989), Gergen and Gergen (1993) and others, that “autobiographical genre” is neither supra-national nor national, but quintessentially very local indeed, and that, in many cases, its characteristic content and form are often closely tied to the specific rhetorical and persuasive purposes which the genre is designed to serve.

10.4 Erikson on Identity, Adolescence, Ideology and Identity Moratorium

McAdams (1985, 1993), whose life story model of identity has been adopted by the present study, acknowledges his considerable debt to Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969). The seed of McAdams’ life story model of identity, arose, it will be recalled, from Erikson’s idea that identity is a “new configuration” formed as a reflective process of “selective repudiation and mutual assimilation” (Erikson, 1959: 113). As was seen in Chapter 2, Erikson’s suggestive phrase, “new configuration”, was developed considerably by McAdams when he drew on Erikson’s practice of writing the life stories of particular historical individuals like Luther (1958) and Gandhi (1969) to produce a model of identity whose “configuration” was biographical.

However, in addition to adopting and developing Erikson’s general conception of identity, McAdams also adopted a number features of Erikson’s developmental account of identity formation, which saw it as occurring particularly during adolescence. The data collected by the present researcher has lead him to question at least four specific aspects of the Erikson’s (and hence also McAdams’) account of identity formation during adolescence.

Identity formation in “late adolescence”

First, McAdams follows Erikson in asserting that identity formation is not only the primary task of “adolescence”, the fifth of his psycho-social stages of development,
but also a developmental task which occurs in "late adolescence and young adulthood." (McAdams, 1985: 9, researcher's italics). In the quotation given below, McAdams confirms his acceptance of Erikson’s developmental timetable: “beginning in late adolescence, we construct stories to integrate the disparate elements of our lives.” (McAdams, 1985: 18, researcher’s italics):

Beginning in late adolescence, we become biographers of the self, mythologically re-arranging the scattered elements of our lives...into a narrative whole providing unity and purpose. Thus, identity is a life story. The identity configuration to which Erikson alludes is a configuration of plot, character, setting, scene and theme. (McAdams, 1985: 29)

If McAdams’ life story model of identity be accepted, then the production of a coherent autobiography offers graphic evidence that its producer has at least begun to develop a sense of their own identity. On the basis of the autobiographies produced by the two groups of students in the research school, it is clear that the majority of students (more than three quarters of the sample) are able to produce coherent, intelligently selective and well-integrated life stories. The students in the two research groups, however, were neither “late” adolescents nor “young adults” in Erikson’s sense of those terms; all subjects were significantly younger. The primary research sample comprised essentially a group of twenty-two fourteen-year-olds and a group of twenty fifteen-year-olds. Neither of these age cohorts would traditionally be described as being in “late adolescence and young adulthood”, which raises an interesting question about the accuracy of the developmental time-scale of Erikson’s initial claims. The coherent and reflective life stories produced for the present study suggest that identity formation can occur earlier in adolescence than has traditionally been thought.

Taking the life stories of both research groups together, there were many more coherent, intelligently selective and clearly organised life stories than either Erikson’s or McAdams’ theories might have predicted. Taken separately, however, there were some significant differences between the two different age cohorts, in which their age and developmental stage may be at least partly reflected, as Erikson and McAdams have suggested. An analysis of the degree to which each individual autobiography was organised and ordered revealed some differences between the two age cohorts.
Taking both groups into account, the majority of the adolescents' autobiographies display a clear sense of who they are. Articulation, differentiation, and the presentation of coherent development in the sense of self were, however, was more marked in the older age cohort, though this was a matter of small degree. About a third of the younger autobiographers produced autobiographies in which the sense of self that emerged was diffuse, fragmentary or unclear. In contrast, less than a tenth of the sample of fifteen-year olds presented a sense of self which was diffuse or fragmentary. In numerical terms, only two members of the senior group produced autobiographies which were episodic and relatively unstructured, whereas eight of the junior sample fell into this category. Members of the junior group were more likely to rely on a simple “chronicle” form of connection between their material: “and then...and then...and then...”.

The junior group were also less likely to make use of a self-conscious narrator who commented on the emerging story. In some of the juniors, such self-awareness was intermittent or absent, in some cases resulting in what, to the more self-aware, might have been felt to be embarrassing revelations. Harry, one of the fourteen-year-olds, for instance, seems to have lumbered his way through near-death by drowning, become one of his junior school’s bullies, and got into Bentham’s without any clear awareness of the significance of these events.

On the other hand, although it is possible to generalise about the larger number of inchoate and unreflective autobiographies in the younger group, it is also true to say that many others in the same group displayed a highly developed sense of self in their adroitly self-aware supporting narratives. Although both samples are small, and although interpretive judgements about coherent identity are thus open to challenge, it may still be the case that, as McAdams and Erikson have argued, identity formation should be seen as a developmental achievement, and it was therefore to be expected that the older age cohort would be more advanced than their juniors. Nonetheless, the general trend of the study’s findings suggest that the developmental task of identity formation may be accomplished significantly earlier than either Erikson nor McAdams expected.
Identifying with ready-made adult roles and occupations

Secondly, Erikson’s account of the *process* of identity formation in adolescence characterises the process as a somewhat *passive* identification with pre-given roles available in an undifferentiated “adult” world. The findings of the present study suggest that the process of identity formation is much more *active* and *creative* than Erikson opines, and that a variety of social worlds - not just a monolithic single “adult” world - may influence their sense of who they are. For Erikson, adolescents accommodate themselves to the prevailing *adult social roles* and *occupational expectations* in a somewhat *passive* manner. Erikson’s account, although formally a “psycho-social” process involving a dialogue between the growing individual and their society, seems sometimes a somewhat one-sided and supine dialogue. Although at times Erikson envisages identity formation as a complex and *dynamic* process whose components include the “constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favoured capacities, significant identifications, effective defences, successful sublimations and consistent roles”, (Erikson, 1959: 116), in many other passages, the individual is cast in a more simplistic and *conformist* light.

This conformist tendency seems to dominate Erikson’s discussions, with the process of identity formation being seen as a matter of finding “a niche in some section of society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him.” (Erikson, 1959: 111). The niche, evidently, is made by *society*, and not the individual. The mature adult has achieved his identity by “accepting some definition as to who he is, usually on the basis of a function in an economy, a place in a sequence of generations, and a status in the structure of society”. (1959: 111-112). For Erikson, as for Marcia (1966, 1980), the roles, ideologies and expectations of the wider adult society provide the norms against which an adolescent’s identity is ultimately calibrated.

In contrast to this rather simple, conformist and authoritarian account of identity formation whereby the docile adolescent gradually, after an experimental period of sowing wild oats (“exploration” and “moratorium”) settles down into their pre-prepared “niche” or “role” in adult society, the autobiographies produced by the
students in the present study suggest that a much more active process of identity formation is going on, and that it involves a much wider spectrum of different worlds than the single “adult” world envisaged by Erikson. Jarvis (1987) has criticised the work of G.H. Mead for having too monolithic and undifferentiated conception of “society”. A parallel criticism might be levelled at Erikson:—

As the individual grows and matures within the context of social living, the person becomes, in part, a reflection of the sum total of experiences that the individual has in society. But that culture is not a single undifferentiated phenomenon, it varies by socio-economic class, by ethnic community, by region and even by gender. (Jarvis, 1987: 13).

Close inspection of the autobiographies reveals a considerable variety of social reference groups, each with their respective values, and any or all of these might serve as potential influences on the adolescent’s developing sense of identity. Only two students in the present study mentioned the adult world and its social and occupational roles as objects of eventual identification. When they did so, it was in a fleeting, uncommitted and “objective” manner which made it clear that they did not so identify themselves at present. Rather than characterising the process of identity formation as one in which the adolescent learns to fit into a single, monolithic “adult” society, these findings suggest that, Erikson’s socially adaptive account of adolescent identity may be both “oversocialised” (Wrong, 1961), and also use an insufficiently differentiated conception of society (Jarvis, 1987). The variety of social worlds which influence the adolescents’ developing senses of personal identity include, on the basis of the autobiographical data collected, family life, relationships with very close friends, social and educational experiences at nurseries, kindergartens, prep schools and Bentham’s, as well as personal experiences that are essentially solitary.

The extended family and close friends provided the context for many of the events narrated, but these family contexts also showed very considerable variation in their tone and values. Two Japanese students, for instance, demonstrated a much more deferential type of familial relationship than one student who was a member of a single parent family, and who seemed to have almost brought himself up in the absence of a parent in the house for most of the day. In the former, obedience to
parents' wishes was paramount, and parental supervision was close; in the other case, obedience and supervision were less prominent.

If the variety of types of family setting manifested in the sample of autobiographies was very varied, the range of idiosyncratic personal experiences was more extraordinary still, all of which features suggest that the students’ social world is a very complex mosaic of interlocking and overlapping social worlds of varying degrees of influence, and which must question the plausibility of Erikson’s more monolithic and authoritarian account.

The closest that the students came to the Eriksonian model of “identifying with adult social roles and occupational expectations” occurred when interviewed about what made them different from others. When offering brief “thumb-nail sketches” of themselves, students quite often “placed” themselves with reference to a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, educational and cultural matrices. Such social identifications were infrequent in the autobiographies themselves. The explanation for this phenomenon may be that there are both nomothetic and idiothetic ways of representing identity, both of which may be used according to circumstances. Rather than seeing the former Eriksonian type of “social-role-referenced” identification as the paradigm case of identity formation, it may well be that, instead, such social “grid-referencing” offers a distinctive nomothetic kind of self-identification that Goldberg (1981) has called “the psychology of the stranger”. McAdams (1992) has argued that such generalised kinds of identity statement present only a few big, obvious and observer-centered features of a person’s identity. Such descriptions offer a different “objective” kind of identity statement from the subjective model of identity adopted by Erikson and McAdams, in which individuals communicate their identity more idiothetically through recounting parts of their life stories. Both of these distinctive types of self-attribution are clearly within the repertoire of most of the autobiographers.

In conclusion, the sources of an adolescent’s identity are much more varied than the simple and passive adoption of roles and occupations available “off the peg” within the “adult” social world; religious, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, school and
familial sub-cultures all contribute to the *personal experiences* out of which the individual constructs, often in very active, creative and idiosyncratic ways, their own unique sense of themselves. The *process* of identity formation may thus be a much more *active* and *individually* reflective process than Erikson first thought, and there may be a much wider array of social worlds and *personal experiences* which serve as sources of identity than he supposed.

Part of the difference in emphasis between the present study and Erikson’s original account may lie in the fact that *society* itself has changed, fragmented and de­stabilised since Erikson’s work was produced in the 1940s and 1950s. These social changes may have removed the kind of clear and authoritative social roles and occupational expectations which Erikson believed were such prominent and stable features of the world of adulthood. At the very least, the present research seems to provide evidence for the importance of the ineluctably *local* and *personal* experiences, rather than macro-social factors in the individual’s developing sense of identity.

*Adolescence and the importance of “ideology”*

Thirdly, both Erikson and McAdams stress the importance of what they call “ideology” in the formation of identity during adolescence:-

We will call what young people in their teens and early 20s look for in religion and in other dogmatic systems *ideology*. At the most it is a militant system with uniformed members and uniform goals; at the least it is a ‘way of life’, or what the Germans call a *Weltanschaung*. (Erikson, 1958:41).

Such an “ideology” helps a person make sense of their lives, argues McAdams. “We understand who we are in the context of what we believe to be real, to be true, and to be good.” (McAdams, 1985: 215). In McAdams’ later work (1991,1993) “ideology” is seen as one of the basic ingredients of the person’s life story. McAdams calls the ideological network which underpins a person’s life story its “setting”. The “setting” provides the interpretive backdrop to a life story, and thus constitutes the matrix within which the story is constructed. Although sometimes recognising its wider possibilities, both Erikson and McAdams usually focus their investigations of
“ideology” on the official public political, religious and philosophical affiliations of their subjects. Erikson’s classic biographical studies, Young Man Luther (1958) and Gandhi’s truth (1969), for instance, are much occupied with the formative role of institutional religious belief and political ideology. McAdams’ own research (such as McAdams, Booth and Selvik, 1981; McAdams, 1985) also concentrates similarly on such “official” institutional systems of belief when he discusses matters of ideology.

In contrast, the autobiographies produced for the purposes of the present study show very little interest in the traditional “grand narratives” of institutional religious belief, party politics, socio-economic praxis, or philosophy. Many of the student authors are agnostic or uncommitted about such matters, and most never mention them at all. One fifteen-year old boy discusses (with obvious sincerity) the central importance of the Catholic faith in his life, whilst another boy identifies himself with his Islamic faith, but these are untypical of the sample as a whole. Two or three others find themselves momentarily contemplating some of life’s potential metaphysical questions when faced with bereavement or cataclysm, but such references are characteristically uncommitted to any official ideology, and are usually brief and fleeting. Most of the autobiographers present no clear evidence of articulate or self-consciously chosen religious or political beliefs. In many ways this is surprising in a school context in which students are obliged to attend a religious service in Chapel on most days. It certainly presents a very different impression from that described by Erikson’s work, as well as by that of McAdams’ empirical American studies. It may be the case that either the young age of the study’s participants, or their immersion in their characteristically sceptical Public School mileu, may go some way towards accounting for the radical omission of “ideology” from the life stories. This difference is, nonetheless, strikingly different from the account given by Erikson and McAdams.

If this position were to be replicated by further research, Erikson’s notion of the development of “ideology” as one of the major defining characteristics of adolescence may stand in need of radical revision. It may be the case that social changes in a modern and post-modern world underpin these findings; in the twenty-first century, fewer people seem to have traditional beliefs and values which are acquired “off the peg” from some official public institution, such as a church or a political party. In
consequence, many people may have beliefs and values of which they are not even fully conscious. In a more pluralistic society than Erikson envisaged, there may also be a very complex array of different types and levels of "ideology"; ethnic and cultural, familial, local and personal. This more individualistic, de-centered and pluralistic social structure seems to be reflected in the life stories collected for the present study, which are often permeated by their own distinctive, idiosyncratic and "home grown" beliefs and values. It seems, rather, as Ricoeur (1992/1994: 164ff) has argued, that all personal stories are told within their own "ethical horizon" of ethical values and aims, and it is these that provide the framework within which the story is told.

The Japanese boys, for instance, enact their life stories within an ethical framework in which the duty to work hard and to obey parents is paramount. Others direct their life course towards the personal project of being famous or different, whilst three others want to serve their country or their "fellow man". Another boy lives by the self-chosen virtues of helpfulness and patience. The variety of such idiosyncratic schemes of belief and value is considerable, and generalisations often obfuscate genuine differences. The autobiographies taken as a whole, however, would seem to provide persuasive evidence for the essentially experiential origins of "ideology", which seems to be local and personal in nature, rather than public and institutional as Erikson proposes.

*Psycho-social moratorium*

Fourthly, Erikson suggests that the period of adolescent identity formation is a time of considerable exploration in which different identities are "tried on". The fluidity of this process requires what he has called a "psychosocial moratorium" (Erikson, 1959, 1963) - a temporary disengagement from past and future identifications in which "he or she has made a provisional break from the past, but has yet to pledge allegiance to a particular future." (McAdams, 1985: 16).

Earlier sections of the present study have highlighted the complex matrix of local moral orders (e.g. *The Code*), personal affiliations and idiosyncratic experiences that
serve as sources of an adolescent’s values and identity. The existence of such local moral orders has important implications for the concept of “psycho-social moratorium” advocated by Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966, 1980) and others. Whilst it is inevitably true that children outgrow old beliefs (such as in Father Christmas), the motion of “psychosocial moratorium” as proposed by Erikson, and developed by Marcia, implies a simplistic bi-polar disjunction between the worlds of childhood and adulthood. This exclusive either/or pair of alternatives can also clearly be seen in McAdams’ definition quoted above. In the limbo state of “moratorium”, it is held, the adolescent has to cut loose from their previous childish values and identifications, and enter a time of experiment and waiting before they are ready to embrace the new values and identifications which are available to them in the autonomous adult world. The adolescent, it seems, has to choose between the world of the child and the world of adults.

The complex array of data collected for this study, however, indicates that the bi-polar split between the worlds of childhood and adulthood considerably oversimplifies the actual social and personal situation of most adolescents. Contrary to the impression conveyed by the work of Erikson and Marcia, the findings of the present study suggest that in between the private world of childhood and the public world of adulthood exist an extensive and complex network of local moral orders, familial loyalties, personal experiences and personal relationships which are important resources for identity formation. Harre (1983) has lamented the way that much social science research has ignored the importance of what he calls these “autonomous pre-cursor worlds”.

The assumption that there is no significant intermediate territory between the worlds of childhood and adulthood might be compared to the assumption entertained by some nineteenth century historians that nothing really happened in the so-called “Dark Ages”. In between the antique golden glories of the ancient world and the exotic eruptions of the Medieval world, it was assumed that nothing of any importance or interest happened. Classical temples were out of fashion and cathedrals had yet to be; Greek philosophy had faded away but Medieval Scholasticism was still a distant dream, unimagined by the (presumed) ignorant who populated the obscure in-between times of the “Dark Ages”. Modern historical research, however, knows
better, and can now attribute the previous attitude towards the “Dark Ages” to a mixture of ignorance and snobbery; historians had not bothered to look carefully enough at the period because they did not believe anything of interest was happening then.

Might a similar attitude, and for similar reasons, obtain in the case of adolescence? Like the Dark Ages, it leaves behind few monuments, and it is often an inscrutable and closed world. Its constantly shifting fashions and values mean that few permanent structures survive within the ambient culture. Nonetheless, during adolescence, as in the Dark Ages, life is certainly going on, and vigorously too. The analysis of The Code, its associated social practices and moral lexicon offered in Chapter 6 are testimony to one such cluster of norms, roles and values. Other data collected during the course of this study suggest that several other uncharted areas of influential value-laden life exist. The sophisticated and highly differentiated worlds of taste in clothes and music, the complex semiology of hair styles, and the etiquette of sexual congress could reveal a richness and complexity of culture the equal of those charted by earlier anthropologists. The evidence collected in this study suggests that although adolescents may gradually relinquish an uncritical and unreflective identification with the people and experiences of their childhoods, they do not simply cut loose from this world of childhood into a void-like “moratorium” on their voyage of exploration into the uncharted waters of adult identity. In between the worlds of early childhood and eventual adulthood, there exists a vast and teeming ocean of intermediate social worlds with their own norms, values, identities and affiliations, and these have their own part to play in the young person’s evolving identity process. Nor are these worlds with their norms and experiences necessarily less important than the worlds of childhood and adulthood; for the students in the research school, for instance, the honour morality values of The Code (“Be relaxed and take a joke”; “Be generous”) may remain an influential part of their identities long after school dinners and Chapel are merely nostalgic memories. For all these reasons, the nature and function of “psychosocial moratorium” might fruitfully be opened to further critical questioning.
10.5 McAdams' model of narrative identity

McAdams' narrative schema

In this section, McAdams' detailed narrative schema is re-examined in the light of the findings of the present study to consider how far its principal features were supported by the data collected. McAdams' life story model of identity has been a central concept in the present study. The basic metaphor that identity may be conceived of in narrative terms, as seen in Chapter 2, was developed further by McAdams to include a detailed schema of principal narrative elements. It will be recalled that the basic elements of his narrative schema were outlined like this:-

Thus, identity is a life story. The identity configuration to which Erikson alludes is a configuration of plot, character, setting scene, and theme. (McAdams, 1985:29).

In subsequent works McAdams developed the “plot, character, setting, scene and theme” schema in a number of different ways. His initial work in 1985 proposed four basic narrative elements, Ideological setting, Imagoes (characters), Nuclear episodes and Generativity script, with two additional “superordinate” variables which he calls "Thematic lines" (derived from the work of Bakan) and "Narrative complexity" (derived from the work of Loevinger). By 1989, “Narrative complexity” had dropped out of the schema, along with Loevinger’s speculations about Ego development, and "Thematic lines" had ceased to be a “superordinate” category.

By 1991, a simplified narrative schema emerged from his work, which has been retained subsequently. The 1991 narrative schema incorporates seven principal elements, arranged in order of their developmental attainment:-

*tone, imagery, theme, setting, scene, character and ending script.*

Influenced by Erikson's theory of developmental stages, McAdams has proposed that the principal features of a person’s life story are acquired only at developmentally appropriate stages in their life cycle. For instance, the overall emotional “tone” of the narrative (whether predominantly optimistic or pessimistic) he argued, depended upon
the quality of the infant’s bond with its mother in the early months of life. A securely
attached baby would tend to develop an optimistic and trusting narrative tone in later
life, whilst insecurely bonded infants may develop a pessimistic narrative tone. Each
narrative element, he argued, was correlated with a specific developmental stage. The
full assessment of this theory of the developmental origins of particular narrative
elements, though fascinating, lies far beyond the scope of the present work.
The findings of the present study nonetheless permit the researcher to comment on
some of the constituent components of McAdams’ narrative schema.

According to this developmental schema, the “tone”, “imagery” and characteristic
patterns of motivational “theme” are developed in childhood. The development of an
ideological “setting” for the life story, as well as the selection of those self-definitive
“scenes” which encapsulate identity are the primary tasks of adolescence. It might be
expected, therefore, that all these elements might be found in the life stories produced
for the present study. The two final elements of McAdams’ narrative schema,
“character” and “generativity script” are, he argues, developed much later in the life
cycle, and so would not be expected to be present in the research sample of adolescent
autobiographies. This sevenfold schema can now be discussed in the light of the data
collected in the present study.

Tone and Imagery

An inspection of the students’ autobiographies reveals clearly that each life story has
its own distinctive tone and imagery. In quite a number of autobiographies, the
narrative opened with an anecdote recounting some experience from the writer’s early
childhood. In many of these cases, the opening vignettes often encapsulated an
emotional tone and themes which would recur prominently later in the story. These
findings are compatible with McAdams’ theories, though without the support of a
considerable body of independent data on the developmental history of each
individual, it is impossible to know how far such anecdotes accurately record key
objective developmental experiences, or whether they reflect subsequent subjective
interpretations of them. Such issues are beyond the scope of the present study.
Motivational “Theme”

Both Murray (1938) and McClelland (1951, 1984) have insisted that *motivation* is an important organising category for understanding the human personality. McAdams (1985, 1993) proposes that a person’s characteristic *motivations* will appear in their life story in the form of recurrent “themes”: “Thematic lines are recurrent content clusters in stories, analogous to recurrent melodies in a piece of music.” (McAdams, 1985: 62). Drawing on the work of Bakan (1966), it will be recalled that McAdams has suggested that there are two principal *types* of motivational theme, designated by Bakan as *communion* and *agency*. In the former, the subject characteristically expresses a preference for close personal relationships and attitudes of care, whilst in the latter, power and personal achievement are more dominant. The researcher was initially very sceptical about Bakan’s binary classification scheme, though believed that the more general issue of *motivation* should be explored to examine its possible influence on the structure of life narratives.

To examine these proposals, the study’s *Motivational Theme Test* asked students to imagine that the world would come to an end in twenty-four hours. What would they choose to do with the remaining time? As a simple way of exploring the plausibility of Bakan and McAdams’ communion/agency classification scheme, each of the students’ responses were *categorised* using Bakan and McAdams’ two motivational categories, and then the number of each *type* of preferred motivation *counted*, yielding a profile of motivational types for each student. These profiles were then compared with the motivational trends and preferences depicted in their written autobiographies. The researcher was surprised that even such an unsophisticated test should generate distinctive and characteristic motivational profiles that accorded well with the content of the autobiographies. Moreover, particularly in the case of introverted students, the motivational profile exercise revealed important motivations that were not always clearly advertised in the respective autobiographies. Therefore, although not a major feature of the study, and certainly far from rigorous, this aspect of the study suggested that McAdams’ “Thematic lines” categories may repay further investigation.
"Ideology"

It will be recalled that Erikson (1968) argued that the development of one's beliefs and values is an important developmental task of adolescence, and referred to such beliefs and values as "ideology". McAdams incorporates this aspect of Erikson's work into his own developmental conception of identity formation, though he prefers to speak of the "ideological setting" of a person's life story. The previous section discussed Erikson's ideas on "ideology" in the light of the evidence gathered in the present study. It was argued there, and so is not repeated here, that the autobiographies provided scant evidence of the traditional "ideologies" of institutional religion, politics or race. Instead, the students' autobiographies suggested that local moralities, familial influences, and personal experiences provided the principal sources of belief and value. On the basis of the material gathered for the present study therefore, McAdams' Eriksonian concept of "ideological setting" - the acquisition of a coherent and developed set of beliefs and values during adolescence - may also need to be modified if it is to do justice to the more local and personally idiosyncratic nature of belief and value revealed by Bentham's students.

Identity formation in "late adolescence"

Like Piaget (1929, 1972; Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) and Erikson (1968, 1985), McAdams (1985) also believes that the skills of analysis and reflection which a young person needs to produce a coherent and well-organized life story require a high level of cognitive sophistication. McAdams (1985) suggests that the creation of a life story requires cognitive skills equivalent to Piaget's final "formal operations" stage of cognitive development. It is only when an adolescent can reflect on the overall significance of particular events in their life course that they can select those key "scenes" (a further feature of McAdams' narrative schema supposedly acquired during late adolescence) which represent these moments of especial personal significance for their identity. This sophisticated cognitive requirement provides one of the major reasons why identity formation, according to McAdams and Erikson, can only begin in late adolescence. A previous section has already presented evidence that coherent and well-integrated life stories can be produced significantly earlier than Erikson and
McAdams supposed, and this may also suggest that Piaget’s account of cognitive developmental upon which they base their claim may also need to be reviewed.

“Character” and “ending”

According to McAdams’ developmental theory, the remaining two basic components his life story schema, “imagoes” or “character”, and “ending” or “generativity script”, are not developmentally applicable to adolescents. He has argued that the development of a unified character is a developmental task reserved for middle age, whilst the creation of a satisfactory and positive sense of an “ending” for the life story is the fruit of reflection in old age. It might be expected, therefore, that neither of these narrative categories would be found in the present study of adolescent autobiographies. Whilst it was certainly the case that no real signs could be found of any “generativity scripts” in the students’ life stories, the same was not the case for “character”.

In the life stories produced by the two research groups, there was considerable evidence of the autobiographer as a substantial “character” in their life stories, a finding that has implications for both the accuracy and the plausibility of McAdams’ schema. McAdams has argued that “imagoes” (his preferred term for the character of the author who appeals in their life stories) are primarily clarified and developed in middle age because, with a complex and varied life-experience behind them, the middle-aged person notices the existence of distinct and sometimes contrary aspects of themselves. Their public and private selves, for instance, may be strikingly different, and there may have been considerable development of the self with the passage of time. In the middle years, the contrasts and contradictions of these “sub-personalities” may be seen more clearly, and, after due consideration, integrated into a unified and harmonious whole (McAdams, 1985, 1989, 1991, 1993).

Despite McAdams’ proposals that the creation of a clear and integrated “character” is only achieved in middle age, many of the autobiographies of the adolescents who participated in the present study, however, depicted themselves clearly as distinctive and unified characters who played their parts alongside the other actors who featured
in the personal dramas depicted by their life stories. From the evidence of their autobiographies, therefore, most of the writers were able to conceive of, and present themselves, as distinctive, unified and coherent characters. Many of the writers also demonstrated a clear ability to present depictions of a variety of earlier selves, as well as to occupy the role of an ironic narrator capable of offering commentary on both their story, and their role and character within it, even whilst in the process of telling it. The existence of such clear characterisation in the majority of the autobiographies produced by these writers still in the developmental stage of early adolescence would suggest that McAdams’ views on the development of character as a middle aged prerogative might be questioned and further investigated.

It is suggested here that McAdams may be confusing two different phenomena regarding the development of character. The first may concern the initial formulation of what kind of “character” one is, a task undertaken by young people as they begin to reflect on who they are. The second task may be a more sophisticated reflective process, usually undertaken after considerable experience of life, in which an older person comes to recognise and puzzle over distinctive “sub-characters” or aspects of their personality, as they have been progressively revealed through an extensive range of a person’s previous life experiences over a number of years. The former type of “character formation” was clearly achieved by the majority of the fourteen and fifteen year olds who wrote their life stories for this study. A smaller number of the students also demonstrated an awareness of different and contrary aspects of themselves; the difference between public and private selves, for instance.

It is not clear how McAdams’ claims about “character” should be evaluated. It may be that McAdams’ schema envisages only the second and later type of reflective awareness in middle age to the exclusion of the initial type of character formation achieved in youth. The middle aged person’s mature reflections on personal identity may characteristically differentiate a variety of “sub-characters”, and this awareness then raises issues of personal integrity and consistency which may prompt the older person to try to integrate or re-interpret the previously differentiated parts. This phenomenon seems common in middle and old age. Let T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets (1944/1959) serve as a representative token of this later type or retrospective
reflection. In Little Gidding II, Eliot begins a catalogue of experiences which the older person may expect. He begins, “Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age”, and he concludes his sketch, in somewhat grim mood, with a catalogue of experiences that may give the older person cause to review and attempt to reconcile discrepant aspects of their past character:-

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
Of things ill done and done to others' harm
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

Eliot’s agonised type of introspection was very uncommon in the students’ autobiographies, so it may be that such introspective self-examination may be, as McAdams suggests, more typical of middle age. Nonetheless, even without such introspective “Sturm und Drang”, there was considerable evidence that the students were capable of depicting themselves as integrated “characters” in their own stories. Although their less complex achievement may be different from the more critical and reflective development of “character” in middle age, the younger person’s preliminary creation and integration of their “character” is not only a considerable cognitive achievement, but is also clearly of foundational importance for the coherence of their life story. Perhaps this should be recognised as such in McAdams’ schema.

*Losing the Plot*

Finally, perhaps the strangest and most contentious feature of McAdams’ life story schema is its omission of plot as a central narrative category. Although his early general summary of his position mentions plot (“The identity configuration to which Erikson alludes is a configuration of plot, character, setting scene, and theme.” McAdams, 1985:29), plot, strangely, does not feature explicitly in any of the subsequent versions of his analytical schema. For narrative theorists since the days of Aristotle’s Poetics, plot has been seen as one of the most basic elements of narrative structure (so, Ricoeur, 1992/1994; Frye, 1957; Bruner, 1986, 1990; Propp, 1968; Bremond, 1973), so its omission from his life story schema would seem to be an unaccountable omission.
10.6 Story types

Is there a cultural repertoire of story forms available to would-be autobiographers which help them give shape and structure to their tales? With breezy confidence Bruner asserts that “the mythologically instructed community provides its members with a library of scripts” (Bruner, 1960: 281) which the individual may use to construct their own life story. In a similar vein, making the assumption that there are, indeed, obvious classes of stories, McAdams announces confidently that “Individual identities may be classified in the manner of stories” (McAdams, 1985: 18).

The identification of a “library” of such story-types or generic scripts would seem to be more easily said than done. The classification of narratives into genres, types, forms and “scripts” is a taxonomic exercise considerably beyond the scope of the present study, encompassing, as it does, vast territories in literary, philosophical, and psychological theory. The search for narrative genres or forms used in autobiographical writing seems, nonetheless a worthwhile one, and the question of such genres or forms was continually present to the researcher during the period of data analysis and interpretation. The proposals of four particular theorists were examined closely during this process.

Gergen and Gergen (1987) conducted a study into how members of a number of American subcultures characterised their “life histories” when asked to represent their life courses in the form of a simple line on the axes of a graph. Participants expressed the general trajectory of their life course in the form of a graph whose axes were, respectively, age in years, and “generalised feeling of well-being”. It will be recalled that the Gergens’ argued that the resultant “life-lines” plotted on the axes of their proposed graph might take one of three basic forms; an upward-sloping line, a downward-sloping line, and a flat line which, they claimed, represented the three most basic types of story-form possible. They called these three story-forms, respectively, the “progressive”, “regressive” and “stability” narrative forms. In the part of their wider study most relevant to the present research, this exercise was undertaken by a sample of 29 youths between the ages of 19 and 21. The collected graphs were then mathematically amalgamated to provide an average trajectory for the sample. This
was found to take the form of a shallow valley, indicating an optimistic start to life, a period down in the dumps, followed by an eventual “happy ending”. Gergen and Gergen claimed that this trajectory might be described in terms of what Frye’s (1957) influential work of literary criticism called the “romantic” (sic, see below) story-type, and they further claimed that this genre was available to the youths in their ambient culture in the form of a wide variety of Hollywood films and TV “soap operas”.

The graphical exercise proposed by their study was replicated with both of the research groups in the present study. The trajectories which the individual students produced, it will be recalled, showed very considerable and idiosyncratic variation. Few individual trajectories described the pattern outlined by Gergen and Gergen (1987, 1993), though mathematical processing produced a poor approximation.

Leaving aside their inaccurate use of Frye’s terminology (in Frye’s schema, the “shallow valley” trajectory would be described as “comedic”, not “romantic”) the findings of Gergen and Gergen might be criticised on other grounds. The “romantic” (sic) form which they argue is characteristic of these youths’ accounts of their life histories seems to be primarily a statistical artefact, a product of the mathematical procedures which have abstracted, manipulated and generalised the individual pieces of data. Their work provided no specific evidence for their claim that their subjects actually used particular culturally-given story-forms in their interpretations of their life histories. In contrast, the data collected for the present study finds considerably more variation in individual “life-line” trajectories than did the Gergens, and the study found very little specific evidence of the students’ use of culturally-given templates which served to provide a “library of scripts” or genres.

Hanskiss (1981) provides a different way of classifying the plots of life stories. In her study of the life stories of adolescents, she found that they adopted one of four different narrative strategies for understanding who they were. In all four of the types, she claimed, the adolescent ascertained who they were by evaluating both their past and their present lives, and then comparing the two. She then argued that the use of a simple bi-valent evaluative scheme then generated four possible types of story; the “antithetical” strategy in which a bad past leads to a good present, the “compensatory”
strategy in which a good past leads to a bad present, the “dynastic” strategy in which a
good past leads to a good present, and finally a “self-absolutory” strategy in which a
bad past leads to, and excuses a bad present. (The trajectories of these four types have
marked similarities to Gergen and Gergen’s (1993) three-fold generic schema of
progressive, regressive and stability narratives discussed in the previous chapter.)

The students who participated in the study did not, on the whole, make the kind of
simple and schematic evaluative judgements about their pasts and presents that
Hanskiss’s schema envisaged. Although there was a tendency to portray early
childhood as a time of innocence and simple pleasure in contrast to the traumatic
experience of early schooling, the four “strategies” proposed by Hanskiss were not
readily detectable in the sample of student autobiographies at the research school.

Campbell (1968, 1970) proposed a single “monomyth” which, rooted in unconscious
psychodynamics, he believed underlay the traditional stories of all cultures. The
“monomyth” concerns the hero who has wrestled and overcome personal and
historical limitations. Although some of the life stories in the research sample had
clear “heroic” plots of this type, the majority did not, and so Campbell’s limited
taxonomy was insufficiently varied to accommodate most of the students’ stories. It
was therefore of little use in classifying the majority of the sample of students’ life
stories.

Elsbree (1982), like Campbell, has also been interested in discovering the basic story-
forms that might underlie the stories of all cultures. He has proposed that there are five
basic story forms, most of which, he argues were defined by their characteristic
content. The five generic plots he proposes are: establishing or consecrating a home;
engaging in a contest or fighting a battle; taking a journey; enduring suffering, and
finally pursuing consummation. Some elements of Elsbree’s schema were entirely
absent from the sample of student autobiographies; “establishing a home” and “taking
a journey” fell into this category. A few stories had clear “heroic” structures, and so
might be considered to fall into his “fighting a battle” category, but the “heroic” type
of story often simultaneously involved “enduring suffering” which made the two
genres seem unhelpfully indistinguishable. The final type, pursuing consummation,
seems so general that it might fit almost all of the stories. Elsbree’s schema was not, therefore, found to be helpful in classifying the life stories of students in the present study.

Although developed as a taxonomy for classifying works of literature, two different schemes presented in Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism (1957) proved much more fruitful for the purposes of the present research. Taking his lead from Aristotle’s Poetics, Frye proceeds to survey inductively both ancient and modern literature in his search for the most basic forms which underlie them. In his analysis of plot types, he proposed that there were two primary types of “movement” in a plot; an upward or downward trajectory, traditionally represented in the basic polarities of comedy and tragedy. He further argued that a second “movement” could be observed in all stories which consisted of a work’s tendency to occupy itself with either the real or the ideal i.e. to describe contingent reality, or to impose an ideal form upon it. Placed together, argued Frye, these two dynamic polarities can generate four principal “modes” which, borrowing Aristotle’s term, he calls mythoi. The four mythoi, he suggested, were not in themselves genres, but were the pre-generic forms from which other specific genres developed. The four types, according to Frye, are comedy, tragedy, romance and irony. Examples of all four types were found in the student autobiographies of the present study, with comedic forms being the most popular story form, and the heroic “romance” being moderately well represented. Unlike the other schemas so far presented, each of Frye’s pre-generic types provided not only coherent and subtle clusters of plot movement, character, and emotional tone for each type, but his analysis also enabled the researcher to generate further analytical questions with which to probe the study’s data. Some of these issues are discussed further in the following chapter. Of all the schemas reviewed, Frye’s taxonomy of pre-generic forms was found to be the best supported by the students’ autobiographies, as well as the most helpful in expediting their close analysis.

10.7 Harré, Strawson and the place of the Body in identity formation

One of the starting points for the present research was Harré’s (1998) sustained examination of the sources of the unity and uniqueness of the self. The Singular Self
(1998), it may be recalled, proposed a detailed "indexical hypothesis" in which both the unity and the uniqueness of the self were guaranteed when a person identified their perceptions, intentions and autobiography with the unique spatio-temporal trajectory of their physical body. Harré's hypothesis suggests that the identification is performed discursively by means of "indexical" referential devices such as first-person pronouns. The person's objectively unique spatio-temporal trajectory then guarantees the uniqueness of their identity, and the singular embodied perceptual "point of view" guarantees the person's unity.

This elegant solution to some of the identity problems which Harré raised is, in many ways, a characteristically British type of philosophical solution to problems of personal identity. It will be recalled that it follows similar lines, for instance, to Strawson's influential discussion (Individuals, 1959) of problems of personal identity, in which Strawson argues for the indispensable primacy of the physical body as a criterion of personal identity. Such an account might be described as an "objective" account of personal identity. It is an account of me-as-seen-by-others, rather than me-as-seen-by-me; an "objective" account of personal identity which gives priority to the way other people might perceive a person, rather than a "subjective" account which gives priority to the way the person sees themselves. The first chapter of this study, it will be recalled, argued that these two conceptions of "identity" must be sharply distinguished, and that the present study was concerned with the latter rather than the former.

For all its power and plausibility, the "objective" accounts of personal identity given by scholars such as Strawson and Harré were not able to serve the purposes of the present study. It was not merely that the "objective" conception of personal identity was different from the "subjective" concept of personal identity, but, on empirical grounds, it was not, apparently, widely used by the students who participated in the present study. Objective criteria of bodily identity may offer a satisfactory philosophical solution to problems of personal identity (bodily criteria "anchor" and stabilise personal identity from the observer's standpoint), but such criteria did not appear capable of solving the problems of "subjective" personal identity raised in Chapter 1. For instance, in the case of William T, the Korsakov's syndrome patient
discussed in the first chapter, the patient was unable to sustain a subjective sense of his personal identity because of the severe damage to both his short and long-term memory. Bodily singularity, stability and continuity may have rendered William T easily identifiable to others, but the continued existence of his body did nothing to stabilise or restore his continuously disintegrating sense of subjective identity. His incapacity to retain personal memories of his past meant that he was forced continuously to create new, unstable and discontinuous identities at each moment, a predicament no bodily or other “objective” criteria of personal identity were able to remedy or prevent.

In the sample of life stories collected for the present study, it was striking that only two of the forty-two autobiographers made use of physical or body-orientated criteria in defining their subjective sense of who they were. The most striking example concerned the fifteen-year-old Ed who, at the age of five, proposed to “the most beautiful girl in the world”. After the trauma of finding himself jilted, he found compensatory consolation in sport. “I realised how much I liked to play sport, and realised it was to be my undying pleasure.” From that point on, many of the important experiences narrated in his autobiography relate to sporting experiences, culminating in detailed descriptions of intensive swimming training that enabled him to win a place in the national swimming finals. Initially, he says, “I was not very well built-up at all”. Because of this, he was “desperate to have a fine healthy body.” He is both proud and very aware of his body, its “stamina, appearance and performance”, reporting in considerable detail some of the changes in overall body weight and muscular definition. His personal sense of who he is seems closely connected to the athletic and physical characteristics of his body.

Similarly, when his best friend dies, his emotional reactions are also experienced primarily through his body:-

My reaction was weird...I didn't cry; I didn't feel bad at all – I just felt my stomach being empty for a number of days.

In their life stories, however, most of the student autobiographers neither dwell on, nor identify themselves closely with their bodily attributes. Indeed, most students seem
largely to ignore bodily identity. Since the primary criterion for the selection of autobiographical material was that of subjective personal importance, it might be concluded that most of the student autobiographers, therefore, did not consider their bodily attributes to feature prominently in their subjective sense of self. This conclusion was confirmed when this issue was explicitly addressed in subsequent discussions. On the other hand, many recognised the social importance of appearance:

Appearance is very important at Bentham's. You are judged by what you wear and how you look. That is why people who wear chequered shirts have the piss taken out of them, and so on. If you are fat here, others will tease you...

Fatness, ugliness and lack of requisite fashion-sense were all specifically mentioned during informal discussions with students as potential targets of peer ridicule, but usually only when such conditions reached excessive of abnormal proportions:

I think that appearance is not important so long as you are not too ugly.

Although several students admitted to taking great care over physical appearance, the general tenor of responses was that whilst external appearance might be socially important, it did not determine one's subjective personal identity. Many seemed to distinguish their physical appearance and its occasional consequences for their social identity, from their personal identities:

To me, bodily dimensions are not that important, for I believe that I will still be the same person as I am today if I weighed twenty stone or was only five foot tall. Obviously I am very lucky to be as tall as I am and I enjoy it, but it does not bother me who I am on the outside; it is the inside that is important. I do not judge people on the way they look for, as I have already said, I find this immoral.

Although he expressed a disliking for his shoulders, another fifteen-year-old author echoed a similar set of priorities:

On appearance, I do not like who I am...but on the inside I am perfectly content.

Just less than half of the sample thought the whole issue of bodily identity and appearance unworthy of comment, whilst one or two students thought that appearance
was important. A fifth of the students admitted to taking care over their appearance. However, even those who admitted to taking some care over their appearance often counter-balanced these admissions with a moderating assertion that it was important “not to be too obsessed” with appearance:—

To me the human body is merely a shell to protect what really lies inside.

Whatever the social consequences of bodily identity and physical appearance may be, it seems clear that, for the sample of students who participated in the present study, such attributes do not play a large part in their core sense of subjective personal identity. This finding further underlines the important differences between “objective” and “subjective” conceptions of personal identity, between the work of Harré and Strawson on the one hand, and Erikson and McAdams on the other.

10.8 Jarvis’ account of experiential learning

The choice of Jarvis’ (1987, 1992, 1999, 2001a) model of biographically-based experiential learning as the study’s overall theoretical perspective was made more than half way through the research process. At an earlier stage in the preparation of the study, Harré’s (1979, 1983, 1991,1998) work, particularly his Singular Self (1998) had been used for the purpose, but it was eventually felt that Harré’s decision to privilege objective criteria of identity over subject-centered criteria, rendered his work unsuited for a study based on the subject-centered conception of identity advocated by Erikson (1959, 1968) and McAdams (1985, 1993). The conceptual arguments for preferring Jarvis’ model of learning were examined in Chapter 3 and are, therefore, not repeated here. The following brief discussion records a number of ways in which the findings of the present study supported Jarvis’ model of learning.

First, Jarvis’ theory of learning maintains that “Disjuncture, or discontinuity, between biography and experience of the wider world is a fundamental condition of human learning.” (Jarvis, 1987:80). From the evidence of the students’ autobiographies, a large proportion of the episodes which they chose to recount concerned experiences in which “disjuncture” played a prominent place. Whether it was the sudden transition from the calm world of the young child’s domestic bliss to the turbulence of the first
day at school, or the first experience of bereavement, disjuncture or discontinuity proved to be a frequent general characteristic of the narrated experience.

Secondly, Jarvis’ conception of the learning process incorporates the ineluctably social context of learning, but does so in a way that is never determined by it. Many of the other perspectives considered, such as the Social Constructionist (e.g. Gergen, 1985), post-modernist (e.g. Foucault, 1973, 1980) or discursive (Harre and Gillett, 1994) approaches, often seemed to operate with implicitly determinist accounts of the role of society and discourse, and correspondingly passive accounts of the individual person. Some such accounts, such as Lave and Wenger’s Situated Learning (1991), seem to offer accounts of individual identity formation which envisage the individual as something of a passive and dependent social cipher who is dependent for their identity on their “communities of practice”. Their account, like other accounts (such as those of Gergen, Foucault and Derrida, for instance) seem to advocate a degree of social, political or discursive determinism that has not advanced, substantially, beyond the position of Marx’s German Ideology, in which Marx argued that “Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness.” (Marx, 1977:164), a remark he later glossed as “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.” (in Singer, 1980:3).

In contrast, Jarvis’ sociological background is refracted through the perspective of G.H.Mead (1934), whose account of the formation of mind and self sow the seeds of a more richly complex, active and dialectical conception of the human agent and their relationship to their social environment. Jarvis’ account of the learning process therefore begins and ends with the personality of the individual learner, a perspective ideally suited to a study which endeavours to explore the phenomenon of individual identity formation. His parallel insistence that “every learning event is biographical” (Jarvis, 1999:76, researcher’s italics), moreover, reinforces the subject-centered nature of his approach. A perspective such as Jarvis’, which encompasses both the social context of the learner as well as their unique individual role as an interpreter of their own biographically-rooted experiences, enabled the study to accommodate both the student’s perspectives and learnings concerning their shared social world and its Code,
along with their individual and idiosyncratic senses of personal identity which they communicated in the individual autobiographies with ease and economy; both could be seen simply as different aspects of the experiential learning process.

Thirdly, although the whole of Jarvis’ model of experiential learning describes and analyses a wider variety of types of learning than are explored in the present study, his analysis of the type of learning most relevant to the present study (a type he calls “contemplation” or “reflection”) was particularly well supported by the study’s findings. It will be recalled that Jarvis’ model of experiential learning differentiates between several distinct types of learning, such as the repetitive “practice” (which forms the basis of much learning in language acquisition, music and sport), “memorisation” (which includes traditional school rote learning), “experimental learning” (which includes learning by trial and error) and “contemplation” or “reflection”. From the evidence of the students’ autobiographies, the latter kind of reflective, interpretive and meaning-seeking learning is of particular importance in the process of creating and representing a person’s sense of identity through the construction of a life story. Jarvis’ account of “reflection” suggests that the three cognitive activities of memory, reflection and evaluation are central to this particular type of learning, so it is especially interesting to note that all three activities are to the fore in the students’ autobiographies, just as they are primary characteristics of Augustine’s (1992) account of the construction of an autobiographical identity, and Sacks’ (1985) analysis of failures to construct a stable identity in the cases of those Korsakoff’s syndrome patients which he discusses.

Fourthly, Jarvis’ account of learning is very wide in scope and goes far beyond the narrow confines of pure cognition. As was seen in Chapter 2, his more recent conception of learning suggests that it includes “transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, senses and beliefs.” (Jarvis, 1999:40). As the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences outlined in the previous chapter demonstrates, all of the items in Jarvis’ list (1999: 40) of learning outcomes could be readily illustrated from the students’ autobiographies, which suggests that its scope is realistic as well as capacious. His more recent work (2001a, and in progress) has also increasingly emphasized the importance of emotional learning, a category of
experiential learning which was (to the researcher’s surprise, given that his subjects were adolescent boys) very strongly represented in their life stories.

Fifthly, Jarvis’ account of learning recognises a variety of different types of social context for learning. His Learning Later in Life (2001a), for instance, presents a two-dimensional grid which distinguishes between the three categories of formal, non-formal and informal learning on one of its axes, and intended and unintended learning on the other, giving the possibility of six different types of learning situation. Such a grid has enabled the researcher to clarify that whilst most of an individual’s learning of their personal identity is likely to take place in learning situations which are both informal and incidental, students’ learning of The Code is likely to occur in formal school situations as well as the peer and teacher hinterland of non-formal situations.

Finally, Jarvis’ conception of learning envisages it as a process whereby the whole person transforms their episodic experiences into cognitive, affective and physical outcomes, and integrates them into their biography (Jarvis, 2003). This account of experiential learning that emphasizes the whole person, their personal experience, and the inescapably biographical context of all learning, would seem to describe accurately the holistic, experiential and biographically-situated character of learning displayed in the students’ autobiographies.

Jarvis’ model of experiential learning, it will be recalled, was originally developed empirically in the context of adult learning and education. The fact that it has proved so useful in the present study of adolescent identity formation suggests strongly that his model has a much wider application than has generally been recognised hitherto. Its capacity to accommodate both social and individual domains of experience, to incorporate intellectually most other learning theories, and to encompass within its broad scope a wide variety of types of learning (cognitive, emotional, and practical) testify not only to its considerable validity and plausibility, but also to its wide applicability.

Having discussed some of the scholars who have contributed so much to the present study, the final chapter considers the strengths and weaknesses of the present study’s
design and execution. When this has been done at length, some practical lessons which residential schools like Bentham’s might learn from the research are outlined, before the study concludes with a statement of some possible directions for future research.
CHAPTER 11

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARIES, LESSONS AND DREAMS

What is it that makes you, 'you' and me, 'me'?
(Ben, fifteen-year-old student)

Philosophy is concerned with two matters: soluble questions that are trivial, and crucial questions that are insoluble
(Stephen Kanfer, reviewing a book about Hannah Arendt)

11.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to deal with four distinct areas of concern. First, the major part of the chapter attempts a critical evaluation of the study as a whole. Secondly, it summarises the principal findings of the study. Thirdly, in the light of the study’s findings, the chapter goes on to make some practical suggestions about one or two areas of school life which might benefit from further reflection and development by those who work in schools like Bentham’s. Finally, the chapter indicates some possible directions for further future research. The attention in the present chapter thus turns away from the social world of Bentham’s, away from the individual students who wrote their autobiographies for the study and away from the work of other theorists. Instead, the chapter turns its critical scrutiny to the work of the researcher instead.

Part 1 of the chapter provides a critical evaluation of the study as a whole. In evaluating the present study, it is suggested that there are three distinct categories of criteria against which the study’s value must be measured. The first set of criteria concerns a number of general philosophical and epistemological questions which must be acknowledged, even if they cannot be easily resolved. This area of evaluation might be held to centre around the question: What is the epistemological status of the “findings” of the present study? The second set of evaluative criteria relate to the study’s principal research question, and devolve around the question: Has the study
succeeded in answering its principal research question? The third set of evaluative criteria concern the usual methodological issues of validity, reliability, plausibility and credibility, and thus examine the question: *How far are the answers provided by the study sufficiently trustworthy?*

To begin this evaluative process, the next section proceeds to examine some of the epistemological issues raised by the present study.

**PART 1: CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

11.2 *What is the epistemological status of the study’s findings?*

However effectively the study might satisfy its principal aims, and however flawless its methodology and design may be, there are, however, a number of respects in which any study is bound to fail. No study of human beings can escape the epistemological limitations to which all quests for knowledge are subject. Before the scientific evaluation of the study’s validity and reliability commences, attention is therefore drawn to the more obvious philosophical and epistemological limitations under which the present study labours, limitations which no amount of methodological tinkering or special pleading can correct.

The claims and conclusions which appear in this report represent merely the researcher’s interpretation - one of many possible - of a limited set of data, collected from a particular group of individuals at a particular time and place. The researcher hopes that he has represented the participants’ life stories and their perceptions of their local social world in a way that is fair and accurate, and he also hopes that such conclusions as he draws from the reported data are similarly fair, balanced, well-supported and credible. Nevertheless, even if these modest aims are successfully satisfied, the summaries of the data and the conclusions the researcher draws from them remain simply his interpretations, and the researcher freely recognises that other researchers might reach different interpretations and perspectives on the same data.
The researcher also willingly acknowledges that not only might other researchers have produced an account which differs in a variety of respects from the account which appears in this report, but that the researcher himself, in different circumstances of time, place and people, might also have produced a report different from the present one offered.

The researcher is acutely aware that, during the research process, his views have changed frequently as a result of the literature he has read, the people he has talked with, the autobiographical material he has collected, and the complex ups and downs of the research process. The researcher has been surprised very many times by the experiences and by the evidence which have presented themselves during the course of the research, and he recognises that many of the ideas with which he began have either been overturned or substantially modified. This is, no doubt, as it should be; Altheide and Johnson (1994) perceptively remark that one discovers ones own prejudices and expectations through the surprises and frustrations of the research process. However, the further implication of the researcher’s experiences of personal change is to reinforce how acutely the findings of any study are dependent on the very specific and localised circumstances under which they were undertaken, and this must needs engender an appropriate humility in any researcher’s aspirations to lay claim to universal truths.

Although the study is informed by an experiential learning perspective, the data presented during the course of the study are, in many ways, at one, two or even three removes from direct personal experience. In essence, the research is a case study of people’s memories and reflections of themselves, and how, in reflecting on their personal history and significant experiences, individuals come to select some experiences rather than others, and interpret those selected experiences in some ways rather than others.

The descriptions of the students’ life stories that have been presented during the course of the present study are the researcher’s incomplete and partial verbal accounts of the students’ accounts of themselves. Both sets of accounts are composed of words, but, as Bruner says: “life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures
organise and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story.” (E.Bruner, 1986:143), and this fact must give the researcher further grounds for humility.

The recognition of the important differences between a person’s life and personality on the one hand, and their verbal accounts of these things raises important general issues about the epistemological status of such verbal accounts of personal identity. Such general issues were raised in the study’s second chapter and are not further developed here.

In many respects the epistemological issues raised here are insuperable; like Augustine (1992) or Thoreau (1995) the researcher takes the view that people are complex, rich, fathomless, mysterious and elusive. They are a mystery to others and are often unknown even to themselves. An attempt, such as the present study, to do justice to the unique individuality of even a small group of people is doomed, therefore, to failure from the start. Within the doleful parameters of his Quixotic quest, the researcher has done the best he can, and, when his work is done, he can only make his small contribution and hope it may serve as a stepping-stone for others; as Wittgenstein says at the end of his Preface to the Tractatus, “May others come and do it better.” (Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1921/1971:5).

11.3 Evaluative criteria specific to the present study

Leaving aside some of the fundamental philosophical issues which any research in the social sciences must raise, the present section moves from a consideration of very general philosophical evaluative criteria to those which are specific to the present study alone. This second set of criteria relates to the study’s principal research question, and the issue of how well this question has been answered.

At the outset, it is stressed that the aim of the study has not been to discover the “real” self or identity of each student, nor to achieve any fixed, final and once-and-for-all “true” account of the students’ personal identities. These more absolute questions of ontology and epistemology with regard to personal identity, though profoundly
important, lie beyond the scope of the present research, and so the researcher feels no methodological guilt for not having succeeded in answering them. It will be recalled, rather, that the study has been designed to answer a more modest and specific research question which may be stated as follows:-

*In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?*

For convenience, this question has been further resolved into two specific separate questions:

1. *In what specific ways do the authors unify their life stories?*
2. *In what specific ways do the authors display differences in their life stories?*

In addition to the principal research question and its two constituent components, it will also be recalled that there are two other - and more general - concerns which the researcher has kept in mind during all the phases of the research process. The first of these concerns relates to the *dual aspect* of the study; the design of the study endeavours to focus not only on the identities of a group of *individual* students, but also aims to do this within the context of a very unusual and distinctive *social* environment. Throughout the study, whilst focusing principally on the *individual* identities of his unique subjects, the researcher has also endeavoured to retain a clear and critical interest in the potential identity-forming influence of their equally unique and distinctive *social* world. In terms of both the study’s design and execution, he hopes he has been able to justice to both individual and social aspects.

The second additional area of concern throughout the course of the study has been *ethical* in nature. Since the study’s central academic pre-occupation is with the unique identities of a particular group of students, it would seem both academically and ethically essential that the design and execution of the study should be *respectful* of those individuals who participated in the study. Being respectful in conducting research, the researcher believes, has *ethical* as well as *methodological* implications. The *ethical* aspect is to respect and celebrate the unique individualities of the delightful, distinctive and generous group of students who willingly participated in the study, and who did so with such openness and trust. The researcher hopes that he has not betrayed this trust. The second aspect, connected with the first, is *methodological.*
Like Freeman (1993), Atkinson (1998) and many other researchers who work with autobiographical material, the researcher shared a concern that much *nomothetic* research in the social sciences was neither sufficiently attentive nor sensitive to the *unique* individualities of the people scrutinised. The earlier positivist scientific imperative to make statistically and empirically valid generalisations sometimes (perhaps unintentionally) elided, ignored, or even annihilated the unique individuality of those individuals subject to its processes. The present research, alongside that of many others within the Life History and personological research traditions, represents a small gesture towards the larger aim of creating a *methodological space* for the distinctive voice of the *individual* to be heard and valued within the social sciences.

11.4 “Validity” and “Reliability”

Leaving aside both the *general* epistemological limitations which any study of human beings must confront, as well as the very *specific* aims of the present study, the remainder of the first part of the chapter can proceed to examine, in a more specific way, the credibility and plausibility of the study’s design and execution. Within the positivist research tradition, the two most important evaluative concepts used to scrutinise the conduct and results of a study are those of “validity” and “reliability”. There is considerable debate between different research paradigms concerning the appropriateness and applicability of these two evaluative terms *outside* the positivist tradition of research. Denzin (1994, 1989), for instance, argues that when evaluating research conducted within the *interpretive* tradition, these positivist critical terms are *inappropriate* and should be set aside in favour of criteria that are more *interpretive*. He recommends the consideration of such features as a study’s “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability”. With an uncompromising assurance redolent of Nietzsche he states:-

*In the social sciences there is only interpretation.* (Denzin, in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 500)

From his post-modernist perspective, he further argues that different social sciences will develop their own distinctive criteria of evaluation, and that “increasingly, the criteria of evaluation will turn...on moral, practical, aesthetic, political, and personal
issues..." (1994:501). His views have found increasing acceptance within the social science community, although as Patton (1990) remarks, people, whether scientists or not, hold strong opinions about what constitutes credible evidence, and that, for many people, the positivist paradigm is still perceived as a privileged and successful method of producing reliable and valid knowledge.

In accord with the hermeneutical stance that has been adopted throughout the research, the force of both these perspectives, positivist and interpretivist, is dialogically embraced; in the critical discussion that follows, the idiosyncratic nature of the present study is interrogated interpretively, but also with an eye to the rigorous questions by which the positivist paradigm would examine a study.

Summarising the main positivist critical criteria, Yin (1994:33) suggests that there are four principal tests which establish the quality of any empirical social research. He lists these evaluative criteria as follows: construct validity; internal validity; external validity and reliability. Within the context of Part 1 of the present chapter, these four concepts are used as both heuristic and organising tools for giving structure to the discussion of the study’s scientific credibility which follows.

11.5 Construct validity

According to Yin (1994) construct validity concerns establishing the correct operational measures for the concepts being measured. For the purposes of examining the study’s construct validity, the researcher asked himself two principal critical questions:-

1. Is the study’s central concept ("identity") sufficiently clear and coherent?

2. Has the concept been appropriately operationalised for the purposes of the present research?

The researcher’s answers to these two important questions are set out below:-
1. Is the study's central concept ("identity") sufficiently clear and coherent?

The research crystallised around fifteen year old Ben’s question; What is it that makes you "you", and me "me"? Chapter 1 traced the considerable initial difficulties in finding a consistent or coherent vocabulary in which this apparently simple question might be articulated, let alone articulated clearly and precisely. Earlier hopes had been pinned on Harré’s interesting and persuasive analysis of personal identity which he called the “Standard Model” (Harré, 1998). After an extended period of puzzlement, reading and reflection, however, the Eriksonian conception of “identity” (Erikson, 1958, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1969) was adopted as the study’s principal focus. More clearly focused than Harré’s conception on the subjectivity of the individual, it was argued that Erikson’s work was also acutely aware of both the inescapably temporal and the social aspects of human life. In his conception of “identity”, Erikson had tried to articulate that aspect of a person’s personality which quintessentially represented their sense of who they were amidst the obvious changes which time and social circumstance wreak upon the stability and continuity of a person’s sense of themselves.

According to suggestions provided throughout Erikson’s work, “identity” was conceived of as a “configuration” produced by each person through a process of “selective repudiation and assimilation of childhood identifications” (1959:113), and which conferred on its possessor a sense of “inner sameness and continuity” (1963: 261, researcher’s italics). The latter phrase encapsulated the quintessentially paradoxical nature of identity; people change over time, and may also present themselves differently in different social situations without (literally) being seen as a multitude of different people; they believe they have an “inner sameness and continuity” which preserves their unity and integrity.

Although Erikson did not himself elaborate his conception of identity systematically or extensively, his idea, it was suggested, incorporated a number of features which were germane to the needs of the present research. According to Erikson’s conception, “identity" :-
1. Represents what is unique and distinctive about the person.
2. Encapsulates the person’s own sense of who they are.
3. Incorporates some of the person’s principal interpretations, personal meanings and intentions.
4. Incorporates the person’s memories of their earlier life and their expectations of their future.
5. Incorporates their relationships with their local context of other persons and places.

In addition to representing the person’s paradoxical distinctiveness, Erikson’s conception of identity can therefore be seen as thoroughly subject-centred, interpretive, intentional, as well as being richly temporally and socially contextualised. It had, in short, all of the features which satisfied the meaning of Ben’s question. The concept was, therefore, both sufficiently clear and coherent to become the focus of the present research, and it was made clearer still by McAdams’ (1985) narrative development of it. In these important ways, therefore, Erikson’s concept of identity (along with McAdams’ development and clarification of its implications) could be claimed to have sufficient construct validity for the purposes of the present study.

2. Has the concept been appropriately operationalised for the purposes of the present research?

Earlier chapters have discussed McAdams’ contributions to the development of Erikson’s conception of identity in considerable detail. Most notably, McAdams has taken the narrative dimension only implicit in Erikson’s conception of identity, and made this feature both explicit and central to his own version of the concept. In assessing how far this concept has been appropriately operationalised for the purposes of the present research, two separate areas of concern need to be discussed. First, there is the preliminary theoretical and general issue about how far the Eriksonian/McAdamite conception of identity represents the rich phenomenon of human individuality in general. Secondly, there is the more specific and practical
question about the adequacy of the Eriksonian/McAdamite conception of identity for the present study.

a) An adequate model of identity?

Regarding the first of these two areas of concern, it has already been recognised by Bruner (1986:143) that “life is richer than discourse”, and that, therefore, any representation of a life in words will be, at the very least partial, incomplete and approximate. To this extent, any possible conceptualisation of human uniqueness and identity will be inadequate, and this is a direct consequence of the richness and mysteriousness of existence and experience when compared with the relative inadequacy of words to capture or represent this completely. Poets and mystics of every generation have always known this, and, during the twentieth century, many social scientists have come to realise it too.

Secondly, although all conceptualisations and models of human identity may be inadequate, some may be more inadequate than others. In Chapter 2, a number of alternative ways of representing human uniqueness were considered, amongst them both Harré’s and McCrae and Costa’s approaches. Harré’s (1998) idea of a four-dimensional matrix suggests that a person’s singularity might be indicated as a position within each of four separate spatio-temporal, social and moral arrays. McCrae and Costa’s (1987) influential “five factor” model of personality proposed a psychometric test which represented the individual’s distinctiveness by five test scores. These conceptualisations of identity were rejected as being less adequate than a narrative approach, such as that of McAdams’ (1985). The five factor model, for all its impressive empirical validation, may be able to give each person a distinctive, if not unique profile (composed of scores on each of the five constituent factor scales), but it cannot represent adequately the person’s own meanings, intentions, personal point of view, nor could it incorporate the rich and idiosyncratic details of their historical and social context. Only a narrative model of identity, it was argued, was able to attempt an adequate representation of these things. For these reasons, a narrative model of identity was preferred to other models.
Thirdly, it was recognized that although *narrative* models and methods of representing personal identity may be more complete and detailed than *quantitative* approaches like the five factor model, a person’s identity is bigger and more complex than any single autobiographical narrative. A life story model of identity could offer, at best, a *snapshot* of the person’s sense of who they were - albeit a richly detailed one - a snapshot taken at a *particular* time and a *particular* place. The ongoing *process* of experience, like its *interpretation* in narrative terms, was a continuous and continuously-changing process, of which a particular telling of the autobiographical story could record only the *current* momentary version.

Fourthly, McAdams’ narrative model of identity, although it was only one possible type of narrative model of identity, was developed after close, careful and scholarly scrutiny of Erikson’s work, and had also been developed, refined and validated through extensive empirical research, both by McAdams himself (1985) and by many others (e.g. Brown *et al*, 1987; Gilligan *et al*, 1990). Harré (1972), himself an acknowledged expert in both the general field of social research, and also specifically in the area of individual identity (Harré, 1994, 1998) has credited McAdams with having developed “the most systematic attempt to develop a narration-based psychology of persons” (1998:142).

For these principal reasons, it is argued that McAdams’ narrative model of personal identity may reasonably be adopted as an *adequate* model of identity for the purposes of the present study.

*b) Has McAdams' life story model of identity been appropriately operationalised and adapted for the needs of the present study?*

Having accepted McAdams’ “life story model of identity” (1985, 1993) as the central concept for the present study on the grounds of both its appropriateness to the needs of the present study, as well as its impressive theoretical and empirical pedigree, it remains to consider how faithfully and successfully this general model has been *adapted* for the *specific* needs and circumstances of the present study. Six arguments
are given which suggest that the model has been successfully operationalised and appropriately employed in the present research.

The first reason for believing that the study has correctly operationalised McAdams’ life story model of identity is that the research protocol used to guide the participants in the production of their life stories (the protocol “Writing your own autobiography” may be seen in Appendix F) was directly and closely modelled upon that used by McAdams himself (McAdams, 1993:256ff). Reflections on the results of a pilot study conducted during the period of initial observation at the research school suggested that adolescent boys found it easier and more natural to write about themselves and their lives, rather than to talk about them in front of their peers, or with the researcher. Although the researcher had initially conceived of a series of face-to-face interviews after the manner of Atkinson (1998), it was decided that a written approach to autobiographical research would be more comfortable for the study’s adolescent participants, as well as pragmatically more effective for the researcher.

Secondly, ethical considerations already discussed in Chapter 4 argued strongly that the research should be as little intrusive as possible, and should also be of direct benefit to the study’s principal participants. Wherever possible, exercises in data collection were designed not only to provide the researcher with valuable information, but were also designed to be of educational benefit and personal interest to the participants. In this way, the various research instruments not only adequately operationalised the principal research concept from a theoretical point of view, but from an ethical standpoint, they were also appropriately adapted to the educational needs of the participants.

It will be recalled, for instance, that the written autobiographical exercise also satisfied an English coursework requirement for the two groups of students to whom the researcher taught English during his period of residency at the school. Although students were obliged to produce written work for the purposes of their GCSE course, students were not obliged to contribute their work to the study, and made their decision about whether to do so or not only after their work was (for academic purposes) assessed.
Thirdly, McAdams employed two further principal methods of complementary data collection, a follow-up interview, and a test of the primary motivational patterns. Both of these complementary techniques of data collection were also mirrored in the present study, but in forms modified to suit the specific circumstances of the present research. McAdams’ initial work, it may be recalled, was conducted in a university setting with his psychology students studying developmental psychology. He was also assisted by a large team of co-researchers who interviewed each student after they had produced their written autobiographies. McAdams’ participants were additionally subjected to a battery of psychometric tests, chief amongst which was Murray’s Thematic Apperception Test. These two principal complementary data collection exercises were adapted for the particular school circumstances of the present study, giving due consideration to the needs of the research, the needs of the students, and the practicalities of the school situation.

The researcher felt that McAdams’ use of a team of researchers constituted a weakness in the design of his study, introducing into an essentially interpretive study the uncontrolled and undiscussed complication of multiple interviewers. The written format of the autobiographies in the present study removed that complication, and also addressed the potential taciturnity of adolescent boys in face-to-face interviews. Thus, the researcher’s ethical concern to be as little intrusive as possible, the relative inarticulacy of adolescent boys when talking about personal matters, and the researcher’s lack of co-researchers to assist with face-to-face interviews indicated that the researcher should replace McAdams’ autobiographical and “follow-up interviews” with a written substitutes. The results of these exercises provided copious useful information and thus proved an adequate and effective substitute for McAdams’ face-to-face versions.

McAdams’ use of the Thematic Apperception Test as a way of exploring the primary motivational themes which characterised each person, was replaced with an imaginative exercise about the end of the world (further details may be found in Appendix F) that, it was hoped, would be more open in its intentions, more fun for the students, as well as informative for the researcher.
Fourthly, McAdams has claimed that his characteristic life story research protocol is an effective tool for eliciting the “personal myths” which he believes to be central to people’s identity (1985, 1993). His approach has also been widely used by many other researchers. The present researcher also found the modified form of McAdams’ life story research protocol employed in the present study effective as an open-ended yet partly structured method of collecting data. The protocol provided some guidance to the student participants about how they might approach the autobiographical task, without being overly restrictive or prescriptive. This protocol (“Writing your own autobiography”, see Appendix F) seemed to provide students with instructions which had a good balance of structure and openness, giving just enough guidance to keep the participants’ responses focused on the primary research concept of narrative identity, whilst still remaining open to almost any idiosyncratic student response in terms of content and manner in the telling of the life stories. The huge range and variety of autobiographical data produced in response to the research protocol attested to the openness and success of the basic schema derived from McAdams’ work.

Fifthly, McAdams’ research protocol, by suggesting that students select only the most significant or important experiences of their lives implicitly encouraged reflection and evaluation of those experiences, and, in effect, asked participants to conduct an evaluative review of their life-time’s most important instances of experiential learning. In this way, the study’s experiential learning perspective, as well as the McAdamite model of identity, were simultaneously and harmoniously combined.

Finally, the data collection methods used in the study elicited data which were not only centred on each subject’s own interpretations and views, but were also highly contextualised in terms of specific time and place. The methods of data collection therefore succeeded in eliciting material from the students in which their distinctive and highly individuated senses of personal identity emerged clearly. It is argued, therefore, that the data collection methods employed in the present study succeeded in operationalising the Eriksonian and McAdamite concept of identity effectively.

In all these ways, therefore, it is argued that McAdams’ life story model of identity was appropriately operationalised and adapted for the needs of the present study.
11.6 Internal validity

According to Saunders and Towsey (2000), the concept of validity relates to the issue of whether the research addresses what it claims to explore, and whether the account produced accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers. In order to assess the study's internal validity, they suggest that two general areas need to be addressed:

*Are the findings of the study clearly, sufficiently and appropriately backed up by the evidence presented?*

*Is the design of the study, the execution of data collection and the conduct of data analysis sufficiently clear, coherent and competent to engender in the reader a measure of confidence in the report’s claims?*

These general questions about the validity of empirical social research evoke several more specific questions relating to the present research. Limitations of space mean that the discussion of many of these areas will be briefer and less detailed than might be otherwise desirable. One crucial issue concerning how far the data collected during the course of the research might be a “performance” put on specially for the benefit of the teacher and therefore very unreliable, is dealt with at greater length. In order to focus the critical discussion of the study’s internal validity more precisely, the following seven specific questions are addressed:

1. *Is the overall design of the study appropriate and sufficient to deliver the quantity and kinds of data that the principal research question requires?*

2. *How successful are the strategies, methods and techniques of data collection in supplying an adequate and reliable body of evidence?*

3. *What implications might the composition and particular circumstances of sample selection have had on the results of the study?*
4. How far are the results of the study an unreliable and artificial artefact produced by the students for the benefit of a teacher?

5. Are the analytical methods employed in the interpretation of the data sufficiently clear, methodologically appropriate and as transparent to scrutiny as possible?

6. Are the data displayed with sufficient detail and clarity to encourage confidence in the study’s findings, as well as to permit further scrutiny?

7. How far do the researcher’s previous experience and skills contribute to the credibility of the research?

Each of these questions is now briefly discussed in turn. Details of the design, data collection strategies, data collection techniques and methods, and approaches to data analysis are described more fully in Chapters 4 and 5, as well as in Appendix F, so are not duplicated in what follows.

1. Is the overall design of the study appropriate and sufficient to deliver the quantity and kinds of data that the principal research question requires?

The study’s principal research question asks how far students living within the highly structured confines of an English boarding school construct a sense of themselves as unified and unique in their autobiographical writings.

In order to answer this question, the study adopted a case study which looked at a group of students who were being educated at a particular English boarding school. The study uses both biographical and ethnomethodological methods to gather, respectively, the autobiographical and the social data required. Both types of data collection method were united by their common concern with obtaining the individual subjects’ points of view, focusing consistently on the subjects’ own interpretations, meanings and learnings. The overall case study design, and the use of biographical and ethnomethodological methods within it, all, it is argued, ensured adequate and
appropriate focus on the unique subjectivities of the particular individual participants, and did so in a way which included a full consideration of the effects of their social context. The overall design of the study, therefore, offers a clear, plausible and appropriate approach to answering the principal research question.

In order to distinguish more clearly between the individual and the social aspects of its design, the study also incorporated a more refined layered structure which ensured that it was able to answer the principal research question in a thorough and well-considered manner. The principal research question sought to examine the identity formation of a group of particular individuals who are each members of a very unusual social environment. The distinctiveness and idiosyncrasy of this institutional social environment, as well as its potential to act as a powerful formative influence on the developing identities of its inmates, required the study to have a design capable of distinguishing the social influences of the school from other, more distinctively personal influences.

The layered design of the study was fully discussed earlier, and its triple structure allowed successive layers of social similarity to be described, investigated and then progressively “peeled off” to allow the more idiosyncratic and distinctive features of the individual life stories to be appreciated more fully. It is argued that this feature of the study’s design was both appropriate and successful in fulfilling the requirements of the study’s principal research question. Without such a carefully layered structure to the research’s design, the shared social idiosyncrasies of Public School life would have been difficult for the visiting researcher to discern from more idiosyncratic personal differences. Acquiring a detailed understanding of the students’ perceptions of their immediate social world also aided the researcher in his ability to make well-informed interpretations of the students’ life stories which were better attuned to nuances of meanings within the local context of the study.

The layered design of the study in which the researcher explored not only the autobiographies of particular individuals, but also their perceptions of their shared social context, also addressed criticisms made by Harré (1998) and others about the tendency of much life story research to ignore the social contexts of the individuals
whose autobiographies are explored. Chapter 6 presented detailed evidence about the students’ perceptions of their shared social world, whilst Chapter 7 considered, amongst other things, influences from the wider social world beyond the confines of the immediate school environment. The thoroughness of these chapters reinforced the strength of the study’s design in answering Harré’s criticism.

A larger study might have given even more attention to the influence of the social world beyond the school, but a decision to do so would have made an already large study unmanageably unwieldy. In the event, the findings of the present study seem to indicate that the generic “outside world” has less immediate influence on the developing identities of the students than many social theorists have supposed.

Finally, the research question, the study’s interpretive methodology, the biographical and ethnomethodological methods of data collection, and the hermeneutical approach to data analysis all matched and cohered in a consistent and appropriate way.

2. How successful are the strategies, methods and techniques of data collection in supplying an adequate and reliable body of evidence?

Given the intensive and detailed manner in which each individual autobiography was examined, the study’s sample of subjects was large. The principal research group of forty-two students (whose life stories and social learnings were the focus of data collection and intensive analysis) was considerably larger than might have been expected for a single researcher working with material of this size and complexity. Many other students also participated in the study in different ways, but the study’s findings centred on the principal research group, drawn from two different year groups in the school. It was hoped that the use of multiple subjects in an intensive autobiographical study, though onerous for the researcher, would generate a more extensive data base and thereby enhance the potential credibility and validity of the study’s findings.

In consequence of the relatively large number of students involved, and because of the layered nature of the study’s design which necessitated collecting autobiographical as
well as social data, a very large amount of data was collected overall. The data fell into three principal categories; biographical data centring on the life stories of the individual participants, ethnomethodological data centring on the students’ insights about their local social world, and supplementary documentary and observational data.

It will be recalled that the biographical data consisted of the forty-two autobiographies which were supplemented by three additional types of biographical data; the “follow up interview”, the Motivational Theme Test, and, in a minor way, by a graph-based exercise based on the work of Gergen and Gergen (1993). Autobiographies ranged in length from 300 to 11,000 words, with rather less than a quarter of a million words of student biographical writing being collected in all. This substantial body of data would, it was hoped, provide a sufficiently extensive and intensive source of information upon which the study’s findings might be based with a reasonable degree of confidence. In the case of the autobiographical material, the study’s data collection strategies were designed to generate complementary sets of data from each individual student, so that their autobiographical writings might be complemented and probed through a comparison with at least three additional sets of data. Again, it was hoped that this design, producing, as it did, multiple complementary sources of data on each individual student, would add an element of triangulation which might not only enhance the study’s attention to detail but also improve the potential confidence and validity of the analysis which the study was able to offer. After the period of the present research, the researcher also repeated the biographical study in another English Public School, and the conclusions reached were similar to those reached by the present study.

The second ethnomethodological category of material was collected through eleven separate data collection exercises, each of which was undertaken with the two principal research groups as well as several others. Five of these data collection exercises were arranged in complementary pairs, with data on each of the five areas of concern being collected in at least two different forms, such as video-taped presentations and written summaries. In this way, data were collected on several different aspects of the students’ social life including the “unofficial” local rules, the principles for being considered “cool”, the local moral lexicon, as well as the multi-
layered meanings with which the school’s ever-prevalent sporting activities were invested. For each data collection exercise, the data sets from each group were collected and analysed independently from the data sets collected from the other group, before being compared with their matched set. All the various data sets concerned with the students’ perceptions of their shared social life were later also compared with one another.

The study’s findings in this area of the study are thus based on the use of multiple subjects, multiple data sources and multiple data sets within each separate source. The results of the various analyses were shared with a sample of participants and recent “old boys” of the school for their views. In this way, the study endeavoured to build in not only an element of triangulation, but also some “feed-back loops” to further enhance the potential confidence and validity of the study’s findings.

Thus, in order to enhance the potential validity of the study’s conclusions, the design of the study’s data collection strategy thus provided not only a large amount of data generated from a relatively large number of subjects, but also used multiple complementary sources of data in each of the principal areas studied. The study also intentionally drew on several distinctively different types of data, including student writings, class discussions, group discussions, argued essays, conversations, speeches, video-taped presentations, graphical exercises, as well as the collection of documentary and observational material. It was hoped that the collection of a rich range of data types would not only be stimulating and entertaining for the students, but also revealing for the researcher, and thus promote further the collection of a rich, varied and reliable data base.

All of the methods of data collection used during the course of the study were united in employing a consistently subject-centred focus. It was each individual subject’s perceptions and understandings, both of themselves and their social world, that lay at the heart of the study, and all the study’s data collection methods, both autobiographical and ethnomethodological, ensured that this emphasis was central.
Finally, the use of data collection protocols and standardised instructions at each stage of the complex and layered process of data collection contributed a further degree of reliability to the study’s design.

3. What implications might the composition and particular circumstances of sample selection have had on the results of the study?

There were two essential theoretical criteria for the selection of an appropriate sample of participants for the present study. The first was that the participants should be students at the research school, and the second was that they should have a distinctive identity. The latter criterion would have been hard to avoid, though the inclusion of identical clones in the study, had they been available, could have offered fascinating comparative data. Any student at Bentham’s might, therefore, be considered to meet the two essential theoretical criteria, so additional ethical and educational criteria were allowed to determine the actual sample of participants eventually included within the study.

For ethical reasons already explained in Chapter 4, it was decided that a policy of minimal intrusion and maximal participant benefit should determine the eventual sample of participants. In the end, the principal research sample included 42 students, composed of two separate groups. The first was a group of twenty fifteen-year-olds, and the second was a group of twenty-two fourteen-year-olds. The members of the groups were therefore all adolescent boys with ages ranging from 13 to 16. The sample included three pairs of brothers, one brother from each pair in each group. A fifth of the overall group held non-British passports and came from a variety of countries including Japan, China, Pakistan, and Kenya.

The age profile of the students was rather younger than the researcher had initially desired; Erikson and McAdams theorised that identity formation was characteristic of the later, rather than the earlier stages of adolescence, and it was initially feared that the relative youth of the sample might render the results of the study inconclusive. In the end, this fear turned out to be groundless. Indeed, in the event, the discovery of very clear evidence for identity formation earlier than Erikson and McAdams had
proposed, proved to be one of the researcher’s most pleasant surprises and interesting findings.

The presence of some older students in the sample of autobiographers would have been an advantage, however, in a number of ways. First, the students who participated in the study showed almost no interest in the various “ideologies” (political or religious, etc) whose acquisition, according to both Erikson and McAdams, is such an important developmental task of adolescent identity formation. The inclusion of some older students, had it been possible, might have enabled clarification of this issue. Informal conversations with older students suggested that they, too, had little interest in Eriksonian “ideologies”, but it would have been good to be able to examine this issue more formally and extensively in the study.

A second area that might have been clarified with the inclusion of some older subjects was that of sexuality, which appeared to occupy a relatively small place in the students’ autobiographies. Given the proverbial association between adolescence and sex, this omission requires further consideration. Why does sexuality feature so relatively rarely in the autobiographies of these adolescents? One obvious reason might have been that they were bashful about revealing such things to someone they perceived to be a teacher. Although there is likely to be an element of truth in this concern, it was also clear that a number of students did reveal something of their burgeoning love lives to the researcher, as one or two of the heart-breakingly poignant quotations given in the previous chapters indicate. Further scrutiny of school life suggests that the issue of “bashfulness” is more complex than a blanket reluctance to discuss sexual matters in front of someone perceived as a teacher. For instance, particular students’ masturbation habits were not an uncommon subject of public comment at the end-of-term Christmas dinners in the boarding houses, with at least three houses awarding unofficial prizes for those caught “red-handed”. Since these accolades were awarded in the presence of the housemaster and house tutors, it may indicate that students were not entirely reticent about the discussion of sexual matters in front of teachers. Nonetheless, living as they do in a kind of “goldfish bowl” where their every action is liable to public scrutiny and comment, students were wisely selective about what got out into the public domain. Since girlfriends, crushes and
masturbation habits could so easily be the subject of explicit and robust comment amongst peers, the prudent student guarded any sensitive areas with circumspection, of which sexuality was clearly one.

A further, and perhaps more important reason, may account for the participants’ relative sexual inexperience. For all the Chaucerian bawdiness of Public school life, both the evidence of the autobiographies, as well as a number of conversations with recent school leavers suggested that, compared with their peers at other types of school, students were relatively more sheltered and less experienced in sexual matters; being sent to a residential Public School, said one student, was like being sent to a Medieval nunnery.

It would have been interesting, had educational circumstances permitted, to have been able to include some girls in the primary research sample, but in a predominantly boys’ school which only admitted a small total percentage of girls in the sixth form, this would have raised a number of difficulties about comparability. Girls who entered the school had a maximum of two, rather than five years in the school, and they did not share the intense early formative social world in which the boys grew up from their earliest years. Since the girls had not shared the same social world, nor for as long as the boys, in a study which endeavoured to do justice to both the social as well as the personal dimensions of identity formation, this difference would have raised serious difficulties about the comparability of their school experiences, and would have introduced an additional complication to the study’s design.

In an ideal research world, the researcher would have incorporated a longitudinal dimension to the study and obtained Yearbook pages and UCAS “personal statements” from the same students that wrote their autobiographies earlier in their school careers. This would have strengthened further the validity of the comparison between the various types of indigenous autobiographical writing, as well as throwing light on each autobiographer’s range of different social selves. Unfortunately, the time-frame and unwieldy logistics of such a longitudinal design rendered it impractical.
4. How far are the results of the study an unreliable and artificial artefact produced by the students for the benefit of a teacher?

As was initially mentioned in Chapter 4, there is an obvious sense in which every telling of a life story is a kind of performance, given at a particular time and place, and to a particular audience. Even if no audience is physically present, the writer of an autobiography may, at least implicitly, or unconsciously, have a particular audience in mind. This “virtual” audience, it might be reasonably argued, will affect both the manner and the matter of what is told. So much is a truism of most, if not all, cases of human communication. In its most general form, the proposition is therefore either too trite or too general to merit discussion.

Another important, but general issue which goes far beyond the remit of the present study, is how far people reveal their “real selves” (supposing there were such things) in their autobiographical musings. As has already been explained, the present study is neither an attempt to discover students’ “real selves”, nor does it claim to produce some kind of ideal autobiographical form which transcends all boundaries of audience and social context.

The question at issue in the present section is more limited in scope, but of considerably greater practical importance: How far are the results of the study an unreliable and artificial artefact produced by the students for the benefit of a teacher?

Leaving aside the previous more metaphysical questions about real selves and the conditions of human communication, the question stated above directs attention to the key issue of how open, honest and sincere the students have been in telling their life stories to the researcher, and how far the researcher’s role as a teacher may have affected the degree of openness and honesty in what was communicated.

The subject matter of the study requires that the researcher is present in the research school for an extended period, and his position within it, and more especially, his relationship to his student participants (as in many exercises in qualitative social research) is of crucial importance in affecting the quality of the data obtained. Denzin
(1989, 1994), Atkinson (1998) and other have emphasized the decisive importance of the relationship between the researcher and the researched in qualitative research, and it is important that the issue be fully discussed here.

In the case of the present study, the researcher is both an insider and an outsider as far as the students are concerned; he is a part of the school community, and accepted as such, and yet he is not himself a student. As far as the students are concerned he is both "one of us", and also not "one of us". Despite the apparent tensions implicit in this position, eight arguments are produced below that suggest that the students have nonetheless communicated their life stories with an impressive, but not total degree of openness and honesty.

First, the material contained in very many of the autobiographies appears, prima facie, to be open and honest. Looks, of course, can be very deceptive, and one can "smile and smile and be a villain", but it is hard to read the many stories from which previous chapters have quoted copiously, without feeling that the writers were frequently sharing their experiences with a degree of genuineness and honesty that is quite remarkable. When confronted with Rahim’s understated account of his courage in the face of his near death experiences, or Tom’s grief at the death of his dog, it is hard to shout "phoney!". The obviously personal quality of much of the material, as well as its disarming directness, is very suggestive of openness and honesty.

Secondly, on the evidence of the autobiographies themselves, the texts construct an implied “reader” who is cast in the role of one of the writer’s close friends. It will be recalled, too, that The Code and its expectations rarely, if ever, appear in the context of the autobiographies, nor for the most part, do the autobiographers include the world of their peers in their stories, except where this forms a necessary back-drop to an experience of particular personal significance. The autobiographies usually depict a world populated by the writer, his immediate family and close friends. The autobiographies, therefore, tend to present the student’s more private and personal self - the self which is distinct from the public world dominated by The Code. The “follow-up interviews” confirmed strongly that students viewed their social worlds as being arranged in a series of concentric circles (evidence for this was discussed in
Chapter 7) with themselves, their family and one or two close friends characteristically placed in the inner circle. Many others reported that they would only talk about the most personal aspects of their lives to those within, or near to this “inner circle”. In their autobiographies, therefore, the students seem to be revealing things about their personal lives that they would not discuss publicly with their peers, but would reserve for members of their “inner circle”. All these considerations suggest that the researcher, who was the sole other intended “reader” of these personal writings (students would place only an edited portion of their autobiography in their GCSE examination portfolio of work, and only if they chose to do so), had been cast by the majority of writers in the privileged role of a member of their “inner circle” of family or close friends. This was not only humbling for the researcher, but also suggested that the autobiographies were being written with the kind of high degree of openness and honesty which students would accord to their closest friends and family.

Thirdly, this impression of openness and honesty was reinforced when the content and manner of the research autobiographies was compared with the contents and manners of the other types of indigenous autobiographical writing which occurred within the school. Compared with the Yearbook, their university entrance UCAS “personal statements” and the sports brochures, the research autobiographies appeared considerably more detailed, thorough, serious and sincere than the other local autobiographical documents studied.

Fourthly, part of the school ethos incorporated a long-standing tradition of friendliness and mutual respect between staff and students. The researcher was privileged to interview a ninety-year old retired teacher from the school who drew the researcher’s attention to this tradition, and saw it as one of the schools most distinctive features. This tradition of openness and friendliness between staff and students can plausibly be argued to have aided the researcher’s own relationship with his student participants, and this may have enhanced the likelihood of a high quality of sincerity and openness in their responses to the research instruments.

Fifthly, the openness and honesty of the students were reinforced more pragmatically by the relentlessly “public” nature of boarding school life. Some of the students
likened the experience of daily school life to living in a goldfish bowl where public scrutiny and exposure were a daily fact of life. This fact led many students to take a less rigid attitude to privacy than might be the norm in the “outside world” (the public discussion of one’s masturbation habits mentioned earlier might provide a pungent example of a certain relaxation of society’s usual personal boundaries, or at least a certain resignation in the face of their erosion). Their social world may thus have enforced a habituated kind of openness that may also have contributed to the openness and honesty of the students’ accounts.

Sixthly, the nature and depth of the personal experiences recounted in the autobiographies was, in the researcher’s experience as a psychotherapist and counsellor, comparable with the type and level of characteristically confidential “therapeutic” conversations, reinforcing the impression that students had been remarkably honest and open in what they wrote.

Seventhly, however, although very many of the autobiographical accounts showed a remarkable degree of openness and honesty, it was also clear that not all areas of personal experience were equally likely to appear in the written accounts of the research group. As remarked earlier, the area of sexuality was one such notable area. The insight that some particular areas of personal experience might be too risky to write about in any kind of public forum was confirmed and illustrated by a number of detailed conversations which the researcher had with a number of older students who talked about their sexuality. In each of the five cases where this occurred, students talked about their discovery of their homosexual orientation, and the confusions and difficulties this had caused them. All of them (except one who had been “outed”) felt very strongly that they could not let their sexual identity be known whilst they were at school for fear of the consequences. They feared public rejection and ridicule (rightly or wrongly), and this, they said, had inhibited not only their emotional development, but even their very capacity to become aware of their sexual orientation. Fear of public exposure and shame had, most said, kept them in a state of denial for several years after their first inklings of their sexual preferences. Hearing about my research, three of these students wrote their own stories, so that, under the study’s cover of anonymity, their voice would have a chance to be heard. Poignantly and tellingly, one
wrote his story on the computer in his study, but wrote it in an unreadably small type-
face, so that if anyone came into his room when he were writing, they would not be
able to read what was on the screen:—

To give you an idea as to how nervous I am about people finding out about
me within the school, as I write this, it is in font size 0.2, so if anyone walks
into my room, they won’t be able to read what I’ve written. Then, when it
comes to printing it out, I’ll wait for each sheet to finish, and fold them up and
put them straight into an envelope, so no-one catches a glimpse! Sad, isn’t it?

After he had left the school, another gay student wrote:—

It’s only since coming to university and stepping out into the real world that I
was really able to grasp just how ridiculous and how sad Bentham’s is when it
comes to homophobia. As the “asexual” drama boy who liked golden oldies
and pop music, I was surprised at just how long it took for people to pick up
that I just might be gay. And yet the odd thing was that the school’s society is
very much split on the issue. It’s taken as read that no-one will like you (apart
from your very closest friends) if you are gay at Bentham’s — unless you
manufacture the sweet lispy wide-eyed homosexual image that everyone can
at least laugh at. However, those that will still talk to you are often the ones
who are most split. I found it bizarre that at any given time, I could be
speaking to someone I thought was a friend, one-on-one, late at night or in the
afternoon, about being gay. Then the very next moment, those very same
people would be jeering at you across the lunch table. What did it feel like
being a gay person in one of the most homophobic environments around?
Lonely and isolated, that’s what.

Comments such as these throw an entirely different and less playful light on the
commonest term of abuse in The Code’s moral lexicon; “gay”. They may also indicate
that sexuality is a more than usually sensitive area at Bentham’s, and that the
construction of masculinity within the students’ social world has its darker side.
Significantly, as chance would have it, one of these older gay students mentioned the
name of a younger student who was involved in what he called “gay activities”, and
was in a relationship with another boy. The student named happened to be a member
of the study’s primary research group. Unsurprisingly but tellingly, those latter aspects
of the named student’s unofficial school life, though apparently important to the
younger student in question, made no appearance in his research autobiography,
confirming the researcher’s intuition that, although most of the students were
remarkably honest and open in their writings, there were nonetheless areas of privacy
which were withheld from public scrutiny.
5. **Are the analytical methods employed in the interpretation of the data sufficiently clear, methodologically appropriate and as transparent to scrutiny as possible?**

An interpretive study, particularly one which espouses the hermeneutical stance of Gadamer (1975, 1976), recognises, just as he does, that there can be no formulaic “method” of data analysis. The interpretation of texts is, for Gadamer, an ineluctably inter-personal and idiosyncratically complex process whose movements can neither be forced into a “one-size-fits-all” method of analysis, nor can its outcomes be specified in advance. Gadamer advocates the researcher’s repeated and continuous engagement with the texts to be interpreted, and urges the researcher remaining open to what the text has to communicate, whilst also being aware of the ideas and assumptions which the reader brings to the act of interpretation. Initial attempts at understanding will produce a “rough draft”, a preliminary attempt to understand. If the interpretive endeavour and the “hermeneutical circle” have been entered with the requisite honesty, openness, mutual respect and carefulness, it can, he argues, result in ever more refined acts of understanding, each of which serves as a “rough draft” for a potentially never-ending series of acts of understanding that might follow.

This, in essence, has been the “method” of interpretation and analysis followed in the present study. Gadamer, however, like Collingwood (1939) also recognised the heuristic value of approaching the interpretive enterprise with a series of specific questions to aid the focus of understanding. The opportunity to use such questions was readily employed during the analytical phase of the present study.

The major aim of the interpretive process was to understand as deeply and fully as possible each individual autobiography in all its distinctiveness, before going on to compare the individual autobiographies with each other to see what additional light the comparison threw on the articulation of their unique differences.

In order to render the analytical process as transparent as possible, the data collection methods, and analytical procedures used to interpret them, were not only been explained in some detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but the approaches to data collection and interpretation used for each distinct data set were additionally reported throughout the
data chapters (Chapters 6 – 9) as each separate body of data was summarised and discussed. This approach was taken so that readers of the study could see for themselves samples of the data alongside accounts of how the data were collected and interpreted. Although this may have lead to some repetition, it is argued that this approach also conferred greater transparency concerning the analytical process.

Gadamer’s work attaches considerable importance to the “prejudices” of the interpreter i.e to the assumptions, ideas and beliefs which the researcher brings to the task of interpretation and analysis. For this reason, the study’s Prologue outlined the researcher’s biography, and subsequent chapters have outlined the principal ideas and literatures which have shaped his thinking. Additional ideas that influenced the researcher’s interpretation of the data were outlined at the relevant places throughout Chapters 6 – 9, and many of these ideas were again discussed in Chapter 10. It is hoped, therefore, that although no researcher can be completely and transparently self-aware regarding the manifold influences which have acted upon him, the present researcher has, nonetheless, endeavoured to be as open and thorough as seemed appropriate for the purposes of the present study.

The process of data interpretation and analysis was conceived of as a dialogical one, with the students’ data, the researcher’s academic influences, and the personality of the researcher himself united in a continuous process of mutual dialogue and interrogation. During the course of the four major data chapters, therefore, the writers whose work and ideas formed an important part of the interpretive dialogue were discussed openly alongside the data, so as to form part of the on-going discussion. In this way, the integrity and openness of the “hermeneutical circle” was, as far as possible, laid open to view.

Before he had collected his data, the researcher had initially tried to formulate detailed theories and analytical schemas derived from the work of Harré (1998), but the data proved to be too complex and curious for any simple scheme to fit, and so the evidence rightly demolished the elegant theoretical simplicity of those preliminary interpretive grids and frameworks. From that moment onwards, the researcher attempted to approach the data with an open and respectful attitude, and with no pre-
formed schemas. He attempted to stay very close to the data he collected, so that any patterns and generalisations that emerged were lead by the data itself (much as in the manner of Grounded Theory) rather than being analytical schemes imposed upon it. This means that the data analyses offered throughout the study are frequently of a strongly descriptive character. They are, as Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988) puts it, “data near” rather than “data distant”. Where attempts were made to explore particular analytical schemas derived from a specific academic theory, these were clearly and explicitly advertised wherever possible.

As suggested by Gadamer, the autobiographical material which is central to the study was subjected to multiple readings. These readings were organised - if such a term is not already too neat and tidy a term for the messy, catch-as-catch-can process of interpretation - into a cumulative cycle of ten major phases. The details of these analytical cycles, their aims and focus, the approaches taken, and the areas examined in each reading were described in Chapter 5. During each reading cycle, a variety of structured Reading Guides, analytical pro formas and questions gave a degree of structure and shape to the analytical process. At each of these ten stages in the process of data analysis, the results of each phase of analysis were recorded in a variety of printed pro formas, tables, pen portraits and written notes, to act not only as “rough drafts” for the succeeding stages in data interpretation, but also to serve as an audit trail of the process of interpretation itself. Some of the pro formas employed for recording purposes can be seen in Appendix F.

Each set of data was analysed separately, and patterns were considered to have emerged only after they were seen to be supported not just by a number of instances in a single data set, but to be supported by instances in two or more data sets.

During the process of data analysis, the researcher was continually “trying out” the ideas, analytical schemas and questions of other relevant theorists to see how well they “fit” the data collected. Amongst the analytical schemes tried out were those of Harré (1988), Ricoeur (1992/1994), McAdams (1985, 1989, 1991, 1993/1997), Aristotle (1982), Frye (1957), Hanskiss (1981) and Gergen and Gergen (1993). Through the use of this procedure, the researcher was able to introduce an element of
"triangulation of analysts" to strengthen the theoretical rigour of the interpretive process.

On the other hand, no attempt was made to impose any particular conceptual framework on the data. The only exception to this principle was the attempt, at the very end of the analytical process, to "tidy up" the complexity of the resulting taxonomy through the use of an organising framework derived from Aristotle's Poetics. This manoeuvre, however, was intended to be no more than practically convenient and cosmetic, and these motivations were clearly articulated in presenting the Taxonomy.

The hermeneutical analytical procedures using the various stages of the data analysis were consistent with both the principal research concept, and with the research's methodology and approach.

Finally, it is hoped that the data chapters, by presenting the data alongside the procedures used to collect and analyse them, provided a sufficiently clear chain of evidence, reasoning and interpretation to instil a degree of confidence in the findings produced.

6. Are the data displayed with sufficient detail and clarity to encourage confidence in the study's findings, as well as to permit further scrutiny?

There are both philosophical and practical issues involved in the apparently simple-sounding idea of "clear and detailed display of evidence". The philosophical issues centre around what Denzin (1994) has called the "crisis of representation" in the social sciences. Since the 1980s there has been increasing awareness amongst social scientists about the inescapably interpretive nature of "truth", and this has lead, not only to a rejection of older styles of positivist research, but also to an appreciation that "objectivity" may be not so much elusive as theoretically impossible; Nietzsche's dictum, "all is interpretation" echoes frequently in the methodological works of Denzin and others. (e.g. Denzin, 1994: 500).
At the most general philosophical level, it is easy to appreciate that reflection and analysis on any matter tends automatically both to objectify and oversimplify the object of reflection, the process of representation, as it were, ontologically pickling all it bathes in its epistemological vinegar. Korzybski (1941), Bateson (1972), Bandler and Grinder (1975a, 1975b) have made this insight central to their work.

It is further plausibly argued by Denzin (1989, 1994), Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988) and others, that when social scientists write about their subjects, they produce only their version of those people or events. This awareness leaves conscientious social scientists with a dilemma; when they write up the reports of their investigations, how far does the scientist’s own act of writing distort or mis-represent the phenomenon under study? The previous epistemological problems, it is suggested, though they cannot be solved, may, nonetheless, be managed consciously and judiciously.

Geertz (1988) suggests that there is no more difficult dilemma for the social scientist than in deciding how they themselves will be present in the text that they write: “Being there in the text is even more difficult than being there in the field”, he argues. In commenting on this dictum, Clandinin and Connelly (1994), using Geertz’ term “signature” to represent the writers’ presences in their texts, sketch the two opposite horns of the dilemma clearly:

Too vivid a signature runs the risk of obscuring the field and its participants; too subtle a signature runs the risk of the deception that the research text speaks from the point of view of the participant. (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:424)

The researcher thus cannot avoid making a decision about how both the researcher and the researched will be present in the written account of the study. Denzin (1989) identifies a number of possible strategies which social scientists have employed when writing about their subjects, differentiated, essentially, by the differing degrees to which they accord priority of place to quotations from the subjects, as opposed to the researcher’s interpretive commentary.

To address this issue, a number of approaches to data display were aired in Chapter 9 when considering how the study’s autobiographical data should best be displayed.
Extensive quotation from the autobiographies with minimal commentary from the researcher lay at one end of the spectrum, whilst the briefer option of minimal quotation, coupled with extensive analytical summaries provided by the researcher, lay at the opposite end of the spectrum. In the end, a compromise between the two was decided upon, with a number of extensive quotations on a selection of topics were offered alongside a more analytical descriptive taxonomy of unifying and differentiating autobiographical features, derived from, and extensively illustrated by, extracts from the autobiographies.

The author’s presence in the data chapters, though by no means absent, was, it is hoped, somewhat reserved, in the researcher’s conscious effort to be a “good listener” and, as far as possible within the constraints of a limited academic document, to let the students speak for themselves.

Leaving aside the issue of the researcher’s presence within the research text, there are two principal ways in which the study aims to provide a clear and detailed display of its evidence. The first has already been adverted to, and consists of the extensive use of quotations from the students. Based on the text’s ample use of quotations set alongside the researcher’s interpretations of them, the reader may be able to make some initial assessment about the plausibility and reliability of the researcher’s interpretations.

The second form of accountability begins within the research report, but extends beyond it. As described in the previous section, the researcher recorded his interpretations at each major stage in the interpretive process, in the form of annotated structured pro formas, dated notes, tables and pen portraits which might serve to document each stage in the process. Along with the large volume of written, videotaped and documentary evidence, these records of the interpretive process itself can also serve as an “audit trail” by which the progress of the research can be checked by others. This, it is hoped, may further enhance the credibility and plausibility of the study’s findings.
7. How far do the researcher’s previous experience and skills contribute to the credibility of the research?

A number of influential commentators (such as Patton, 1990) argue that one of the major factors which add immeasurably to the credibility of the research is the credibility of the researcher. Does the researcher have the requisite experience and expertise to engender the reader’s confidence that the study’s conduct and conclusions will be competently and intelligently managed? The present researcher proposes five areas of his previous experience and competence which may reinforce the plausibility of the present study.

First, he undertook published empirical research in the field of social psychology alongside Rom Harré, one of the leading practitioners in the field. That research, like the present study, made use of ethnomethodological methods, and also involved conducting research in a variety of school contexts, including a boarding school context (see Morgan, O’Neill and Harré, 1979).

Secondly, the researcher has had a long-standing interest in issues concerning personal identity, and has read extensively (but also, no doubt Quixotically) in the literatures of philosophy, theology and psychology on the issue. Research at the University of Oxford into conceptions of the self in twentieth century psychology lead to an extensive study about a variety of such conceptions of the self and the place of narrative in them. (O’Neill, 1996).

Thirdly, although he was educated at a State school himself, the researcher has had more than twenty years experience as a teacher and counsellor in a variety of residential schools, including some well known, as well as lesser known Public Schools. He has therefore experienced these unusual cultures at first hand before conducting the present research, and has had a long experience of their distinctive ethos. This previous experience, it is hoped, will make him a more discerning and perceptive interpreter of the data he collects.
Fourthly, the researcher has had extensive experience and training as a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst and counsellor, and therefore has considerable professional experience of listening to people’s life stories and discussing their interpretations of them.

Finally, the researcher has long had a personal fascination with reading a variety of autobiographical writings. This, it is hoped, has complemented his reading for the present study in a positive way.

11.7 External validity

According to Yin (1994) the issue of external validity is concerned with establishing the domain to which a study’s findings can be appropriately generalised. How far can the findings of the present study be applied more widely? All case study designs have to face important issues about their representativeness, and therefore about the limitations of their findings’ wider applicability or generalisability. Since the design of the present study was constituted not only as a case study, but also as a case study whose principal focus was the uniquenesses of two groups of students in a single residential institution, this issue becomes particularly acute. If each person and situation is unique, studies which report such things must face a major question about the extent to which, even in principle, their results might have wider application. This general issue, as well as its particular application to the present study, are discussed in this section. Two principal questions provide a focus for these discussions:-

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the case study design of the present study?

2. How far do the principal findings of the study permit wider application or generalisation to other situations?

Approaching the first of these questions, it has been argued (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Jarvis, 1999) that the case study method has a number of major strengths. First, a case study design can offer a “thick description” of particular cases, with an abundance of details, which, in the case of the present study, would expedite the investigation of the particular uniquenesses of both the participants and their unusual social environment.
Secondly, the case study design offers data which are *locally contextualised* in very specific ways. This consideration is indispensable for a study which adopts a life story model of identity; stories are amongst the most highly contextualised forms of communication that human beings commonly use. Thirdly, the case study design provides information on both *individuals* as well as their *social context*. The study’s dual focus on both the *uniquenesses* of particular individuals, as well as their perceptions of their *social context* make the case study design an *ideal* vehicle for the research. Fourthly, the case study approach can provide a *holistic* and *lifelike* picture of the situation described. Fifthly, it may also provide an effective communication of the *subjective flavour* of the participants’ experiences. Sixthly, the approach is capable of providing good quality data, particularly if the design of the study and the relationship of the researcher to the researched is also good. Finally, the case study design offers a very *flexible* tool of research.

According to Clegg *et al* (1985:9), amongst the most widely discussed *weaknesses* of the case study approach are these; that it cannot establish *causation*, that (compared with quantitative and experimental designs) the case study approach is *subjective*, and finally, that the specificity and uniqueness of the particular case may undermine its *representativeness* and thereby impugn the *generalisation* of its findings to other contexts.

The first two criticisms present less difficulty than the third. It is not part of the aims of the present study to establish any form of causation, whilst the study’s focus on each *individual’s* sense of who they are make *subjectivity* the study’s very essence.

The issue of *generalisability*, however, presents a greater challenge. Jarvis (1999) argues strongly that *every* case is unique. He argues that the passage of time and the changes it brings in its train, mean that the particular people and situations which existed at one specific moment in time will *never* be repeated in an identical form thereafter. This Heraclitan insight crystalises a profound epistemological insight that goes far beyond the methodology of the case study. The “Heraclitan” perspective that draws attention to the eternal and unstoppable flux of things implies that *nothing* is repeatable, and this must include even the most positivistic laboratory-based scientific
experiments. This means that, strictly speaking, the concept of “external validity” has no application to the case study method, nor, perhaps to any other scientific method. Rather than seeing this as a weakness of the case study approach, Jarvis grasps the fuller implications of his Heraclitan insight for the idea of external validity tout court. If everything is always in flux, the coherence and appropriateness of the concept of “external validity” itself may have to be radically questioned throughout the social sciences:

It might be argued that the inability to generalise from a case study means that it cannot have external validity. My position is that the criterion of external validity cannot be proved to be valid in itself, because every practice situation is different. (Jarvis, 1999: 85)

Like the damning criticism made against the Logical Positivists’ Verification Principle, that it self-destructed when applied to itself (Barbour, 1966), Jarvis’ Heraclitan insight, it might be argued, has a similar unanswerable force in undermining or substantially limiting any study’s claims to generalisability.

However, this conclusion, as he rightly argues, does not mean that “anything goes” in the social sciences. On the contrary, precisely because an individual case study cannot be replicated, its design, data and documentation need to be all the more detailed and rigorous. The present study has endeavoured to follow these recommendations.

Nonetheless, although Jarvis argues that each case is unique and unrepeatable, there are, nonetheless certain similarities and patterns in people’s social lives, and though not exact, there may sufficient common ground between different social situations for some lessons and insights learned in one situation to be transferred to another. With playful irony he makes his point by developing an old maxim that encapsulates the original insight of Heraclitus:

The same water cannot flow under the same bridge twice. That is true. But if you stand on the bridge, you will see that different molecules of water make similar patterns – and we recognise that patterns of behaviour do occur. (Jarvis, 1999:86)

He goes on to argue that since it is the case that “at the heart of social living are similarities and patterns”, then it follows that such “patterns of practice emerge and
will be revealed within the uniqueness of each case study.” (loc cit., researcher’s italics). If this is so, then it suggests a looser yet more plausible alternative to the positivist notion of external validity. Although each situation is unique, some of the patterns that emerge in a particular situation may yet have an illuminating transferability beyond the unique and unrepeatable single case.

In this respect, the present study has traced two different types of “pattern”. The first is a predominantly social one, and is encapsulated in what has been termed The Code, an attempt to summarise the students’ perceptions of the unofficial and frequently unconscious local code of rules, norms and values which govern their communal daily lives whilst at school. The second type of pattern is more individually focused, and consists of the Taxonomies of unifying and differentiating patterns which attempt to describe some of the ways in which the students’ life stories were unified and distinguished. What are the possibilities that these patterns might be appropriately and illuminatingly transferred to other situations?

Transferability of The Code

From the researcher’s experience in other English Public Schools, the general nature and characteristic structure of The Code, in particular its constitution as a hierarchical “honour morality” with prominent “masculine” values, would seem to be fairly widespread. This intuition is, very informally, reinforced by a wide range of both fictional and biographical writing which describes traditional boarding school environments. From Billy Bunter to Harry Potter, from Thomas Hughes’ strongly autobiographical Tom Brown’s School Days (describing the rigours of life at Rugby) to Another Country, (the play delineating Burgess’s and Maclean’s time at Eton, similar honour codes can be seen in operation. Respecting ones elders, not telling tales, and the importance of being good at sport if one is to be respected by one peers, are frequently repeated features of Public School life, whether it be rugby at Rugby, or quidditch at Harry Potter’s Hogwarts.

Although many traditional boarding schools may share similar types of honour morality (and the codes that go with them), there may well be differences about the
specific details of such codes at different schools. Only empirical comparative studies could confirm the details of such a surmise, and it would certainly be fascinating to discover the extent of such similarities or variations. A few long-established boarding schools, such as Summerfields and ‘Bedales, have a reputation for being much less hierarchical, as well as more liberal and informal in their ethos. It would be particularly interesting to see if the informal pupil codes in such schools approximated to honour moralities at all, and if they did so, how different their characteristic codes might be.

Transferability of The Taxonomy

First, although derived from close analysis of only forty-two particular autobiographies in a very specific (and perhaps peculiar) environment, the Taxonomy, or some better version of it, may prove to be capable of much wider application. Exactly how far would need careful empirical investigation, but it may be that the Taxonomy outlines some of the principal components of any autobiographical genre that uses narrative techniques for its presentation and unification. The argument for making this seemingly enormous suggestion would be built on evidence and arguments occurring in the fields of narrative research and developmental psychology, of which space does not permit discussion here. As an example of the direction in which such an argument might move, Bruner’s work (1986, 1990) suggests not only that there is a universal “narrative mode” of cognition, but it also points to evidence from developmental psychology which supports the early appearance of such a cognitive capacity in young children. If his proposals continue to be supported by a growing body of empirical evidence, then there may be a basis for believing that the principles of narration may be, if not innate, then learned very early, and this may imply, at least at the level of the most rudimentary narrative features, considerable inter-cultural stability in the ways in which narratives are structured. These issues, however, require very much more empirical investigation and debate before any confident conclusions could be reached, so the status of the present study’s Taxonomy must be seen as only a tentative suggestion which needs further testing in other contexts.
Secondly, the wider applicability of the present study’s Taxonomy might be supported, more informally, from another source. The researcher inspected a wide range of autobiographies, both ancient and modern, after the conclusion of the study’s main phase of data analysis was completed. This informal and cursory inspection suggests that the Taxonomy’s main features may be detected in many other types of autobiographical writing, other than those collected specifically for the purposes of the present research.

Thirdly and interestingly, several of the Taxonomy’s basic narrative elements also recur frequently in the more abstract literature of literary theory. One of the earliest and most influential of these was Aristotle’s analysis of literary form with its six-fold taxonomy of plot, character, theme, music, style and spectacle. There are, notoriously, many conflicting theories in the field of literary theory about which elements of narrative are essential to the constitution of a narrative. In the literary field there are, for instance, heated debates about the relative priority which should be given to plot on the one hand, or character on the other, as fundamental constitutive elements of narrative. (Compare, for instance the opposite views of Propp, 1968, and Greimas, 1976, on this issue). Despite the differences of emphasis which such debates evince, however, it is interesting that so many of the same basic narrative ingredients recur so frequently in these strongly-contested debates.

The researcher believes, however, that the specific Taxonomies delineated in the present study are unlikely to be complete; the complexity and richness of even a small number of stories is almost inexhaustible, whilst the same cannot be said for the researcher, who was sufficiently exhausted by the present version of the Taxonomy’s current state of completeness.

The researcher’s temperament was strongly in favour of producing nice neat, brief orderly schemes that make everything look simple and clear. The autobiographical data he collected, however, thwarted this disposition at every turn. The irreducible complexity, detail, messiness and prolixity of the present Taxonomy, though frustrating for the researcher and potentially tedious for the reader, may stand, in consequence, a higher chance, not only of representing the data more fairly, but also
of being of somewhat wider applicability than otherwise might have been the case. Only further systematic research could establish this.

The researcher also believes that the present structured form in which his current version of the Taxonomy is presented is unlikely to be definitive. As has been explained earlier, the present ordering was done at the very end of the analytical process simply to “tidy up” the sprawling array of detailed narrative differences which the researcher’s analysis had revealed. To spare the reader more confusion than otherwise might have been the case, the current ordering has been created for cosmetic reasons and for practical convenience alone.

11.8 Reliability

Many of the issues which affect the reliability of the present study have already been aired in previous sections, since they involve the appropriateness, competence, rigour and transparency of the study’s design, data collection and data analysis. Yin (1994) suggests that reliability amounts to “demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as data collection procedures—can be repeated with the same results.” (Yin, 1994:33), but arguments were given in the previous section (see Jarvis, 1999) to dispute the applicability, and perhaps even the coherence of this suggestion. Jarvis (1999:75ff) has argued strongly that each case is unique and unrepeatable, since things are always changing over time, and, consequently, that the notion of “repeatability” (and the notion of “external validity” which is frequently tied to it) is untenable. This Heraclitean insight into the “universal flux” of experience renders the test of simple repeatability inadmissible as the primary factor in assessing the reliability of social research such as the present study.

Leaving this major theoretical issue aside, four major issues affecting the reliability of the study have already been dealt with in earlier sections. The first concerned the question of how far the students who participated in the study had been sufficiently open, honest and trustworthy in their contributions so that conclusions based on their data might be anything more than fictional. That issue was fully examined in the previous section on the study’s internal validity, and so is not further discussed here.
The second issue concerned the researcher's competence in the execution of the study. The many considerations of design, data collection and analysis which provided relevant evidence of his competence, or lack of it, have already been presented, not only in the present chapter, but also throughout the research account. The third issue affecting the overall reliability of the study concerned the researcher's personal credibility as a researcher, and the earlier section on the study's internal validity presented some of the considerations relevant to this issue.

The final issue affecting the overall reliability of the study concerns the researcher's honesty. This question has also been discussed in an earlier section when the issues of data analysis and data display were considered. Throughout his conduct of the study, the researcher has endeavoured to retain a respectful and open-minded approach to his data, and has tried to be aware of the assumptions and temperamental biases which he brings to the process of research. He has also tried to be transparent and detailed in describing how he collected his data, fair in summarising it, and clear in displaying it. He has identified the authors whose work has most influenced his thinking and analysis. He has quoted liberally from his sources so that his readers can check for themselves his interpretations against the evidence, and he hopes he has left behind a well-documented audit trail.

He has made every effort to be as self-aware as possible, and has reflected constantly on both the process of research and its emerging discoveries. When he began the research, he had no idea about how the research process would turn out, nor what its conclusions would be. His early theory-generated ideas were all frustrated and overturned by the data he collected, and he has been frequently surprised by what has emerged from the process. All of these things, he hopes, have added to the quality and plausibility of the eventual research.

No doubt, however, the researcher has also failed to be aware of many of his assumptions, just as there are literally millions of books and articles that he might have read but didn't. He has also failed to deal with many issues in his report that might have been explored. Where this is the case, this is not, he hopes, a matter of deception and duplicity, but of either pragmatic necessity (you can't say everything)
or of simple lack of awareness. In this regard, he is comforted by Jarvis’ (1999) discussion of Guba and Lincoln’s criticisms that all reports of case studies are oversimplified, selective and unrepresentative:-

All reports, of whatever kind, are representations or interpretations of some form of event or reality. It would be impossible to find any account that is not an oversimplification. (Jarvis, 1999: 82).

The present researcher, therefore, pleads guilty to these charges of oversimplification; “life”, as Bruner says, “is richer than discourse.” Despite these limitations the researcher has, nonetheless, tried to be honest, clear and careful in this work. Imperfect as it is, he has done his best.

11.9 Particular strengths of the present study

The previous sections have subjected the study to extensive criticism. To provide an element of balance, the present brief section draws attention to what might be seen as some of the study’s strengths.

First, the research attempts to conduct an autobiographical study of a group of particular individuals which also examines their perceptions of the formative influence of their social environment. This kind of carefully and thoroughly contextualised autobiographical study is, as Harré (1998) has argued, relatively rare. McAdams’ own work, though very detailed in its approach to the analysis of particular individuals’ life stories, has been less inclined to include an analysis of the social contexts of his autobiographers.

Secondly, as was argued earlier, the research literature on Public Schools is sparse and dated. The present research, therefore, offers a relatively rare and recent insight into this type of educational setting. The glimpse which the study provides of the students’ perceptions of themselves and their social environment is, he believes, largely unparalleled in contemporary research.

Thirdly, the research raises some ground-breaking questions about some of the prominent theorists who have influenced the researcher. The study’s findings raise a
number of interesting theoretical issues about the claims of previous researchers in the field. For instance, Erikson (1958, 1959, 1968, 1969) suggests that identity formation is usually attained in later adolescence. The evidence of the present study suggests that an earlier date needs to be considered. The present study also raises a number of questions regarding McAdams’ (1985, 1993) work. For instance, McAdams’ analytical schema which identifies what he argues are the principal components of any person’s life story (tone, imagery, theme, ideology, character and generativity script, McAdams, 1993) may need considerable revision. The present research also raises issues about Goffman’s (1961/1968) claims about “total institutions” and their effects on individuals. These and several other issues were raised more fully in Chapter 10, and so are not repeated here.

Fourthly, the study’s Taxonomies offer a very detailed and comprehensive analysis of the ways in which uniqueness is narratively presented (and perhaps constructed) in the life stories of the research’s participants.

Fifthly, the study offers a narrative Taxonomy for the description and analysis of life stories. It is hoped that, after some further revision, this Taxonomy might serve as a useful heuristic and analytical tool for other researchers working in various fields of biographical research. In this way, the present researcher may be able to make some small gesture towards repaying the assistance he himself received from the analytical frameworks offered by scholars such as McAdams (1985), Frye (1957), Gilligan et al (1990), and Brown et al (1987).

Sixthly, it is hoped that the study is well-argued and that it has depth as well as comprehensiveness.

Finally, it is hoped that the study’s style and presentation - despite the necessary prolixity required by the extent and irreducible complexity of the autobiographical material studied - makes the account comprehensible.
PART 2: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

11.10 Summary of the study’s principal conclusions

It is stressed that the present section can give only a brief summary of the study’s findings; for a more detailed statement of the study’s findings, the reader is referred to the study’s four principal data chapters, Chapters 6 – 9, as well as to the summary given at the beginning of the previous chapter. It will be recalled that the study has been designed to answer its principal research question which has been formulated as follows:-

In their life stories, how far do the students in the research school construct a sense of themselves which is unified and unique?

Although many other areas were explored along the way, and lead to interesting findings, the present summary of the study’s principal conclusions must start with its principal question.

Answering the principal research question

The study found that the autobiographical narratives produced by the students each presented an identity that was both unified and distinctive. The distinctive character of each life story was sufficiently highly differentiated to believe that each story was unique. In their life stories, therefore, each of the students successfully and convincingly presented a sense of themselves which was both unified and unique, and some of the many ways in which their stories achieved unity and uniqueness were summarised, respectively, in the study’s Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns and Taxonomy of Narrative Differences.

Although it is recognised that the concept of “uniqueness” goes beyond the phrase “highly differentiated”, it is suggested that the degree and character of the differences displayed in the autobiographies could very plausibly be seen as providing strong evidence for the uniqueness of each person’s life story. Moreover, it seems
reasonable to suppose that, on grounds of content and subjective perspective alone, no other individual in the history of the universe would be able to replicate identically the personal experiences which took place at the particular times and places described in the autobiographies, let alone the manner of their perception and presentation. For all these reasons, therefore, the study concludes that each of the students successfully and convincingly presented a sense of themselves which was both unified and unique.

Basing its findings as precisely as possible on the autobiographical data collected, the study was impelled by the complex and detailed evidence it collected to represent the range of specific unifying and differentiating features of the students’ life stories in the form of two detailed descriptive taxonomies, respectively the Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns and the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences.

The Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns and the Taxonomy of Narrative Differences (discussed fully in Chapters 8 and 9 respectively, and which, for convenience, are hereafter referred to simply as “The Taxonomy”) together describe nearly eighty separate dimensions along which the life stories unify and differentiate themselves. The Taxonomy thus serves as a convenient way of summarising and displaying the very large number of differences which even the study’s modest number of life stories can instantiate.

The construction of the Taxonomy has also, it is hoped, provided a convenient method of reversing what Jarvis (2001) described as the post-Enlightenment trend of “distilling out differences”, and has, instead, drawn attention to the remarkable range of differences exhibited by a small number of life stories produced within the confines of a very narrowly circumscribed social world, that might, according to some social theorists, have been expected to induce considerable uniformity and conformity amongst its inhabitants. Whilst other parts of the study’s layered design presented some of the similarities which the study’s participants share, the Taxonomy, it is hoped, has not only summarised a very large number of personal differences between the life stories, but has also described some of the many ways in which, in their life stories, students construct a sense of themselves which, for practical purposes, is unique.
Taken together, therefore, the study’s two constituent taxonomies, the *Taxonomy of Unifying Patterns* and the *Taxonomy of Narrative Differences*, thus present the researcher’s detailed answer to the study’s principal research question. The former taxonomy gives a specific answer to the study’s first subsidiary question, *In what specific ways do the students unify their life stories?*, whilst the latter taxonomy answers the study’s second subsidiary question, *In what specific ways do the students display differences in their life stories?*

From data collected concerning the students’ perceptions of the local peer-group world in which they lived whilst at school, the study also found that students shared a remarkably consistent perception of the unofficial rules and values which shaped their conduct and character within the confines of their local social world. The norms and principles which govern the students’ day-to-day social relations and presentation of character have been described terms of a collection of unwritten rules which the researcher has called *The Code*. *The Code’s* specific norms and values are not known by boys when they enter the school, but they are quickly learned, and thereafter seem to be universally assumed and followed throughout a student’s school career. *The Code’s* norms and values may be seen reflected in the distinctive moral lexicon of evaluative terms used within the school, as well as permeating the complex meanings attached to a student’s involvement with, and competence at “sport”. *The Code’s* principal features are summarised below. With regard to its potential influence on individual students’ senses of their unique personal identities, however, despite the consistency and obvious influential power of *The Code’s* unofficial norms and values (and despite pressures from the school’s official rules and values), neither set of constraints appeared to influence significantly the sense of self which the students presented in their *autobiographies*.

The study has also lead the researcher, tentatively, to a number of other conclusions, each of which has been outlined earlier in the text. Some of the most important of these conclusions are briefly summarised below.
The unity of personal identity

Although all the autobiographies convey a sense of personal unity, in one or two cases, the sense of unity is not well developed. The data suggest that a strong sense of narrative unity is statistically more highly associated with the older age cohort of students, though a strong sense of unity is displayed by very many of the younger participants, which suggests that the development of a unified sense of self may be, as Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966, 1967, 1980) and McAdams (1985, 1993), a developmentally-related phenomenon.

Different social selves

Although all the autobiographies give considerable attention to the depiction of their various earlier selves, they give relatively little attention to their different social selves. Thus, the students’ temporal selves (their various younger and older selves) are much more frequently depicted in their autobiographies than their various social selves, though the latter are freely acknowledged by students in their responses to the “follow-up interview” questions.

Students’ perception of a hierarchical spectrum of different social worlds

In describing the variety of social contexts in which they live their lives, most students recognise between four to seven distinct social worlds, ranging from being alone or being with just one or two close friends at one end of the spectrum, to being with “the lads” somewhere in the middle of the social spectrum, to being at a formal school occasion at the other more public end of the spectrum. Students acknowledge that they deport themselves differently in different social situations. From the data collected, it seems clear that different individuals feel most “themselves” in some social situations rather than others. In such preferred situations “the real me” (a phrase used by several students) emerges. For most, but not for all students, the social context within which the “real me” emerges is likely to be a situation when the student is with one or two close friends, or with family, or when alone.
It was clear from the data that, by the age of fifteen, most of the students who participated in the research recognised that they were able to present different social selves in different social contexts, and also that they each had their preferred social world (their “social centre of gravity”) in which they felt “most themselves”. These data lead the researcher to suppose that most students viewed their personal array of social worlds hierarchically, with some social contexts having greater personal importance than others. Each student’s array of social worlds might be conceived of as a series of nested concentric circles with family and close friends in the innermost circles and “the lads” and the formal world of the school in the outer circles.

According to temperament and personal preference, it seemed that different students felt “most themselves” in different social “circles”. Whilst some felt “most themselves” when with a large group of friends, the majority of students felt “most themselves” when in the company of a few close friends. The whole issue of how the students’ sense of personal identity relate to this spectrum of social contexts, and how these socially-constituted “multiple selves” are unified, is an area which needs considerably more investigation and clarification.

**Institutional and social influences on identity**

Neither the rules and values of the official “total institution”, nor those of the local peer-group world and its Code appear very much in the autobiographies, suggesting that, at least for most students, their own sense of identity, though affected by these things, is not decisively constituted by them. On the contrary, asked to select the most important events of their lives for inclusion in their life stories, most students selected personal experiences which featured family and close friends, and often included accounts of experiences where emotional learning seemed to have been a decisive factor. The unexpected emphasis on such emotional episodes in the autobiographies suggests that further research needs to be done to clarify the role of emotional learning as an important factor in the formation of the sense of self.

The striking exclusion of The Code from the autobiographies, as well as the relatively sparse references to either their communal peer world (even when these were
explicitly asked for in the research protocol), or the official public world of the school suggested that these peer-group and institutional features, though they may be a strong influence on the students’ communal social lives, were not a strong influence on their sense of personal identity. This surprising discovery suggested that Goffman’s account (1961, 1963) of the strong identity-forming effects of total institutions may need to be modified considerably. Goffman’s somewhat passive and socially determinist conception of the inmates of total institutions would seem, in the light of the data collected in the present study, to be excessively “oversocialised” (Wrong, 1961).

**Learning to be who you are; questioning the importance of school and “society”**

From the evidence of the autobiographies, it seems clear that the students construct their sense of themselves as a result of a variety of types of individual biographically-situated experiential learning, rather than as a result of more generic influences from “society”, “culture”, “discourse” or “language”. As has already been seen, not only do the autobiographies evince relatively little interest in the social world of the school, with The Code, peers and the Institution finding little place, but specific references to the wider ambient culture are also very sparse. The autobiographical material thus gives very little support to those types of theory that would attribute to broad generic social forces (such as “social conditioning”, “cultural influence”, or “discourse”) an important role in identity formation. From the evidence of the present study, identity formation would seem to be the most local and idiosyncratic of all “local knowledges”, and therefore, to be the least amenable to explication by generic social theories. This finding may have certain parallels with the surprising idiosyncracies and conservatism which Alheit’s biographical research (1995) has revealed.

The autobiographies are characteristically filled with detailed accounts of personal experiences which took place at particular times and places, with particular personal outcomes and conclusions. The experiential and biographically situated nature of the life stories would seem to confirm the fruitfulness of both Jarvis’ (1987, 1992, 1999) and Alheit’s (1995) accounts of biographically-situated and life-long experiential
learning as plausible and apposite ways of understanding the processes by which individuals learn to be who they are.

**The usefulness and plausibility of McAdams' work**

McAdams' life story model of identity proved to be a very useful concept around which to organise the present research. His research protocols also proved invaluable as a basis for developing the investigative tools used in the study. The analytical schema of narrative components (tone, character, key events, ideology etc) which he developed as a result of both theoretical reflection on the work of Erikson, and his own empirical studies, was found to be interesting and useful as a starting point for the present research, even if the results of the present study suggested a number of areas where his schema may need critical reflection and revision.

However, a number of features of McAdams' work seem to be particularly put into question by the results of the present study. First, he, along with Erikson, suggests that identity formation is a characteristic of “late adolescence and early adulthood”. The results of the present study suggest that the process of identity formation in adolescents may be already far advanced much earlier than he had supposed. Secondly, his schema omits *plot* as a basic narrative category. This seems puzzling, since emplotment is a universal feature of all the life stories collected for the present research. Thirdly, some of the specific features of his schema of narrative components, such as his suggestion that the achievement of *ideological setting* is a narrative feature developed during adolescence, or that *character* is developed in middle age, are not supported by the data collected for the purposes of the present study.

**The Code and school “honour moralities”**

As mentioned earlier, the data collected in the area of the study which examined the students’ perceptions of the *social* world in which they were living suggested that the norms and values which acted as important organising and regulating influences upon their communal life seemed to be constituted in the form of what Harré (1983), Pitt-
Rivers (1971) and Weston (1975) have described as an “honour morality”. This honour morality was not an “official” part of school life, yet the writ of its law seems to run universally through the school’s student body. It could be characterised as an implicit, undiscussed hierarchical code of rules which defined and prescribed both the character and conduct of those who lived under its sway. In Chapter 6, the honour morality’s main principles and rules were summarised as The Code, whose principal rules prescribed due deference to those higher in the hierarchy, as well as the maintenance of approved type of “character” on the part of the individual. The “honourable” character knew his place, was sociable, could “take a joke” and was sufficiently “sporty” and “masculine” to avoid social stigmatisation. Allowing for variations in rights and expectations which were dependent on the individual’s hierarchical status, The Code’s contents seemed to be remarkably uniform amongst different year groups, and its influence seemed universal within the school.

Culturally-given autobiographical genres

A number of scholars have proposed the existence of a variety of “autobiographical genres” which underlie or inform the efforts of individuals to construct their autobiographies. Denzin (1989) and Gergen (1993), for instance, have suggested that there is a generic “Western literary convention” which lays down a foundational template for all autobiographical writing. Against this view, other scholars such as Harré (1998) and Hammerle (1995) have argued for greater cultural differentiation, suggesting that there may be more local culture-dependent autobiographical forms. Against both of these views, the wide range of different types of autobiographical data collected during the course of the present study suggests a more complex and locally differentiated picture in which there may be a multitude of different autobiographical genres even within a very small sub-culture. Rather than merely imitating a culturally authoritative template, autobiographical writing, it is suggested, is determined by the particular local social purposes which motivate it.

The four forms of autobiographical writing collected during the course of the study (the research autobiographies, the Yearbook autobiographies, the UCAS personal statements and the sports tour brochures) each exhibited a characteristically distinctive
type of content, style, length and organisation. From the evidence collected, it is suggested that the different forms which these writings took depended neither on any generic "Western literary convention" (cf. Denzin, 1989; Gergen, 1993), nor on any single cultural template (Harré, 1998; Hammerle, 1995), but was dictated instead by the very specific local purposes for which the particular piece of autobiographical writing was produced. For instance, a student may write about himself to display academic credentials to a university admissions tutor, to present himself as "a bit of a lad" to his fellow school leavers, or to present himself as a competent sportsman to potential financial supporters of a school sporting tour.

It may also be the case that, if Bruner (1986, 1990) and others are correct in their arguments that there is a distinct "narrative mode" of cognition, then the common characteristics of narratives produced at many periods of history and in many lands may reflect not so much a "Western literary convention", but something which might be seen, in more Chomskyan (Chomsky, 1957, 1965) terms, as a universal "deep structure" of narrative which specific local circumstance may adapt and modify, but not abrogate. Though interesting, such a contention clearly lies far beyond the scope of the present study.

**Erikson’s account of adolescent identity formation**

The data collected during the course of the present study may also raise some interesting questions about specific features of Erikson’s (1968) account of adolescent identity formation. The view of both Erikson and McAdams, as was seen earlier, is that identity formation is a feature of "late adolescence or early adulthood" (McAdams, 1985:9). Of the fourteen and fifteen-year-olds who participated in the study, more than three-quarters produced coherent, intelligently selective and well-integrated life stories which attested to a well-developed sense of identity. This suggests that Erikson’s developmental timescale for identity formation may need to be re-considered. (The intellectual sophistication of these life stories amount to a considerable cognitive achievement, each demonstrating the considerable capacities of their creators to recall, reflect, select, evaluate, interpret and display accounts of
personal experiences may also have implications for Piaget’s schema of cognitive development.)

Erikson’s account of identity formation is frequently conceived of in somewhat passive terms, with the adolescent finding “a niche in some section of society, a niche which is firmly defined, and yet seems to be uniquely made for him” (Erikson, 1959:111, researcher’s italics). As the italicised elements of the quotation imply, for Erikson, identity formation is characterised as a process of “fitting in” and identifying with a set of pre-existing roles derived from the adult social world. Individual learnings and the influence of sub-cultures are given relatively little attention in this account. In contrast, the life stories collected during the study present an altogether more individual, more socially diverse and less passive picture of identity formation. For the students who wrote their autobiographies for the present study, identity formation seems to have very little to do with the adult social world and its pre-existing “niches”. Students appear to learn from their own personal experiences more than they adopt pre-given social roles (the latter are rarely mentioned in the life stories or discussions). The identity-defining episodes which the students choose to describe in their life stories characteristically involve close personal experiences shared with close friends, mentors, family and peers, rather than “society” and its “roles”.
Erikson’s account, therefore, may be seen as depicting the adolescent too passively, whilst his depiction of the adult social world is insufficiently differentiated.

Erikson’s (1968, 1985) claim, adopted by McAdams, that the acquisition of an “ideology” is a fundamental characteristic of adolescence, has already been questioned, but the data collected for the purposes of the present study also raise questions about a further aspect of Erikson’s account of the process of adolescent identity formation. In particular, it is suggested that Erikson’s concept of “moratorium” (developed extensively by Marcia, 1966, 1980) may need to be re-examined critically. For Erikson, “moratorium” is a time when adolescents temporarily disengage from their previous identifications, norms and values. After this temporary period of disengagement, during which the adolescent explores other norms and values, the adolescent refines their identity before returning to the adult world. This idea, particularly as developed by Marcia (1966, 1980), implies a bi-polar
disjunction between the worlds of childhood and adulthood. This simplistic disjuncture ignores not only the complex network of adolescent sub-cultures, but also the individual’s ongoing personal experiences in a whole variety of social contexts. Erikson’s and Marcia’s bi-polar disjunctive account of adolescent identity moratorium is not supported by the evidence of the present study, which depicts rich intermediate worlds of sub-culture and personal experience between “childhood” and “adulthood”, all of which provide the adolescent with opportunities for identification. It is suggested that, in particular, Marcia’s bi-polar schematisation ignores the facts; it is, in effect, an argument from a putative silence, a silence which is broken by the adolescent voices which speak in the present study.

PART 3: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

11.11 Possible practical implications of the present research for practice in schools

Although the primary focus of the present study has been upon the unique identities of the students who generously contributed their life stories, the study has also explored the students’ perceptions of their life within the confines of their particular boarding school. As such, the findings of the study, whatever they may indicate about the unities and uniquenesses of the life stories of the individual participants, have also illuminated their perceptions of certain aspects of the particular school environment in which the study was conducted. Some of the study’s discoveries and insights about the ways the students perceive their school environment may thus be of interest or practical value to those adult members of the school community who, in whatever capacity, are concerned with the welfare of the school’s students. For the benefit of those whose responsibility it is to manage the school, as well as for the contributions it might make to the continuing professional development of the school’s staff (whether teachers, housemaster, tutors or matrons), the findings of the present study may indicate particular areas of school life where reflection on current practice may be fruitful.
Three areas are singled out for particular consideration in this brief section. The first explores the implications of the existence and influence of *The Code* for school life. The second considers the claim, made by some recent commentators (for example Duffell, 2000; Bathurst, 2002a, 2002b), that boarding school education is frequently a traumatic and damaging experience, characterised by a variety of types of bullying and emotional deprivation. The third, and much more specific area which was suggested by some of the data collected, considers very briefly the experiences of a number of gay students in the school, and asks questions about how issues of sexuality and gender are handled within boarding school environments. Each of these three areas would merit a separate study to itself, requiring a much fuller degree of exposition and documentation than can be afforded within the limited scope of this concluding chapter. Nonetheless, despite its necessary brevity, the selection of these three issues at this stage may be sufficient to open up constructive dialogue between the worlds of academic research and school practice.

**Implications of the existence and influence of the unofficial “Code”**

*The Code* - the system of unofficial values, norms and rules which permeates the students’ world - impinges strongly but silently on many aspects of school life, and its influence would seem, from the evidence collected, widely influential. Students’ social relationships, their approach to academic work, as well as to sporting and leisure activities, all seem to be powerfully determined by *The Code*’s prescriptions. If it were not for research like the present study, or the canny intuitions of some experienced teachers, such potent influences on school life may remain outside the conscious knowledge and consideration of school staff. After all, many of the features of *The Code* are directed primarily to the regulation of the “private” lives of the students when they are beyond the ken of their teachers and other representatives of the school’s “official” public structures. As the study reported in Chapter 6, however, there were a number of areas in which *The Code*’s influence may have implications which went beyond the regulation of peer conduct alone within the students’ private world of peer relationships.
The first and most obvious of these areas lies in the direction of the school’s formal academic ethos. From the students’ writings, and from some of The Code’s specific rules, The Code is both powerful in its influence, and ambivalent in its attitude towards academic achievement. Although the autobiographies suggest that for more than a third of the students, getting into Bentham’s was seen as either a turning point or the highest point in their lives, The Code, in contrast, is clearer still that ostentatious academic commitment or effort is frowned upon. Whilst the official School Rules begin with the words:

Academic work must be your priority. You should aim, by wider reading and further enquiry, to do more than merely satisfy formal academic requirements.

The unofficial rules of The Code prescribe alternative standards which are more ambivalent about academic commitment:

Don’t be keen.
Don’t suck up to teachers.

Furthermore, the local moral lexicon stigmatises those who are seen as too well motivated academically as “nerds” and “geeks”, unless they are able to off-set this failing through the counter-balancing saving graces of being sociable, or good at sport. However, in its own ambivalent way, The Code does work in favour of a certain degree of academic commitment and success; it discourages, for instance, the giving of ostentatious cheek to teachers, and poor academic performance is stigmatised as being “thick”. Conversations with a number of students suggest that being perceived as “thick” by ones peers may be a greater incentive to academic study than the school’s official monthly grading system. For a school so firmly and publicly committed to academic excellence, it must give teachers and managers pause for thought that some of the students’ most potent sources of academic motivation are not - whatever the school authorities may think - controlled by the school’s academic staff.

Another area where The Code is influential is in the area of sporting activities. These, as was seen in Chapter 6, constituted not only a form of physical exercise and leisure-time activity, but were also a potential symbol of moral character and value. Sporting prowess was able to command the respect of peers, to offset the moral blemish of
academic industry, as well as to act as an important marker of social status, masculinity and sexual attractiveness. As a result, the award of an official school "colours" tie denoting sporting prowess may obtain for the wearer greater chances of success in the common room, classroom and bedroom. An awareness of this situation may influence the staff who make such awards.

A third area in which The Code may exert an important influence is in its commendation of emotional self-control and reserve to those who live by it. The Stoic "stiff upper lip", stereotypically seen as characteristic of the Public Schoolboy, still seemed to be enjoined on members of the research school by its Code. Although The Code enjoined students to "Be sociable" and to "Be yourself", it also commanded "Never have a break-down in public", "If you have strange interests, suppress them now", or "Stay calm and don’t react to anything that the older years say about you", rules which command the most rigorous emotional self-control. This raises issues about how helpful such a controlling atmosphere may be for the emotional development of adolescents.

Finally, The Code and its associated moral lexicon seem to encapsulate a very "traditional" and masculinist set of attitudes towards masculinity, girls and homosexuals. This area, which has particularly strong implications for female and gay students at the school, is developed later.

Is the experience of Boarding School education traumatic?

Duffell (2000) has made a strong and impassioned argument that the experience of boarding school education is frequently a traumatic one for many of those who are subjected to it, and he, along with others, has set up a "survivor’s helpline" to offer therapy and support to those who have, he claims, been damaged by it.

There are, no doubt, some very unpleasant residential schools in the country, and there will be many students who are upset, traumatised and damaged by their experiences at such places. From the data collected during the course of the present study, however, Bentham’s is not such a school. For the majority of students at the research school,
their experience of school life is a positive and happy one. As has already been mentioned, more than a third of the students describe their entry to the school as one of the high points of their lives. Almost all enjoy the genuine (albeit sometimes rather robust) friendliness of both peers and staff, and they appreciate, enjoy and take advantage of the school’s excellent facilities. The majority seem to perceive school life as a high-energy, sociable and jokey experience beside which home life, whatever its other compensations, seems rather quiet, boring and reclusive. Even some of those who have not always seen eye to eye with the school authorities during their school career express, at least retrospectively on their Yearbook page, their genuine appreciation of their time at school.

Although “telling tales” to teachers is commonly proscribed amongst most school-children, conversations with a wide range of students demonstrated, like their autobiographical writings, a considerable measure of openness and honesty. It was clear that, given the opportunity for private and confidential conversation - and even without it - students were characteristically very honest about school life. A small number of instances of bullying (in about a tenth of the sample of student autobiographies) are recorded in the autobiographies. The worst instances occurred at the students’ Prep schools, before the participants arrived at Bentham’s. This apparent pattern of Prep school bullying was reinforced anecdotally during the course of the research by further reports from students about unpleasant experiences at their previous schools. In one serious case, for instance, a boy described being imprisoned inside a duvet cover and then being kicked by the other people in his dormitory until his nose and arm were broken, and he was bleeding profusely. No such instances were discovered at Bentham’s, although there were a small number of cases of a much less serious nature, usually amounting to unkind name-calling and, in one instance, of physical intimidation (but not violence). These cases were discussed with students and a brief analysis of the evidence is offered below.

Goffman (1963, 1961) has suggested that there are three main categories of common social stigmatisation; “tribal” (ethnic, cultural and religious), “physical” (obesity, disfigurement etc) and “characterological” (sexuality or other deviancy). From the evidence collected during the course of the study, only the latter category furnished
instances which caused significant distress to their student recipients. Conversations with students about particular incidents which occurred during the course of the researcher’s placement at the school suggested that, leaving aside one case of apparently gratuitous and unprovoked unkindness, other instances fell into one of three categories:-

1. The “victim” had, unusually and unknowingly broken one of the unwritten rules of *The Code*, and was experiencing the consequences of social disapproval. The reactions of both sides seemed equally unreflective and un-premeditated.

2. The “victim”, who quite frequently broke some of *The Code*’s unwritten rules, seemed to display a more chronic lack of awareness and a lack of requisite *social skills* to adjust his behaviour accordingly. In two of the cases explored in some detail by the researcher, the unpopularity and stigmatisation was ameliorated when the “victim” began to learn the social skills and the “correct” rules of conduct. In this instance, he later achieved a measure of the admiration from his peers for his reputation as an academic *savant* about cricket, a successful participant in the house debating team, and a capacity for wild and uninhibited public disco-dancing.

3. The “victim” had sexual characteristics (of sexuality or gender) which were considered unacceptable by the predominant male population. This area, which concerns the treatment of gay students and some girl students, is returned to in the next section.

This schematic outline needs both further exposition and further research. The present section began with the question: *Is the experience of Boarding School education traumatic?* From the evidence collected, the question may be tentatively answered by the following four conclusions:-

1. The majority of students at the research school are, by their own admission, and in a large number of cases and contexts, happy and well adjusted. Their
experience of school life is, in the main, satisfying and enjoyable, and there is no evidence of serious bullying, and only a few instances of minor bullying. The three students who had experience of education in the Maintained sector said that life at Bentham’s was very significantly more friendly than their previous experiences elsewhere. The investigation of this latter claim, though interesting, is clearly beyond the scope of the present research.

2. There seems, however, to be a significant number of troubling cases of bullying, even of a very severe kind, which characteristically occur at some Prep schools.

3. Such instances of bullying as occur at Bentham’s usually occur for one of two types of reason; the “victim” unknowingly breaks one of The Code’s basic principles, and/or, persistently lacks the same level of social awareness and social skills possessed by his peers which might allow him to modify his behaviour in a more socially acceptable manner.

4. The most intense single collection of accounts of personal unhappiness from students at the school came from gay male students (and, in one or two cases, girls) who found themselves ostracised and stigmatised, apparently on the grounds of their sexuality or gender.

Further research and reflection might develop an integrated strategy on bullying that encouraged greater institutional awareness of some of the areas where the values of the institution itself, whether official or unofficial, could be more supportive of certain categories of student, particularly some of the gay students and girls. Where structural change in the institution was not practically possible, students who were stigmatised because of their social category, lack of social awareness or lack of social skills might be supported and assisted in the development of the insights and coping skills that would make their school life more agreeable and satisfying.
Issues of sexuality and gender

The previous section has already raised the issue of those gay male students, as well as some of the girls, who fell foul of the Code-permeated unofficial value system, a system which several of the gay students described as frankly “homophobic”. The researcher found himself the recipient of a number of moving and painful accounts of the difficulties which the gay students had experienced whilst they were students at the school. Indeed, as a group, the level of unhappiness, confusion and loneliness in this group of students was more acute and chronic than any other single group who came to the researcher’s attention. Most had been sufficiently unhappy and lonely to consider suicide at some stage or other, which might serve as a fairly objective indicator of the degree of distress and unhappiness experienced. In the view of the gay students, the institution as a whole, and their peers in particular, were markedly “homophobic”. Even if the number of students involved was small (though a large body of independent research commonly suggests that most populations could expect to include between five and ten percent of their number who were homosexual), the degree of distress was not only high but also chronic. According to a number of studies (Savin-Williams, 1998; Heron, 1983, 1995) unhappiness and stress concerning sexuality are statistically associated, particularly during adolescence, with both successful and unsuccessful suicide attempts. The seriousness of such distress invites careful consideration by any community which considers itself to be caring, which Bentham’s both does and is.

PART 4: FUTURE RESEARCH

11.12 Possible directions for future research

Although the present study has been designed to investigate a very limited, if complex area of concern, namely how far a group of adolescents at an English boarding school represent and construct their sense of themselves as unified and unique in their life stories, the study has raised a much greater range of issues than the researcher had
initially envisaged. Some of these issues might repay further investigation. Amongst these are:-

**Further investigation of aspects of the work of Erikson, Goffman, Marcia, McAdams, Denzin, Gergen and others**

Chapter 10, as well as previous sections of the present chapter, have raised a number of questions about the work of several eminent theorists whose ideas influenced and directed the earlier course of the present study. All of the issues raised in Chapter 10 require further empirical research and critical reflection to resolve the questions raised there. In this regard, aspects of McAdam’s narrative schema, Erikson’s account of adolescent identity development, Marcia’s account of the Eriksonian concept of “moratorium”, and Denzin’s and Gergen’s claims about the decisive formative influence of a “Western literary convention” governing autobiographical writing, might all repay further study.

Leaving aside the further exploration of the work of those eminent theorists which Chapter 10 and the present chapter’s summary of findings have outlined, in concluding this study, three narrower areas of possible investigation are selected as possibilities for further scrutiny, either because they extend the present study’s scope in more specialised ways, or because, during the conduct of the present study, the research has raised one or two areas where students’ quality of life and education at school is at stake. The three selected areas concern the integrity and unity of the students’ multiple social selves, the plight of gay students (and some girls) in the research institution, and the role of students’ emotional learning in their identity formation and general emotional development.

**Investigating students multiple social selves and how they integrate them**

The first of these issues is an academic issue concerned with the further investigation of the students’ multiple “social selves”. It would be interesting to consider the question: How far are students aware of their multiple “social selves”, and in what ways are they able to integrate and harmonise these into a unified sense of self? Of
the areas for further research outlined in the present section, this area of investigation is closest to the original principal research question. It will be recalled that, although the students’ life stories are rich in their accounts of their various temporal selves, the range of different “social selves” that appear in the autobiographies is very limited. Data already collected and presented in the present study attested to the fact that students were already articulately aware that they operated in a number of distinct social environments, and many recognised that they deported themselves differently in each. It would be interesting to investigate further how far these manifold “social selves” affected their sense of personal identity and integrity. Whilst the present study has produced a large body of data that attests to individuals’ multiplicity of temporal/historical selves (the aspect of identity that Erikson calls “continuity”), the study has not unearthed much autobiographical evidence of the other aspect of Erikson’s conception of identity, namely “sameness” (or the multiplicity and integration of an individual’s various social selves). It would be interesting to investigate this area further. It may be that McAdams’ (1985, 1993) intuition is correct; that the integration of a variety of social sub-identities is a developmental task that occurs only in middle age, and is thus not encountered in the life stories of adolescents because they have not yet reached the developmental stage at which the appropriate awareness and integration may take place.

This research topic might be essayed with greatest validity, but also greatest difficulty, by conducting a further longitudinal autobiographical study with a sample of the same students who participated in the present study when they reach middle age. More realistically, if an opportunity were to arise to re-visit the original research school for a period of time, it might be possible to design a study in which a sample of willing students were presented with brief biographical “pen portraits” of themselves written by an array of other people, one or two from each of their different social worlds. Confronted with these accounts of themselves by people from their spectrum of social worlds, the individuals’ comments on the disjunctures between the various accounts produced by others (such as the disjuncture between others’ perceptions of the subjects in different social settings, and the subjects’ own perceptions of themselves in the same social settings), might generate a rich and fascinating body of data for further analysis.
However, without both the opportunity to re-visit the original research school and the willing co-operation of a sample of the students, such a study would be impossible. Even given both opportunities, it would be fraught with practical and logistical difficulties, and would also require the most sensitive handling. However, only such a rigorous design could generate a sufficiently rich and theoretically appropriate body of data to begin to map the complex inter-relationships between the students’ various social selves.

**Improving the quality of school life for gay students**

The second issue for further investigation is motivated by a practical concern for the distress experienced by the group of gay students at the research school who entrusted the researcher with their stories and urged him to make use of them so that others might not have to suffer as they had suffered. An obvious question for further research in this area might be: *What are the characteristic experiences of gay students at the school, and how far might the school contribute positively to such students’ development?* Further research in this area might begin with the collection of further autobiographical data from this group of students, both at the research school, as well as at a number of other boarding schools, and, alongside it, an analysis of the individual, cultural and institutional factors which construct masculinity in such a way that raises difficulties for those (whether gay males or some females) who do not fit in with the dominant constructions of sexuality and gender.

The researcher’s placement in the research school has already generated a significant amount of data in the form of student autobiographies, discussions and researcher observations relevant to this issue, but which both space and relevance to the present study’s principal research question precluded from examination and discussion. *The Code’s* characteristic machismo, and the occurrence of the term “gay” as the single most popular term of abuse within the local moral lexicon would be obvious starting points for a further investigation into social and institutional manifestations of what a number of students called the school’s endemic “homophobia”. A disciplined analysis of such a body of data might enable the individual and social situation to be more
clearly understood, and, consequently, enable the researcher to suggest ways in which the predicament of these vulnerable students might be ameliorated.

**Emotional learning in schools**

A third area for further research and reflection concerns the place of *emotional learning* in the students' life stories, and the implications this may have for both the *construction* of identity and the practical *emotional education* of students. A number of recent works, both academic and popular (such as Wilson, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973 and Goleman, 1996) have drawn attention to the advantages of greater emotional awareness, articulacy and intelligence, and Goleman (1996), building on the work of Gardner (1983) and Savlovey and Mayer (1990), has argued persuasively for the intellectual coherence and practical utility of what he calls “emotional intelligence”.

It was striking that the adolescents who participated in the present study, who, in their communal lives with their peers shunned emotional openness, should not only be so *emotionally open* in their written autobiographies, but should also reveal that a high proportion of the most significant experiences and events which they selected for narration in their life stories concerned occasions of *emotional learning* which they saw as being of special significance in defining their identities. These facts, revealed as they were through the medium of the study's written autobiographies, raise a variety of important practical and theoretical questions for educators about how young people may best be supported in their *emotional learning*.

It might reasonably be hoped that a school environment should aim, at the very least, not to *hinder* a students' emotional development, and some might venture to hope that schools might even *encourage* the development of both emotional maturity and what Goleman (1996) has called “emotional intelligence”. Further research needs to be undertaken to explore ways in which schools could contribute more positively to their students' emotional development, and to the development of “emotional intelligence”. (At the time of writing, press and other media reports carried news of pilot schemes being tried out in a number of schools in which a variety of experimental forms of
emotional education, from meditation to journaling, were being incorporated into the
school curriculum.)

Several of the students who participated in the present study commented that they had
found the exercise of writing their autobiographies helpful in a number of ways; in
assisting them to understand themselves, in seeing the significance and meaning of
experiences they had not appreciated fully earlier, and in expediting the process of
coming to terms with previously painful past memories. Such experiences might
suggest that a more widespread use of autobiographical writing in schools may itself,
under the right circumstances, be emotionally educative.

Finally, however, beyond the issue of emotional learning in schools lies a more
fundamental issue about the place of emotion, both in the constitution of the self, as
well as in the whole area of learning itself. The traditional psychologies associated
with both Western and Eastern spiritual traditions (and from which the present voyage
of discovery originally set out) have long argued that, for good or ill (frequently a
mixture of both) human lives are constituted and directed by the quality, intensity and
objects of our emotional attachments. Claxton (1984, 1994), Ornstein (1986a, 1986b,
1995) and Goleman (1996) have all acknowledged the value of these older spiritual
traditions for their insights into the place of emotion in human cognition and identity.
The mainstream of contemporary Western psychology, however, has been much
slower to acknowledge and to investigate fully the importance of emotion for
cognition and identity formation. It is therefore both interesting and encouraging to
the present researcher to see that Jarvis (for instance Jarvis, 2001a) is
characteristically in the vanguard of such explorations. The entire field of emotional
learning, both in itself, and insofar as it has an impact on traditional academic learning
in schools, seem ripe for a very wide range of both practical and theoretical research.
More fundamentally still, however, if the intuitions of Ornstein, Claxton and Goleman
and Jarvis are even partly correct, it may be the case that Ben’s question, What is it
that makes you, ‘you’ and me, ‘me’? needs to receive a fundamentally emotional type
of answer; I am the history of my loves and the child of my aspirations. As will be
recalled from the first chapter, this, as Williams (1979/1990, 1982) argues, was the
essence of Augustine’s position on personal identity.
Ironically, therefore, the researcher’s quest has come full circle. Having started out by exploring the interesting similarities and differences between the Buddha’s and Augustine’s accounts of the place of desire in the constitution of the self, he finds that, after a lengthy detour through analytical and hermeneutical philosophy, a survey of twentieth century psychological accounts of the constitution of the self, and, most recently through the present empirical autobiographical study of identity formation amongst a group of adolescents in an English boarding school, he has returned to those questions about the place of emotion in the constitution of identity from which he started out several years ago. Perhaps Kanfer (1982) was right in suggesting that there are, indeed, two sorts of philosophical question: “soluble questions that are trivial, and crucial questions that are insoluble.” If he is right, the researcher must take some consolation in Kanfer’s suggestion that the insolubility of the researcher’s questions at least testify to their importance.
EPILOGUE

AN END AND A BEGINNING

"I could tell you my adventures - beginning from this morning," said Alice a little timidly: "but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

"Explain all that," said the Mock Turtle. "No, no! The adventures first," said the Gryphon in an impatient tone; explanations take such a dreadful time."

(Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)

At the end of his autobiographical sequence of poems, Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot says that "to make an end is to make a beginning". At the conclusion of the present study, the time has also come to make both an end and a new beginning. In strictly academic terms, the study's "principal research question" has been both posed and answered, and so the advertised task of the research has been completed. However, it may be recalled that behind the formalities of the "principal research question" lay a larger, less formal question. Ben's question, from which the whole enterprise originally set out, asked: "What is it that makes you, 'you' and me, 'me'?" How does the present study measure up against that question?

In formulating the study's principal research question, Ben's query was interpreted as an enquiry into each person's sense of their own uniqueness and unity. Erikson's conception of "identity" was selected as a convenient and appropriate way of discussing those features. The Eriksonian conception of identity, particularly as re-formulated by McAdams, enabled the researcher to give an account of what - at least in their written autobiographies - made each person unified and unique. In that sense, therefore, the study provided an answer to Ben's question about what makes you, "you" and me, "me", and the study also concluded that, in all probability, the sentiment of the Andrews Sisters' song was right: "There'll never be another you".

The study's detailed Taxonomies which catalogue the many ways in which students' life stories were unified and differentiated constitute, in Aristotle's sense, a "poetics"
of personal identity by which the self (or at least a current version of it) is made. The study suggests that the “poetics” of personal identity is, as Augustine, McAdams and Ricoeur have concurred, narrative in form; “time becomes human time to the extent it is ordered after the manner of a narrative” (Ricoeur, 1984:3). In practice, each narrative version of the self is inevitably “an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience” (Ricoeur, 1992/1994:162), implying that the poetics of personal identity, like poetry itself, produces, in Marianne Moore’s marvellous phrase, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.”

However, it could be argued that Ben’s question raises issues about aspects of personal identity that go beyond the differentiating and unifying qualities of narratives. Perhaps Ben’s question also hints at more searching questions: What animates you? In relation to what desires and dreams is your identity organized and constituted? It may be recalled that such questions were central to the inquiries of the “Guru” and the “Saint” alluded to in the study’s Prologue; the constitutive place of desire and emotion were defining features in the contrasting accounts of personal identity offered by the Buddha and Augustine.

If one takes seriously the inescapably relational quality of human life - the fact that there is no untouched core of selfhood, no metaphysical soul or self that is prior to personal history and conversation, nothing prior to reciprocity - then the place of desire (what McAdams and McClelland might call “motivation”) in a person’s relationships with the “world” may be just as crucial as narrative in constituting a person’s identity. Identity may be constituted not simply by telling autobiographical stories, but by the quality and direction of a person’s attachments. (Rowan Williams, 1997, expresses both aspects of this polarity in a neat pun. He says “Selves relate”; they are constituted not only by the stories they tell, but also by the quality of the relationships they have with what transcends them.)

If Ben’s question is interpreted in this second sense, then the present study has had much less to say. So far, the study has explored some of the ways in which a group of students tell their unique life stories, but, as Freeman (1993) points out, living a life and telling stories about it are two different things. If the second strand present in
Ben’s question is followed, discovering what makes you, “you” and me, “me”, may, much more importantly, involve acknowledging and exploring the loves and desires which constitute and define each person. Drawn onwards by new loves and new hopes, the process of “relating” (narrating) our past is never completed since we are always in the process of “relating” (having relationships) with the world in new and ever-shifting ways which re-configure our identities as we do so. I am not only the history of my loves, but also the child of my aspirations and hopes.

This second aspect of Ben’s question - the defining affective and emotional aspects of personal identity - is less fully explored by the present research, an omission which might signal a new beginning. McAdams’ life story model of personal identity certainly incorporates the characteristic patterns of each author’s principal motivational and emotional attachments under the heading of narrative “theme”. It is also interesting that the students who participated in the study chose so frequently to recount personal experiences which featured strong emotional attachment or emotional learning. The data collected during the course of the present study suggest, therefore, that McAdams’ model of identity, like Ben’s question, require a fuller exploration of the place of a person’s loves and desires in the definition of their identity, and so the study’s end, just as Eliot suggested, also points to a new beginning.

If Virgil’s insight, “Trahit quemque sua voluptas” (Each is drawn by their own desires) is even partly correct, a person’s identity, like their treasure, will be where their heart is. Both may only be discovered in the idiosyncratic process of relating to those othernesses we love and treasure, an identity-defining process of discovery described in Mary Oliver’s (1992) poem, *Wild Geese*:-

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.....
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

“Let the soft animal of your body love what it loves”; beyond all narratives, Mary Oliver’s invitation may be another pathway to the ancient yet ever new discovery of that which both Augustine and the Andrews Sisters sang:

“There’ll never be another you”.

APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public Schools are unusual, even peculiar institutions for which there is a minimal academic literature of any sort. The more specific issue of adolescent identity within such institutions is hardly served at all. Such literature as exists is briefly reviewed here.

The dearth of literature about the personal lives of pupils in boarding schools is remarked by Duffell (2000), the author of the most recent analysis of the effect of boarding school education on pupils. In The Making of Them he says:-

Our next step is to go to the literature. Here we are in for a shock. One might think that because of the popularity of these schools, and the assumptions that to send one's child to one "is a conscious, considered decision" – there would be a good body of literature on the subject. Surprisingly, quite the reverse is true. There is plethora of pre-war novels and 'penny dreadfuls' which romanticise boarding school life. There is many a history of the alma mater written by an 'old boy'. There are accounts of the rise of the system itself, and of an interesting period in the last century when the boys began to get threateningly out of hand prior to the reforms of the famous headmaster, Matthew Arnold.....But there is very little serious criticism, and almost nothing on the psychology of such a system." (Duffell, 2000:20)

This appendix leaves aside the copious but questionably relevant corpus of autobiographies, biographies, novels and plays about the lives of specific (ex) Public School pupils, written either by themselves, or by others. It also leaves aside the body of boarding school fiction, a perennially popular "school" of writing which includes Jennings, Darbyshire and, most recently, Harry Potter amongst its older alumni.

The researcher made a point of reading a number of published autobiographies by several ex-pupils of the research school. For ethical reasons concerned with preserving the anonymity of the research school, these will not be discussed here, nor will they appear in the bibliography. These provided one or two interesting points of comparison with the autobiographical material produced by current students, but were mainly of historical interest.

Academic Literature relating to Public Schools

Very little of the already small amount of academic literature dealing with Public Schools relates to the present research. Of the historical literature, Newsome’s Godliness and Good Learning (1961) stands out for its careful and scholarly analysis of the changing Victorian values which were articulated in the public schools, ancient universities and the Church of England during their re-formation in the nineteenth century. Illustrative case studies of particular headmasters and pupils are presented, and the change in educational ideology from “godliness and good learning” (a phrase taken from the Collect of Thanksgiving for the Founder of Winchester College,
William of Wykeham) to “muscular Christianity.” More specific, but still of mainly historical interest, are the edited collections of reminiscences, such as Marlborough by the Boys (1963) and Charterhouse by the Boys (1964), as well as Crump’s Bedales Since the War (1936) and Cheetham and Parfit’s Eton Microcosm (1964). None of these address the specific interests of the present study.

Of the sociological literature, such literature that exists is rather old, and the focus is on the schools as social structures, rather than on the subjectivity of particular pupils. Into this category might fall such works as Kalton’s The Public Schools (1966), Lambert’s The State and Boarding Education (1966), Ogilvie’s The English Public School (1957), Weinberg’s The English Public Schools (1967) and, more insightfully, Wilson’s Public Schools and Private Practice (1962). Out of the limited literature, two books deserve a little more attention. The first of these is Wakeford’s The Cloistered Elite (1969). A sociologist at Brunel University at the time, Wakeford’s research included “a long period of personal participation in the life of a public boarding school”, during which he collected a variety of data. Some of this certainly included conversations and interviews with pupils about their perceptions of various aspects of school life. This is a serious study which includes the occasional tantalising glimpse into the personal world of pupils, but the focus of the study is mainly on his sociological analysis of the school as a structure, rather than on the personal lives of individuals within it. Nonetheless, both the organisation of his material (chapters titles include “The Schools as Organisations”, “Concomitants of Organisational Membership”, “Adaptation to the School”) as well as his analytical frameworks are directed towards what, in the book’s subtitle, he calls “A sociological analysis of the English Public Boarding School” (my italics).

The other important book, also by a sociologist, was published the year after Wakeham’s study. Lambert’s The Hothouse Society (1968) used a team of researchers to collect the words and speech of a very large numbers of boarders, both boys and girls. Once collected, these were sorted into a number of categories according to subject matter. The collection makes fascinating reading. Some of Lambert’s general reflections still hold true at the present research school, even if the specific nature and content of pupils’ interests are rather different:-

Wherever we went...we could not avoid the question of sex. To the adolescents of thirteen and over who form the vast majority of boarders, the development, control and fulfilment of their sexual energies is a matter of overriding personal importance and a subject which pervades the talk, the imagery, the humour and the activity of the communal underlife, as well as attracting the attention of the staff. (Lambert, 1968:149).

However, the kind of homosexual subculture which Lambert reports is not characteristic of the research school; in this matter, as in a number of other areas, times have changed. Despite the large and varied collection of pupil talk, Lambert’s study is, like Wakeham’s, nevertheless focussed primarily on offering a sociological picture of this distinctive type of school; it illustrates aspects of school life, not specifically the identities of particular students.
Finally, although not concerned with Public schools, Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* (1977), Beverly Skeggs' *The cultural production of 'Learning to Labour'* (1993), and Maitin Mac An Ghail's *The Making of Men* (1994) provided useful points of contrast and comparison with radically different types of school.
APPENDIX B

McADAMS' NARRATIVE COMPONENTS AND THEIR RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Erikson had suggested (1959) that there are eight psycho-social stages in each person's life-cycle. McAdams suggests that there are parallel stages through which a person's life story is developed; at each stage, distinctively different elements of the life story are added. For instance, using insights drawn from the researches of developmental psychologists such as Piaget (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) McAdams argues that different young children in the pre-operational stage of development do not yet have the cognitive skills to develop personal narratives for themselves; this skill is developed during the succeeding concrete operations stage. This has important implications for the person's development of their life story. Although the sense of identity - the sense that one is a separate, distinctive, unified and continuous self - only begins to be articulated during adolescence, important contributory elements are acquired much earlier. On the basis of his empirical studies (1985), McAdams theorises that each of the main stages of the Eriksonian life cycle contribute something distinctive to the developing life story. An outline of his scheme, already seen in Chapter 2, is set out below:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>NARRATIVE FEATURE</th>
<th>TYPES AND VARIANTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Tone</td>
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<td>Plot</td>
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<td>Early Childhood</td>
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<td>Mid-Late Childhood</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Agency</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Communion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Ideology of Justice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Ideology of Care</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Nuclear Episodes</td>
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<td>emphasizing the above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Agentic Imagoes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communal Imagoes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood</td>
<td>Ending</td>
<td>The Generativity Script</td>
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<tr>
<td>Later Adulthood</td>
<td>(Life Review)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A brief commentary on this outline is offered below to complete this critical overview of McAdams' simultaneously narrative and developmental account of identity formation:-
Many psychologists have argued that the first year of life has a profound effect on a person's subsequent development. (Bowlby, 1969, Erikson, 1963). The formation of secure attachment bonds in that first year will tend to furnish the growing infant with a hopeful and optimistic attitude to life. Less fortunate infants may have a first year characterised by frustration and disappointment which will lead to a more pessimistic attitude. These foundational early experiences will form the basis for the pervasive tone of the subsequent life story. They may also predispose the story-teller towards the adoption of a matching type of plot. Using Frye's (1957) classic plot typology, a hopeful and optimistic early tone may suggest a life story whose plot is that of either a comedy or romance, whereas a pessimistic early tone may invite tragic or ironic plot types.

During the nursery-school years of early childhood, children are still at the Piagetian cognitive stage of "pre-operational thought". Thinking at this stage is still fluid and magical, unrestrained by the constraints of logical or narrative coherence. Powerful images from life, fairy story, film or television may enter the child's world and be incorporated as part of their idiosyncratic semiological and imaginative vocabulary and later contribute images to the nascent life story.

The eight year old who has entered the Piagetian stage of concrete operational thinking can now place images into a simple narrative structure. The stories that they tell begin to develop in coherence and sophistication, and the children come to understand implicitly that narratives organise human intentions in time; in Bruner's phrase, they learn that "narratives deal with the vicissitudes of human intentions." (Bruner, 1986: 16). It is at this stage, therefore, that the child also develops the capacity to connect together their acquired images and nascent story-lines to represent intentions and motivations. McAdams calls such representations of intentions and motive, themes (1985, 1987, 1991, 1993. "Themes", he says, "are recurrent patterns of motivational content in stories." (McAdams, 1989: 165). The concrete operational child realises that stories tell us what characters are trying to do, what they want, and how they succeed or fail in attaining their aims. Drawing not only on his own researches, but also on some of Murray's (1943) work with the Thematic Apperception Test, McAdams suggests that motivations and intentions may be categorised into two distinctive classes. Adopting Bakan's (1966) terminology, McAdams distinguishes between two different categories of motivation, agency and communion. "Agency", says McAdams, "denotes themes of power, separation, mastery control and isolation, Communion denotes themes of intimacy, love, cooperation and merger." (McAdams, 1989: 165).

During adolescence, the Piagetian cognitive stage of formal operations is reached, and the person becomes capable or abstract, self-conscious and self-analytical thinking. These new capacities, coupled with the physical changes brought on by puberty and the social changes associated with new social roles and imminent adult responsibilities, prompt a critical re-assessment of all that had been previously accepted. It is at this stage that values and beliefs (Ideologies) are scrutinised and revised, and that the recurrent patterns of motivational preferences are narratively represented as "nuclear episodes".
Early adulthood, according to McAdams sees the refinement and integration of different and often conflicting aspects of the personality, particularly in clarifying and integrating different aspects of the person's character. The person may realise, as Walt Whitman did, that "I am large, I contain multitudes"; that there are, in effect different "sub-personalities" within each person. McAdams refers to these as Imagoes, and during this period, he argues, they will become more integrated as some of the conflicts are considered and worked through. Middle adulthood brings a sharper awareness of the approach of death, and induces the person to consider their achievements. Those who can face the prospect of their eventual end without immobilising despair may live the remainder of their lives according to what McAdams calls a Generativity Script, in which they decide to contribute what they can to the social and physical world which will eventually survive them.

McAdams' theory thus combines a chronological developmental scheme with a suggestion that the constituent narrative components of a life story are also built up in parallel developmental ways. This brief outline fails to do justice to the richness of McAdams' scheme, but it does, at least, indicate the general shape of his theory. The principal elements which, McAdams argues, constitute the life-story narrative (plot, tone, character, scene, setting) form the basis for the principal analytical tools used later in the present research, and are discussed in the light of the study's findings.
APPENDIX C

TWO ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF UNIQUE IDENTITY:

A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF McADAMS’ NARRATIVE AND McCRAE & COSTA’S “BIG FIVE” MODELS

The model of identity adopted for the purposes of the present research is based on the idea that identity is to be conceived of as a biographical narrative, or, in McAdams’ phrase (1989:161), that “Identity is a life story”. It has also been argued that this narrative model of identity can also offer plausible accounts of personal uniqueness and unity. However, over the last twenty years or so, a quite different type of model has been hailed as a valid and reliable tool for representing individual human uniqueness, even if not unity. This model is the “five-factor” or “Big Five” model of personality associated with McCrae and Costa (1984, 1985, 1987), McCrae (1989) and others. In this Appendix, the two models are compared and assessed critically. The choice of a narrative model of identity is then defended.

Although “trait” theories of personality have had a long history, and were for many years unpopular amongst the mainstream of personality psychologists (Christie and Lindauer, 1963; Edwards, 1957: Argyle and Little, 1972: Mischel, 1968; Mischel and Peake, 1982), the development of the “five-factor” trait model has revived with considerable vigour the flagging fortunes of the trait-based approach to the description and understanding of personal identity. Even Harré, in his volume devoted to his own quite different “matrix” and narrative models of unique identity, concedes to such theories the capacity to encapsulate personal uniqueness:-

Uniqueness can be expressed in the concepts of the recently revived trait theory, in that any individual could have a unique position in the ‘space’ defined by the Big Five dimensions of the current version of the theory. (Harré, 1998: 94)

Having asserted the present research’s preference for McAdams’ narrative model of identity in the first chapter, it behoves us now to justify this choice against its principal competitor.

The Five-factor model

In this Appendix, the origins and character of the five-factor model will be outlined. Next, the supporting evidence and claims made for it by its supporters will be summarised. Both the evidence and the claims will then be assessed critically. Finally, arguments will be produced which draw attention to a number of the theory’s limitations, both as a holistic theoretical model of personality, and also as a suitable conceptual tool for the present research.
Origins

The current five-factor model was first articulated in the pioneering work of Fiske (1949), Tupes and Christal (1961) and further reinforced by Norman (1963), although the idea that personality could be classified nomothetically according to a limited number of simple dimensions clearly has a much longer history. A variety of “trait” and “type”-based theories of personality have been proposed during the course of the twentieth century, in which an individual’s personality can be described using a limited number of particular characteristics or “traits”. Allport and Odbert (1936) were amongst the first theorists on the scene and produced a list of about 18,000 personality descriptors by searching an unabridged English dictionary. Using a number of complex steps, Cattell (1943) winnowed the list down to 171 terms, which he then used as the basis of an empirical study. These terms were then used by the subjects to rate other people they knew. The list of descriptors was then further reduced to between 35 to 40 clusters of related terms. These were used to construct ratings scales which, in their turn, were used by subjects to rate both themselves and others. Using factor analysis, Cattell (1947) further reduced these factors to 12, after which Fiske’s (1949) analysis advocated the even lower number of five factors.

The Five Factors

In its current form, the five factors are:- (I) Surgency (Extraversion), (II) Agreeableness (Warmth), (III) Conscientiousness (Will), (IV) Emotional Stability (Neuroticism) and (V) Culture (Intellectance, Openness to experience). The theory suggests that each person can be assessed by themselves or by others and allocated a particular score on each of these five separate scales. It is argued that the resultant profile will be distinctive, and that, therefore the individual’s portfolio of scores on the five factor scales can represent that individual’s uniqueness.

Supporting Empirical Evidence

It is argued by its supporters that traits not only exist, but also endure across time and situations, can be measured validly and reliably, and that these measurements of individual differences have considerable predictive power. These claims are supported by a variety of specific empirical studies (Buss, A.H., 1989; Carson, 1989; Conley, 1985; Costa and McCrae, 1988; Epstein, 1984; Hampson, 1988; Hogan, 1987; Kenrick and Funder, 1988; Rushton, 1990; Tellegen, 1985).

In addition to these specific studies, there are three main types of empirical evidence which are held to substantiate the validity of the theory as a whole. First, lexical analyses of dictionaries, such as that of Allport and Odbert (1936), seem to confirm that a five-factor model underlies most dictionaries. Secondly, meta-analyses of many specialised personality measures and of other personality theories seem to demonstrate that the same five factors may underlie these more sophisticated personality tools and theories. Among the specific evidence in this category we might consider McCrae’s research (1989) which uncovered the same five factors in a number of standard personality measures, and John’s (1989) similar achievement when analysing a number of radically different personality theories. Thirdly, it has been claimed that the five factors can be discovered in at least six other natural languages. So far, cross-
cultural studies have included English, German, Japanese, Chinese, modern Hebrew and Tagalog (Filipino).

**Supporting Theoretical Claims**

The strength of empirical support for the five-factor model suggests that people do indeed consistently describe themselves and each other in accordance with five fundamental dimensions. To many commentators, this evidence, cumulatively, is very persuasive, and many personality psychologists believe that the five-factor theory, or some future refinement of it, could and should provide a kind of "grand unified theory" to unify the disparate field of personality research. Briggs (1989) argues that the five-factor model represents a major advance in personality theory, and offers additional advantages. First, it provides a compendious and coherent conceptual space for organising and unifying the otherwise confused discipline of personality studies (i.e. it offers a kind of 'grand unified theory'). Secondly, it provides a compelling framework for designing further personality measures. Thirdly, it "should merit special attention in the continuing search for the mechanisms underlying individual differences in the personality." (Briggs, 1989:247)

**Critique of Empirical Evidence**

The three main types of empirical evidence offered in support of the five-factor theory (the lexical research employing factor analysis of dictionaries, the meta-analysis of other personality measures and theories, and the cross-cultural claims) have all been criticised.

Let us take first the mathematically-processed lexical evidence. Factor-analytic studies of personality traits are subject to a number of well-known criticisms. Whilst factor analysis is a sophisticated mathematical tool, as McAdams argues, "a great deal of subjective and sometimes arbitrary decision-making goes into (a) the choice of items, (b) the choice of factor-analytic procedures and rotations, and (c) the labelling of obtained factors." (McAdams, 1992: 334). Further, as Revelle (1987) and Waller and Ben Porath (1987) have pointed out, no theoretical basis or explanation for why these five factors should be selected has yet been proposed or examined. Further, Goldberg (1981) has criticised the naive assumption which underlies the five-factor model, namely, that language systematically and adequately reflects social and psychological reality. As even staunch proponents of the model admit, such an unquestioned and deep faith in the transparent scientific rectitude of natural language seems peculiar. McCrae and Costa admit:–

No one would imagine that an analysis of common English terms for parts of the body would provide an adequate basis for the science of anatomy; why should personality be different? (McCrae and Costa, 1985:711)

The second category of evidence adduced in support of the theory is that meta-analyses of a variety of existing personality measures and theories reveals that a common five-factor model underlies them all. Although there is much impressive empirical evidence here (Costa and McCrae, 1988, McCrae, 1989), on closer inspection, some of these claims seem more contrived and strained than appears at
first sight. Superficial or inaccurate comparisons at both the verbal and conceptual levels can lead to a greater degree of apparent agreement between theorists than is actually the case. For instance, in constructing and comparing a number of personality measures, Jackson (in Costa and McCrae, 1988:259) conceded that the Personality Research Form, which purported to measure Murray's psychogenic "needs" is really a measure of "traits", and so misses Murray's fundamental meaning completely. In this way, the "Big Five" model is perhaps not quite the cover-all scheme first thought; unkindly, perhaps, it has sometimes been pictured by its detractors as Cinderella's ugly sister trying on ill-fitting shoes, all the while exclaiming; "It fits!"

Thirdly, the cross-cultural evidence has also been questioned. More recent studies have shown that although the five factors emerge clearly from an analysis of indigenous trait terms in both German (Angleitner and Ostendorf, 1989) and Filipino (Church and Kaitigbak, 1989), only two of the five factors emerge in a similar analysis of Chinese (Yang and Bond, 1993). There is clearly a need for more work in this area before the cross-cultural claims can be considered reliably substantiated.

*Critique of Conceptual Claims*

In contrast to the empirical arguments proposed by Briggs on behalf of the five-factor theory, McAdams (1992) also argues on theoretical grounds for a much more sceptical estimation of the five-factor model. Far from offering a "grand unified theory" under whose capacious umbrella the whole field of personality psychology might be subsumed, McAdams argues that the five-factor theory is capable of doing justice to only a part of the field, and a peripheral part at that. Let us now consider a number of these arguments which question areas in which the adequacy of the five-factor model as an account of the uniqueness of personal identity.

First, the five-factor theory is unable to address what Maddi (1980) has called the "core" elements of personality such as needs and motivation. McClelland (1951, 1984), one of the most distinguished of personality psychologists, has argued that a comprehensive and precise description of personality would require the assessment of at least three different types of personality variable; stylistic traits, cognitive values and schemas, and dynamic motives and needs. The five-factor model ignores at least two of these three categories. According to McClelland's account, therefore, the five-factor model thus gives only a partial and superficial account of personal identity.

Secondly, the model has a very limited ability both to describe in adequate detail what is distinctive about particular people, as well as to predict specific behaviour. At best, the five-factor model makes bland and general statements about people. As John (1989) argues, the five-factor theory operates at a very general level of description; trait categories are descriptive terms of very high generality or "bandwidth". The corresponding proportionate cost of such very general descriptions is that they thereby sacrifice "fidelity" to specific details. For instance, the American Psychiatric Association publishes regularly its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, a thick volume which definitively describes in detail the main diagnostic features of the many possible types of psychiatric disorder. The contents of this compendious reference work on the variations in human emotional well-being (covering such conditions as reactive depression, endogenous depression, Alzheimer's disease, catatonic
schizophrenia, mild anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and spider phobias) would be represented by a single score on scale IV (Emotional Stability) in the five-factor model. Information of this high level of generality may only with difficulty achieve descriptions which aspire to "uniqueness".

Thirdly, the model fails to offer causal explanations about the origins of people's particular actions. Although the model is capable of making general predictions about generic tendencies and patterns of behaviour (Epstein, 1984, Moscowitz, 1988), it is not able to offer explanations or reasons for the predicted behaviour. To many psychologists, this seems a major omission.

Fourthly, the five-factor theory disregards the specific contextual and conditional nature of much human life and conduct. McCrae and Costa even decry the relevance of considering contextual factors as "the belief that individuals may be constantly reshaped by their experiences." (McCrae and Costa, 1984:176). Of course, people may be remarkably consistent in their general traits and dispositions. McAdams concedes that Extraversion is extraversion, whether it's among African-American men or German women, in 19th-century London, or among Australian aborigines last week." (McAdams, 1992:343).

Nonetheless, although the most general traits of a person's personality may be fairly stable, the behaviour and experience of individual people also differs enormously according to context; Attila the Hun, like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, may both have been caring parents at home, whilst also being ruthlessly efficient executives at work.

Fifthly, the five-factor model, however well validated and reliable, is unable to offer a theoretical framework or suggest a research programme for studying the structure and organisation of the personality, or for explaining the coherence and integration of the personality's different aspects. In this respect, the five-factor model seems particularly limited; personality, according to John, is seen simply as a hierarchy of individual difference terms (John, 1989). The person is simply a stable set of scores on an unconnected set of five generic trait scales. Such a profile is what Allport (1937) disparagingly called a "psychograph". Such a "psychograph", he argues, focusses on disembodied attributes rather than actual people, sees people in atomistic rather than holistic terms, and implies that individuals' personalities are nothing more than the sum of their trait-scale scores. Such a perspective seems parsimoniously minimalistic, even reductionistic. These concerns prompted Carlson (1971) to ask succinctly: "Where is the person in personality research?"

Sixthly, it may well be wondered whether the five-factor model and the narrative model of identity encapsulate or measure the same thing at all. McCrae and Costa (1985), staunch advocates of the five-factor model, admit that ratings of intelligence by those who know a particular person do not correlate highly with scores on intelligence tests. "Intelligence" from the standpoint of the observer is a different construct from the kind of "intelligence" which is measured by IQ tests. McAdams asks: "Might not the same thing be said with respect to personality?" (1992:349). It
may well be the case that the two models are measuring different things, or different aspects of the same thing. Bruner’s work investigating two distinct modes of cognition might suggest that each model is underpinned by a quite distinctive and separate form of cognition. This suggestion will be further discussed in the next section.

There is a seventh difficulty; the model relies too exclusively on simplistic terms in its descriptions of personal identity. The five-factor model of identity suffers from the effects of its methodological limitations. The model relies, crucially on obtaining ratings; respondents are, in a variety of ways, asked to rate particular traits of their own, or others’, personalities. In order to be reliable, ratings must be simple. The usual ways of doing this are to structure test questions so that “yes/no” or simple linear scaling answers are elicited. “I don’t know”, or “It depends”, or yet more complex and articulate responses cannot be accommodated within such simplistic ratings systems, so have to be omitted. As McAdams puts it laconically:-

Subjects and their testers play an oversimplifying and economizing game in which the ground rules are quite clear from the outset: We are here to get a general, superficial, and virtually nonconditional picture of your personality. (McAdams 1992:350).

The final difficulty, is, like the previous point, also methodologically generated. As Lamiell (1981) has pointed out in a different context, self- and peer-report trait scales implicitly force respondents to compare themselves, as an outsider would, with others. Asking someone to rate themselves with regard to a particular trait implicitly forces them to step outside themselves and compare themselves with other people. This comparative characteristic has enormous consequences for the resultant implicit model of identity. As Hogan (1987) points out, this means that the five-factor theory in effect asks the respondents to describe personality from the standpoint of the observer:-

We can now specify with some confidence the structure of the vocabulary that observers use to describe actors – put another way, we have a replicable model of the structure of the personality from the point of view of the observer." (Hogan, 1987:85).

This observer-centred perspective is, as we have argued earlier, quite distinct from a subject-centred perspective, and, as we argued in Chapter 1, it is the subject’s own view which is determinative for the person’s sense of identity. This was illustrated, it may be recalled, in the first chapter when we discussed the issue of identity definition in the case of a group of men who had sex with other men (Jagose, 1996). Despite their regular and often frequent sexual contacts with men which outside observers might label as “gay”, several of those interviewed did not identify themselves as “gay”; in their own eyes, they were “straight”. This last point might serve to alert us to the radical differences between observer-centered perspectives on identity, such as the five-factor model, and subject-centered perspectives like McAdams’ autobiographical narrative model of identity.

In summary, the five-factor model of personality provides a superficial (what Geertz might call “experience-distant”) rather than an intimate (or “experience-near”)
perspective on personal identity. It offers an observer-centered view rather than the subject's own perspective. It is also characterised by a nomothetic rather than an idiographic approach. McAdams, drawing on an insight of Goldberg's (1981) summarises the significance of the five-factor approach to describing individual persons:

The Big Five constitute a psychology about the observations of strangers. They encapsulate those most general and encompassing attributions ...that we might wish to know when we know virtually nothing else about a person. (McAdams, 1992:353)

He concludes that the five-factor model of personality is essentially a "psychology of the stranger". Although it may therefore be viewed as one possible model available for use in personality studies, it is too limited in scope, depth, contextual detail and subjective richness to serve as the integrative model of personality or identity for either the whole field of personality studies, or, indeed, the present research.

The Case for the Narrative Model of Unique Identity

The arguments advanced in the previous section preclude the adoption of the five-factor theory of personality as a model of unique identity for use in the present study. It remains now to examine the radically different narrative model of identity. In this section, a selection of the empirical studies and theories which argue for the widespread, if not universal occurrence of narrative modes of personal expression and understanding will be briefly discussed. The narrative model of identity will then be evaluated against the critical arguments addressed to the five-factor model in the previous section.

Evidence for the Narrative Model of Identity

The empirical evidence for the five-factor model, in the main, revels in its correlational and mathematically quantifiable measurements of validity and reliability. Such quantitative approaches make minimal use of the interpretive methodology which the construction and interpretation of any narrative requires. As we have already seen, there has been an explosion of academic interest in narrative as a foundational metaphor in the social sciences (Sarbin, 1986, 1983; Bruner, 1986, 1990), as well as convergent strands of research in a number of different disciplines which use narrative models of personal identity. McAdams (1993) offers one of the most sophisticated and highly developed of such models. The growing body of empirical evidence for the widespread, perhaps universal currency of narrative in human personal discourse is of recent origin, and is growing in scope and depth. The brief section that follows gives some examples of the early results of such empirical research into the use of narrative. Unlike the evidence for the five-factor model of identity, which is predominantly quantitative and nomothetic, the evidence for the prevalence of narrative forms of discourse and cognition usually takes a more naturalistic and observational form.

Thorne (1989), for instance, has conducted a number of studies in which she records and then analyses the way people talk about who they are. She shows that when
people talk about who they are, they do not usually speak in expressly dispositional terms. If they are asked to do so (for instance by a passing trait psychologist) most people are able to describe themselves in terms of the required traits and dispositions. They would not, she reports, usually do so. Instead, she argues, when people describe and discuss the complexly contingent nature of themselves, they normally do so in episodic and narrative forms (Thorne, 1989).

There are also several studies which demonstrate the pervasiveness of narratives in the lives of young children. In one of a number of striking studies, Miller (1982) investigated the conversations at home between mothers and their pre-school children in Baltimore. In that intimate environment, the flow of stories is “relentless”. On average, in every hour of recorded conversation there are 8.5 narratives, one every seven minutes, of which three-quarters are told by the mothers. Nelson’s study, published as Narratives from the Crib (1989) observes that young children characteristically talk to themselves in order to make sense of their everyday experience, and this is often in the form of narrative monologue. Still further studies, such as those collected by Jean Mandler (1984) demonstrate that experience that does not get structured narratively suffers loss in memory.

Studies such as these suggest that our personal and social existence is soaked in narrative forms of discourse, and may be so common that it is often simply taken for granted. There is a need for considerable further systematic empirical research into people’s use of narrative in many personal and social contexts, and this is now increasingly taking place. Within the fields of Interpretive Sociology, the Life Story movement, Discourse Analysis, Social Psychology and Personality Psychology there is a veritable explosion of studies which investigate personal narratives. A critical assessment of this huge, diverse and burgeoning field is beyond the scope of the present study.

**Critique of Narrative Models of Identity**

After outlining the nature of the five-factor model of personality, a number of criticisms were made of its adequacy when considered as a tool for understanding the identities of particular persons. In this section, we shall subject the kind of narrative model of identity which McAdams (1993) proposes, to parallel scrutiny. Would such a narrative model of identity be better able to withstand the criticisms previously offered? To this question we now turn.

The first criticism levelled at the five-factor model was that it was unable to address what Maddi (1980) has called the “core” elements of personality such as needs and motivation. The narrative model of personality suffers no such difficulty. Bruner (1986: 16) argues that “Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions.”; needs and motivations are amongst the primary ingredients of a story, and narratives are often structured around the motives and needs of its protagonists. McClelland (1951, 1984), as we saw earlier, argues that a comprehensive and precise description of personality would require the assessment of at least three different types of personality variable; stylistic traits, cognitive values and schemas, and dynamic motives and needs. A story is capable of encapsulating all of these things, from the
most superficial stylistic traits of appearance to the deepest and most hidden motivations, as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* demonstrates.

Secondly, whereas the five-factor model had a very limited ability to describe in adequate detail what is distinctive about particular people, the narrative approach is capable of expansion towards an almost unlimited degree of detail. To continue the example from the previous point, Shakespeare’s narrative supplies us with a wealth of detailed information about the state of Hamlet’s mind and heart as he confronts the murder of his father, the espousal of his mother to his father’s murderer, and his ambivalent love for Ophelia. Although we may still be as uncertain as he is about his exact feelings or state of mind, we know more from reading the narrative than we would from being told his score on scale IV (Affect, Emotional Stability) of the five-factor model. Narratives supply us with more detailed descriptions about people, and may thereby improve, at least slightly, our chances of making reliable predictions about them.

Thirdly, whereas the five-factor model fails to offer causal explanations about the origins of people’s particular actions, the narratives people construct about their lives are awash with a wide variety of explanations, and explanations of at least two distinct types. The first and most obvious way in which actions are rendered comprehensible is by explaining the immediate history and context which lead up to the action in question, and by articulating the dominant motivations of the actors. Narratives are ideally placed to provide such explanations. Denzin (1989) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) have pointed out that narratives may also serve an additional array of more rhetorical functions which a biographical narrative may serve; a subject’s narrative may furnish evidence of a variety of types of explanations, reasons, self-justifications and excuses. All of these types of explanation can be seen in autobiographical narratives, as narrators seek to make their stories coherent and plausible to themselves and others.

Fourthly, a narrative description of a person’s life, or constituent episode within it, is characteristically rich in specific contextual and conditional detail; in just this respect, Harré and Secord argue similarly that “interpretation of personal reports needs to be done within a social context”. (Harré and Secord, 1972:38). Time, place and social circumstance are indispensable to understanding adequately a person’s actions and character. Narratives characteristically attend to such considerations, and are especially good at encapsulating the historical dimension of human experience, without which it is often difficult to make sense of a life. Gusdorf (1980) argues:-

An examination of consciousness limited to the present moment will give me only a fragmentary cutting from my personal being...In recounting my history I take the longest path, but this path that goes round my life leads me the more surely from me to myself. The recapitulation of ages of existence, of landscapes and encounters, obliges me to situate what I am in the perspective of what I have been. (Gusdorf, 1980, in Freeman, 1993: 29)

Developments in the social sciences over the last forty years have demonstrated again and again the importance of wider social contextual factors for the constitution and comprehension of human meanings. Whether it be “local knowledges” (Geertz, 1983),
or Bruner's "transactional contextualism" (Bruner, 1990:105) or Denzin's assertion of the "cultural writing practices" (1989:26) which he believes constrain all writing about lives, the importance of the particular context and conditions of people's lives is inescapable. If this is so, then biographical narratives are better placed to supply the contextual details which frame the episodes of particular lives better than almost any other medium. Moreover, an autobiographical narrative may also discuss not only the life narrated, but also the process of the narration itself. Augustine (1992), Sartre (1964, 1981) and Keller (1988) famously do this.

Fifthly, the five-factor model experienced considerable difficulties in offering a theoretical framework for theorising the structure and organisation of the personality, or for explaining the coherence and integration of the personality's different aspects. The narrative model, on the other hand, has no such difficulties. McAdams (1987, 1989, 1993) has proposed that people's autobiographical narratives provide very revealing insights about the structure and organisation of their personality. Since the structure of a person's identity is the structure of their life story, such insights, he argues, can be independently confirmed through the use of sophisticated psychometric tests such as the Thematic Apperception Test (Morgan and Murray, 1935; Murray, 1943). Bruner has argued for a very strong correspondence between lives as lived, and lives as told; "Lives are lived according to the same conventions in accordance with which lives are told." (Bruner, 1991).

Sixthly, whereas the five-factor model was accused of relying exclusively on simplistic terms in its descriptions of personal identity, the narrative mode of personal description suffers no such limitations. In his own anthropological work, Geertz (1973:19) distinguishes between what he calls "thick descriptions" and "thin descriptions". The former are descriptions which describe fully the context of an experience, including the intentions, meanings and circumstances that originally organised the experience, whereas the latter merely report facts independent of intentions and circumstances. Narrative approaches to the description of personal identity are clearly much closer to Geertz' "thick descriptions", and thereby easily escape the charge of being simplistic.

Finally, whereas the five-factor theory describes personality from the standpoint of the observer, autobiographical narrative, and the model of identity built upon it give a subject-centred perspective. The narrator of an autobiography offers the subject's own view – or one of the subject's many possible views of how they currently view their world, their experiences and themselves. Schutz (1964) argued strongly for the scientific importance of this perspective for the social sciences:-

The safe-guarding of the subjective point of view is the only but sufficient guarantee that the world of social reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer. (Schutz, 1964:8).
APPENDIX D

HARRÉ’S “STANDARD MODEL” AND ITS ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL
UNITY AND IDENTITY

The work of Rom Harré clarifies and develops several areas of Mead’s account of the social formation of the self. There are five main aspects of Harré’s work which, particularly in the earlier stages of the present study, were considered carefully for their possible usefulness as a conceptual framework.

The first aspect concerns Harré’s account of the social formation of what he calls “personal being”. His earlier work, such as Personal Being, 1983, has many affinities with Mead’s work, even if the style and terminology are different. In the course of a trilogy of works on the social formation of the person (1979, 1983 and 1991) Harré proposes an analytical framework for considering the processes involved in the construction of “personal being” which is more rigorously schematized than that offered by Mead. Harré’s framework of four “quadrants” (1983) provides an analytical grid for describing the constituent processes of ‘publication’, ‘symbiosis’, ‘appropriation’ and ‘transformation’ involved in personal psychology. This grid is summarized in the table on the following page.
An Analytical Space for Personal Psychology

Quadrant 4:
With a more idiosyncratic and unique personal identity now already formed, the individual moves from his private world towards engagement with the public and social world of other people. His words and actions, now part of the public world, may act as a model, resource or influence which other people may use in the construction of their own identities. The movement from Quadrant 3 to Quadrant 4 might be called “Publication”, and if the individual’s public contributions become a part of the social fabric, “Conventionalisation”.

Quadrant 3:
The linguistic and social resources acquired in the social world and previously incorporated into the personal psychology of the individual are now inflected and transformed into something more idiosyncratic and distinctively personal and unique. Harré calls the movement from Quadrant 2 to Quadrant 3 “Transformation”,

Quadrant 2:
In the movement towards this more private quadrant, the individual takes language and other social skills (such as how to describe things, how to praise or blame, how to apologise) and digests these. They become the resources out of which the individual will build a more distinctively personal version of these resources. The movement from Quadrant 1 to Quadrant 2 might be called “ Appropriation”.

Quadrant 1:
This is where the formation of personal psychology begins. Open public discourse with other members of the social group. In this world of social conversation, language and other social resources are acquired through modeling, imitation, and “psychological symbiosis”.

Individual

Social/Collective

Quadrant

Public

Private

Not only does this scheme have affinities with Mead’s analysis of the social formation of the self, but it also makes the process of self-formation more explicit. Most interestingly for the purposes of the present research, Personal Being develops in more detail an account of how personal uniqueness is constructed out of the self’s socially acquired resources. The final chapter of Personal Being (“Identity projects”), builds upon the principal Median sources of personal identity, social roles and the reflections and interpretations of others, and then goes on to suggest that there are two additional ways in which the socially acquired resources may be inflected with personal meanings so as to produce socially comprehensible personal uniqueness. Harré argues that the personal use of metaphor and the attribution of meaning to the self by those other than the self, are the two principal means for accomplishing this task. (1983:282).

The second aspect of his work which relates to the present research is his analysis of the principal concepts concerning personal identity. He argues that there has been
considerable philosophical confusion about the choice and meanings of vocabulary for discussing personal being.

We do need a word for persons as seen by themselves. The word in use for this job is “self”, in reflexive pronouns such as “myself”. (Harré 1998 : 74)

There is, of course, a considerable philosophical literature within English-speaking philosophy which discusses what are usually referred to as “problems of Personal Identity”; the work of Strawson (1959), Hampshire (1959), Swinburne (1974) and, more recently, Parfit (1986) have been prominent. Detailed discussion of such works is beyond the scope of this review; Harré argues that this philosophical debate is of only limited use for the psychologist wishing to study the sense of self which subjects have of themselves, because the term “identity”

“...has drifted right across the semantic landscape to come to mean more or less its opposite. Someone’s “identity” in much contemporary writing, is not their singularity as a unique person but the group, class or type to which they belong.”(Harré 1998, 6)

In particular Harré comments on the equivocation in the use of “self” to mean sometimes “singularity of point of view” (roughly equivalent to Mead’s “I”) and at other times “totality of personal attributes” (roughly equivalent to Mead’s “me”). In The Singular Self (1998 : 68ff) he provides a detailed discussion of examples drawn from the recent literature of psychology, showing how writers slip and slide between one meaning and the other. He argues that the result is not only confusing, but also an impediment to further research.

To expedite both matters, he offers his own analysis of the basic terms concerned with the subject’s sense of their own identity; “self” and “person”. He acknowledges the influence of Stern (1938) on his conceptual scheme. He calls the results of this analysis, “The Standard Model”.

**The “Standard Model”**

The four major concepts are as follows:-

**“Person”**

Persons, as Strawson has eloquently argued, are the basic particulars of the human world. (Harré 1998 : 72)

The person is the basic embodied particular who is individual, publicly identifiable, and around whom the human form of life revolves. The basic ontological realities upon which the discursive approach to psychology is based are just these persons with their natural capacities, powers and abilities, and the conversations which they have with each other. Together, persons construct the forms of life and language which are the origins of personality and personal psychology. There are no other primary inner “parts” or psychological mechanisms; just persons, their abilities and their conversations.
Persons are identified by other persons using the criteria of numerical and qualitative identity which are the commonplaces of the already-mentioned philosophical literature on "identity"; continuity of bodily existence and personality, supplemented in certain difficult cases by continuity of memory. Such criteria, being empirical and inferential are inappropriate (as well as unnecessary) for one's identification of oneself, whose criteria of identity are laid out severally in the three sub-categories of "self" below.

"Self 1"

This is the person's moment by moment awareness. Self 1 is constituted by the ongoing daily perceptions and consciousness which are experienced as centered in a point of view which is situated in the physical body. It is the sense of being "I", and because each person is embodied in a single physical body, the "point of view" which is Self 1 is also always singular. It is the sense of occupying one and only one standpoint from which both to perceive and act upon the world (which also includes one's own body). Neither amnesia nor florid pathologies of personality can remove this foundational sense of self. In discourse, this sense of self is manifested by the characteristic use of first person indexical grammar.

Self 2

This is the sum total of attributes of the person. It can include what Rogers (1951) and others have called the "self concept" i.e. all the things that the person believes about themselves, (including their beliefs about what a "self" is), the things they aspire to, as well as narrative accounts of what their life-story has been in the past and might yet be in the future. This descriptive concept of oneself can vary at different stages of the life journey, and it can vary markedly according to social context and current events. Thus there can be many Self 2s. A person with amnesia or Korsakov's Syndrome (a condition where damage to certain brain centres destroys all or part of a patient's memories of the past) may lose all or part of their Self 2s, but they retain Self 1. Patients with Multiple Personality Disorder may claim to have several Self 2s that occupy their body serially. Self 2 is manifested in discourse which consists mainly of descriptive self-attributions and stories.

Self 3

This is the sort of person we are taken to be by others. The person may intend to present himself socially in one particular way, but the projected image of self will not necessarily be read by others in the precise way the subject intended. The interpretation of Self 3 by others is subject to local conventions and norms. Each of us can have many Self 3s, since we can appear different to different people. Self 3 manifests itself in the speech and acts in which one acts as a person with a place in the local social and moral order. Goffman's work (particularly 1959, 1961, 1963 and 1969) has much to say about this "presentation" self.

Reflection on this conceptual scheme reveals it to be, in many ways, a development of Mead's simpler analysis of the "self" into the constituent components of "I" and "me". Harré's "Self 1" corresponds roughly to Mead's "I", whilst Harré's "Self 2"
corresponds to Mead’s “me”. The use of this conceptual scheme allows us to locate the focus of the present autobiographical research more precisely as an investigation into certain (narrative) aspects of students’ “Self 2s” (the autobiographies of individual students), understood against the local school sub-culture which offers a range of values, norms and person typologies through which one’s self-presentation (“Self 3”) is managed.

The self; unique, unified and singular

Thirdly, as we saw earlier, Harré is one of the few theorists to raise in an explicit form the issues of how thoroughly social beings achieve a sense of self which is unique, unified and singular. His analysis of the theoretical issues surrounding personal uniqueness have been of fundamental importance in formulating the research questions in the present study of autobiographies of adolescents in a residential Public School setting. Harré discusses and clarifies the meaning of these three central terms relating to personal uniqueness.

a) Singularity

To experience oneself as a “singularity” is to experience oneself as a single point of view and point of origin for actions, occupying one, and only one position in the physical world. Whatever the vagaries of their memory, an amnesiac could not lose this singularity.

“...each person is ...a singularity. By that I mean that everyone has a sense of themselves as occupying a point of view from which they perceive the world around them... as a singularity, a person has no attributes other than a position in space and time.” (Harré 1998, 8)

William James, at the turn of the century also saw this as the fundamental, and perhaps the only basis for selfhood. His account anticipates Harré’s in several respects:-

The individuated self, which I believe the only thing properly called self, is a part of the content of the world experienced. The world experienced (otherwise called the “field of consciousness”) comes at all times with the body at its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest. Where the body is, is “here”; when the body acts is “now”; what the body touches is “this”; all other things are “there”, “then”, and “that”....the body is the storm-center, the origin of coordinates...Everything circles round it and is experienced from its point of view. The word “I”, then, is primarily a noun of position, just like “this” and “here”... (James 1977: 187)

According to Harré, the sense of self is always singular for every human being, in all cultures. This, he argues, is because each human being has only one body.
b) Unity

Where must I be singular to pass as a normal person and where can I be multiple without threatening my standing as a proper human being? (Harre 1998 : 93)

Each of us, though we may only have one body and therefore one physical point of view, have a whole multiplicity of selves (Self 2s). We can assume radically different identities in different social situations, as Gergen’s ground-breaking research (1969, 1970) demonstrated. We can also change and evolve as our lives progress through time; the self at six and the self at sixty can be strikingly different. The impressions that others form of us add to this complex picture. A patient with Multiple Personality Disorder insists that they may have many selves; their sense of unity of self has been compromised. But for most people, however:

Finally there is unity; the lives, experiences, thoughts and memories of most people somehow hold together as just one person. (Harre 1998, 19)

For most people, however, there are various means by which the multiplicity of selves are stitched into one tapestry, and these are sufficient to maintain the thread of unity. The continuity of the embodied point of view, with one person for each body is an important means of unification. Another tool lies in the stories we tell; as McAdams says “…unity also lies in the stories I tell myself and others, my personal myths. We are the stories we tell.” (McAdams, 1993:3)

c) Uniqueness

Harre has a variety of ways of accounting for the uniqueness of persons. In some parts of his work (1983, 1998) suggests that uniqueness is constituted by the unique position which we occupy in a number of “arrays” or matrices, which include spatio-temporal location, social position and position in a local “moral order”. In other parts of his work (de Waele and Harre, 1979, and Harre, 1998) he suggests that uniqueness is encapsulated in the uniqueness of a person’s life story or unique collection of personal attributes. He also suggests that the former might incorporate the latter (1998).

To have a sense of one’s personal individuality is to have a sense of having a place or places in various manifolds, that is, systems of locations. (Harre 1994 : 103)

To have a sense of oneself as being unique is to have a sense of one’s location in several different arrays of material things, events and people. Harré’s account borrows the metaphor of plotting points on a graph, where a point’s particular location can be described by stating its coordinates on the graph’s axes. Harré extends this idea and proposes a multi-layered matrix for describing the unique position of each human being. He suggests that we have a location in at least four different “arrays”, physical, temporal, social and moral:-
1. Each of us has a place in space, a place in the physical world from which we perceive the world, and from which we also act upon it. In this way, our identity is connected to our body which has a unique location in space, a location not occupied by any other self.

2. Each of us is located at a particular point in time, having followed a particular trajectory through time (our particular personal past) and we also anticipate a continuing trajectory through time (our future).

3. Each of us has a place in a local social order - we have social roles and a place in the social hierarchy or "pecking order". The social hierarchy may be ordered by age, reputation, status, wealth or wisdom. We may also have varying degrees of power and influence over others.

4. Each of us also has a place in the local "moral order"; a system of evaluative norms, criteria, practices and ritual by which people are judged and assessed. Living within the moral order will entail moral duties and responsibilities according to our place in it, and we are subject to evaluation and judgement according to the local moral norms. The practices which characterise a local moral order may include ways of showing respect and deference, as well as ways of censuring people through abuse, insults, punishments and gossip. The moral order may also have institutions by which moral status can be changed, such as trial or apology.

In terms of this multi-level spatio-temporal/social/moral matrix, uniqueness is conferred through the individual occupying a unique position in the complex matrix. However, in addition to this unique position in a series of "arrays", Harré also presents alternative ways in which personal uniqueness can be conferred, and he tries to incorporate these into the matrix outlined above. These alternative indicators of uniqueness include, importantly, the person’s "self-concept" and their "autobiography".

Throughout our lives, he suggests (Harre, 1998:129), we accumulate collections of attributes, shifting and changing in complicated ways. These "attributes" may include not only personal qualities, but also the beliefs, attitudes, thoughts and feelings which are all part of what Rogers (1951, 1961) and others have called the "self-concept". Though we may share attributes with other human beings, the overall package of attributes is likely to be different from any other human being, and therefore guarantees our uniqueness.

Personal uniqueness, he argues (1998:135), can also be guaranteed is through our unique autobiography. Each and every human being is unique by virtue of their unique collection of attributes (the self concept), or in the temporal trajectory they follow, which can be narrated as a unique autobiographical story.

Finally, Harré offers a specific hypothesis which explains how the unique, unified and singular sense of self is produced discursively. He calls this the Indexical Hypothesis for the construction of the self.

The psycholinguistic thesis of the social construction of selfhood is simply that in acquiring the grammatical capacity to use the first person devices the
The Singular Self provides a sustained argument that the singularity, unity, and uniqueness (see below) which we characteristically ascribe to the "self", is largely the result of the use of indexical pronoun devices. In outline, Harré argues that because we are embodied beings whose perceptual organs are an integral part of that body, then our basic perceptions are also necessarily centered at the same physical location as our body, which occupies a uniquely different physical location from any other person's body. When we report on what we see, hear, and feel using the word "I", we thereby link the report of the perception to our present physical position. We also experience ourselves as the point of origin for the various actions which spring from the intentions and plans which, as discursively formed beings, we learn to make. By using the word "I" to own such actions and intentions, we also thereby bind the origin of our agency and responsibility to the same embodied location as our perceptions. With our perceptions and agency already bound to our bodily location by the use of "I", we can, by the simple extension of similar indexical procedures, link our unique autobiographies, as well as our social and moral commitments to the selfsame bodily location. Through this simple process of making "I"-type statements about my perceptions, plans, deeds, memories, hopes and social relationships, I own them as mine, and link them to the unique location which is my body. In this way a sense of self is built up which is unique, unified and singular, because all these attributes are tied by the indexical pronoun "I" to the singular location of our single physical body, and unique because no other being possesses the variety of spatio-temporal, social, moral and autobiographical attribute which "I" have. He summarises his position:-

In studying the use of first and second person pronouns, we are investigating the discursive production of selfhood.” (Harré 1994:104).

Critique of Harré's work on the self

Harré's account of the construction of selfhood is enormously rich, complex and detailed. He poses the question of personal uniqueness in pristine and exemplary form, he provides a clear and persuasive analysis of the central concept of personal identity, the "self", and he offers several accounts of personal uniqueness, unity and singularity. The breadth and depth of his many proposals is beyond the scope of this brief review, and only a very limited aspect of his work can be considered here. For all its strengths, Harré's work, though providing a starting point for the present research, is not adopted as an overall theoretical framework. There are five reasons for this.

First, his work offers, it would be argued, at least two separate accounts of personal uniqueness; one based on unique position in a fourfold spatio-temporal, social and moral matrix (Harré's "four arrays"), and another account of personal uniqueness which is based on a person's unique autobiography or attributes. Although he makes the attempt to integrate these two accounts by incorporating the latter into the former, the work of Ricoeur (1983, 1984, 1985, and especially 1992) offers an alternative analysis which incorporates the physically embodied person's spatio-temporal existence, perception and agency into a narrative framework (Ricoeur, 1992/1994). In
a number of ways, Ricoeur's account seems clearer and more satisfactory than Harré's analysis, and it will be discussed in the next chapter. Since the present research is more concerned with the autobiographies of adolescents, Ricoeur's approach is more congenial.

Secondly, Harré's fourfold matrix, although it certainly offers a way of representing personal uniqueness in a way that is unique, unified and singular, it does so in an impersonal observer-centered way, rather than in a subject-centered way. The scheme of "arrays" provides for an objective account of uniqueness (what Nagel, 1986, might characterize as "the view from nowhere"). In the present research, which seeks to examine the participant's own sense of themselves, and compare this with their social learnings, an objective descriptive matrix is less useful. Burkitt has made other criticisms of Harré's general approach, seeing it as too enthralled by a temptation to produce Kantian types of transcendental analytical frameworks, but detailed discussion of this claim is beyond the scope of this review.

Thirdly, since the primary focus of the present research lies, as stated above, in the exploration of the participants' own sense of themselves, then it is essential that the theoretical framework can do justice to the subjective meanings, personal interpretations, intentions, motivations and learnings of the school students. Using arguments derived from the work of Bruner and Ricoeur, it can be argued that the narrative autobiographical form is a more appropriate theoretical as well as methodological tool for these purposes.

Fourthly, Ricoeur argues (1994:40-55) that the indexical shifter "I" is too unstable on its own to be a carrier of personal identity and uniqueness. Like all indexicals or "shifters", the meaning and content of statements to which they are attached vary, often rapidly, according to specific context and speaker. The manifold statements made by an "I", he argues, can only achieve a greater degree of stability, continuity and coherence when the individual "I" statements are "anchored" to something which is not shifting. Ultimately, argues Ricoeur, the requisite stability, continuity and coherence are achieved when "I" is incorporated into the plot of a continuous autobiographical narrative. (Ricoeur, 1994:140-168).

Finally, Harré's account does not clarify what, for the individual concerned, the process of becoming a unique and unified individual involves. His earlier work uses four "quadrante" to describe, in Meadian fashion, the process of self-formation. This account, like Mead's, adopts a social rather than an individual perspective. Harré's later work, whilst it gives a very specific analysis of the function of the first person indexical pronoun in constructing the sense of self, the primary focus of the analysis is on the generic discursive conditions for the production of selfhood, and not on the concrete circumstances, contexts and experiences which might evoke the use of the appropriate indexicals. It will be argued later that from the individual's point of view, this process of self-formation can best be characterized as one of personal experiential learning, and for this reason, Jarvis' account is to be preferred.
APPENDIX E

GOFFMAN'S ACCOUNT OF IDENTITY WITHIN "TOTAL INSTITUTIONS"

The work of Erving Goffman has considerable importance for the present research, in particular, *Asylums* (1961) and *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). The former book is based on a three year study of patients in mental hospitals and other institutions that Goffman came to call 'total institutions'. The book was an attempt to demonstrate how the structure of the self is dependent on the social processes and institutions in which people live. In “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions”, one of the constituent essays in *Asylums*, he defines a “total institution” as “social arrangements which regulate, under one roof and according to one rational plan, all spheres of individuals’ lives – sleeping, eating, playing and working.” (1963:5-6). This general definition would serve as an accurate, if unflattering description of a boarding school. He also sees them as “forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self.” Although, as Wakeford (1969:42) points out, there are some differences (public school inmates are let out for the holidays), it is also true that, at the time he was writing, the average public schoolboy spent more time in his “total institution” than the average convicted criminal at Pentonville. (Morris and Morris, *Pentonville*, 1963).

Inmates, according to Goffman, are stripped of the social status and social supports which they had in the outside world through experiencing a series of “mortifications”, such as :-

- Role dispossession; the loss of your ability to choose your own multiple roles in different social situations, and receiving an enforced role by the institution.
- Programming and identity-trimming, through the loss of one’s previous identity, and being subjected to a variety of admission procedures and restrictions on personal liberty.
- Dispossession of name, property and other appurtenances used by the individual to maintain their individuality (their “identity kit”).
- Imposition of deferential or degrading postures, stances and rituals.
- Loss of privacy and enforced exposure to other people with little choice.
- Restricted access to usual methods of “saving face” in social situations.
- Restrictions on autonomy, self-determination and freedom of movement.

It would, at least to some degree, be possible to find examples of most of these categories of practice in the research school – a school, incidentally, which is seen by both teachers and many students as considerably more liberal than many.

Both in *Asylums*, and in the later *Stigma*, Goffman explores ways in which the “misfit” or “outsider" - the person who is unable or unwilling to conform to the prevailing group norms - can cope with the conflict between their own individual identity, and the identity offered to them by the institution. In *Stigma*, the whole of society is seen as a total institution, with its own “honour” system and values. A “stigma”, according to Goffman (1963), is something which is socially deeply discrediting. There are three types:-

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• "abominations of the body" – such as physical deformities, obesity etc.
• "blemishes of character" – such as dishonesty, homosexuality or weakness of will.
• "tribal stigma" - such as race, nation to religion.

The misfit or stigmatized person has acquired a "spoiled identity" which needs to be "managed". Goffman suggests a variety of possibilities, ranging from overt defiance to capitulation.

Goffman’s work has been criticized on a number of grounds. In particular, the "dramaturgical" model which underlies his analysis of many social situations (such as those discussed in Stigma, and in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life) has been seen as having limitations (Wilshire, 1982a, 1982b, and Burkitt, 1991). Whilst it may be useful on some occasions to see a person as if they were an actor playing a role, there are a number of important differences between actors playing roles and people in everyday life; for one thing, actors can easily divest themselves of their roles in a way that other people cannot. Even Goffman concedes this point: "...this attempt to press an analogy so far was in part rhetoric and a manoeuvre." (Goffman, 1969:224).

More seriously for any discussion of problems of identity, Goffman’s model might be seen as an extreme version of the tendency observed in many sociologists’ accounts of identity to reduce personal identity to social roles and norms. Such a conception is, in Wrong’s terms, in danger of “hollowing out” the person and making them merely a social mask, a social cipher. On the other hand, Harré finds Goffman’s style of social analysis entirely appropriate for the specific, and more limited task of discussion the social impressions which a self makes on others, and for articulating the local social norms and character typologies. (Harré, 1998:78).

These aspects of Goffman’s work provide a useful framework for analyzing some of the data about how students experience the official and unofficial constraints of the "total institution" in which they live for the majority of the year, and will be further discussed when we come to examine the specific methods used in the present study.
APPENDIX F

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The following Methodological Appendix includes copies of some of the protocols and exercises given to the students, and it also includes detailed explanatory material on the rationale and design of some of those instruments and analytical procedures whose fuller treatment was precluded for reasons of space in the main body of the thesis. The material included in this Appendix is listed below. The protocols used with students are reproduced in exactly the same form as they were issued to the participants:

1. **Protocol: “Writing your own autobiography”** (This was the guide given to students as a set of suggestions before they began to write their own autobiographies. It was emphasized that the suggestions given in the protocol were in no sense intended to be prescriptive, and that students were free to approach the task as they chose.)

2. **Protocol: “Follow-up Interview”** (This was the brief set of questions given to the study’s participants after they had completed their written autobiographies. It asked them to reflect generally on the changes, continuities and possible sources of their identity.)

3. **Motivational Theme Test** (Details of the origins and rationale of this exercise are discussed more fully than in the main body of the thesis.)

4. **Graphical Autobiography Exercise** (This is a copy of the one-page sheet given to students, based on the work of Gergen and Gergen, 1993a)

5. **Types of Supplementary Background Data Collected** (In addition to the biographical and ethnomethodological data collected, the researcher collected a large volume of data from a variety of other sources during his placement at the research school. The main types of data collected are listed in this section.)

6. **The “Reading Guide”** (Further details of the rationale and academic background of this analytical tool are described and discussed.)

7. **Pro forma for use with the “Reading Guide”** (The process of data analysis involved a re-iterative cycle of ten detailed “readings” of the data. Copies of this pro forma were used to record the researcher’s emerging observations and tentative conclusions.)
1. PROTOCOL: “WRITING YOUR OWN AUTOBIOGRAPHY”

People tell the story of their lives in all sorts of different ways. They select events and experiences that seem most important, interesting or meaningful for them.

**Working out the main “chapters” of your life**

To help you plan what you are going to write, you might begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book. Each part of your life composes a chapter in the book. Certainly the book is unfinished at this point, but it still probably already contains a few interesting and well-defined chapters. Please divide your life into its major chapters and briefly describe each chapter. You can have as many or as few chapters as you like, but I would suggest dividing it into at least two or three chapters, and at most seven or eight chapters. Give each chapter a name and describe the overall contents of each chapter.

**Key Events**

In an exercise like this, you won’t be writing a full length book, but it would be good to write in detail about a few selected important events. (detailed descriptions tend to more interesting for the reader than vague generalisations). Below is a varied list of events or experiences which are important to many people. Write about each of these. You can build these into your chapters, or you can write them as a separate section. Give each “Key Event” a title.

1. **A Peak Experience:** What is the highest point of your life story so far, the most wonderful moment so far?

2. **A Nadir Experience:** What is the lowest point in the life story - the worst moment in your life so far?

3. **A Turning Point:** Describe an incident or moment which, now you look back, was a turning point in your life when you underwent an important change in your understanding of yourself.

4. **Your Earliest Memory:** Write down one of your earliest memories, along with the setting, scene, characters, feelings and thoughts.

5. **An Important Childhood Memory:** Any memory of your earlier childhood that stands out as important today.

6. **Your best Experience at Bentham’s:** It need not be “legal” or academic! What made it so good?

7. **Your worst Experience at Bentham’s:** What happened? What made it so bad?

8. **Somebody who influenced you a lot:** It might be a relative or a friend. What are/were they like? What made them so special?
2. PROTOCOL: “FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Now you have written your autobiography, how would you answer the following questions:-

How have you changed since you were a child? How have you stayed the same?

Are you a different person when you are on your own/at home/at school/with close friends? In what ways? What makes you different from everyone else?

How has being at Bentham’s changed you? In what ways?

How important are bodily things, such as your appearance, bodily dimensions, sporting abilities etc to your sense of who you are?

What makes you different from everyone else?
3. MOTIVATIONAL THEME TEST

Theoretical background

As was seen in an earlier chapter which outlined McAdams’ work, McAdams proposes that lives, like the stories told about them, are organized by the principal motivations and purposes which animate them.

Motives help to organize our behaviour, providing energy and direction for various things we do. Motives help to shape our identities by emphasizing particular themes in the personal myth. But motives are not the same as themes. A motive exists within a person’s personality. It is an internal disposition that begins to take form in the elementary school years. A theme exists in the story. It is a cluster of narrative content having to do with what characters in the story recurrently want or intend. (McAdams, 1993: 73)

Drawing on the work of McClelland (1951, 1984), Freud (1900/1976, 1920/1955), Rank (1978), Angyal (1941) and Bakan (1966) McAdams further suggests that the motivational themes that direct people’s lives may be classified into two principal distinctive types of content. Borrowing Bakan’s (1966) he calls these two contrasting motivational dualities, agency and communion.

Within the agency theme, McAdams, like other theorists, distinguishes between the power motive as “a desire for feeling strong and having an impact on the world”, and the achievement motive, which is seen as “a desire for feeling competent and doing things better than others do them.” (McAdams, 1993: 282):

While everybody desires to assert and expand the self to one extent or another, certain individuals seem to be exceptionally strongly disposed toward power, autonomy, mastery and achievement. (McAdams, 1993: 282).

McAdams earlier work explored empirically the second major motivational cluster which Bakan called communion, and which McAdams calls intimacy. People for whom the communion theme predominates may exhibit a warm and friendly personal styles, and the value love, compassion and friendship ultimate virtues:

The intimacy motive is a recurrent preference or readiness for experiences of warm, close, and communicative exchange with others. (McAdams, 1985: 291)

These principal motivational themes, according to McAdams, serve to organize and unify any life story, and it is these two themes which the Motivational Theme Test is designed to explore.

Design of the Motivational Theme Test

In the design of his original study, McAdams administered the Thematic Apperception Test (Morgan and Murray, 1935; Murray, 1943). The Thematic Apperception Test was designed by Murray as a tool for identifying hidden unconscious and conscious motivations which Murray (and indeed McAdams) believed to be important well-
springs of personal identity. The TAT was designed as an instrument in which subjects were shown an ambiguous picture featuring a number of people. Respondents were then asked to imagine or invent an explanatory story which connected all the features of the picture. This interpretation was then coded so as to yield numerical scores on a variety of specific categories of motivation. For both Murray (1938) and McAdams (1985) the use of this test complemented their biographical explorations. In the context of the research school, however, it was felt that the TAT would be an inappropriate instrument to use. The participants, unlike McAdams’, were not studying psychology, and the use of the test, though interesting for the researcher, would contribute nothing to the students themselves. Its covert projective design also raised ethical problems in this context. In the research of Murray (1938) and McAdams (1985), the principal aim in using the TAT was to provide an alternative measure of participants’ dominant motivations through the use of their imaginations. The researcher therefore designed an imaginative exercise which might address the issue of dominant motivational themes in the participants’ lives. This exercise was undertaken by the students in the two autobiography groups.

It was hoped that the exercise would be stimulating and enjoyable for the students, and would also – though in a more open and overt way than Murray’s TAT – provide an additional indicator of dominant motivational themes which might furnish complementary or contrasting comparisons with the written autobiographies.

The exercise was preceded by a brief class discussion in which the researcher introduced an amusing poem by the poet Roger McGough (McGough, 1967: 81). The poem, At Lunchtime: A Story of Love, deals with one of the poet’s imaginative fantasies. He imagines everyone is told that the world is going to end at lunchtime. In these unusual conditions, many people throw off the usual constraints of social expectation and respectability and do things they had always been wanting to do. The poem finishes with the words:-

people pretended that the world was coming
to an end at lunchtime. It still hasn’t.
Although in a way it has.

Students were then asked to complete a piece of imaginative writing with the title, What would you do if you knew the world was going to end tomorrow? Using reasoning similar to that of Dr Samuel Johnson who opined, according to his biographer Boswell that:-

When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully. (Johnson, quoted in Boswell’s Life of Johnson, 19th. September, 1777)

It was theorized that such a situation would enable students to clarify what was currently most important to them. In the process of reflection, they may be able to articulate what their current major motivations were.
The students' responses to the stimulus-material provided by the poem were analysed by reading through their accounts carefully several times. Each student characteristically gave a list of things they would like to accomplish before the end of the world came. Each of these aspirations, wishes or plans were categorized according to Bakan's (1966) two-fold schema, so that each wish or plan was assigned to either the "agentic" or "communal" categories of Bakan's motivational schema. Definitions of the meanings of these two coding categories were taken from McAdams (1985). When each aspiration and plan had been assigned to one of the two categories, the number of instances for each category were counted. In most cases, students gave fairly clear indications about the rank ordering of their "end of the world" preferences, and these were also recorded. At the end of this analytical process, therefore, each student had acquired a simple "motivational profile" which recorded the number and proportion of aspirations which fell into each of the two motivational categories, as well as recording any rank order preferences they had expressed.

Coding the Motivational Theme Test

The students' responses to the stimulus-material provided by the poem were analysed by reading through their accounts carefully several times. Each student characteristically gave a list of things they would like to accomplish before the end of the world came. Each of these aspirations, wishes or plans were categorized according to Bakan's (1966) two-fold schema, so that each wish or plan was assigned to either the "agentic" or "communal" categories of Bakan's motivational schema. Definitions of the meanings of these two coding categories were taken from McAdams (1985). When each aspiration and plan had been assigned to one of the two categories, the number of instances for each category were counted. In most cases, students gave fairly clear indications about the rank ordering of their "end of the world" preferences, and these were also recorded. At the end of this analytical process, therefore, each student had acquired a simple "motivational profile" which recorded the number and proportion of aspirations which fell into each of the two motivational categories, as well as recording any rank order preferences they had expressed.
4. GRAPHICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY EXERCISE

A life story in a single line

Now that you have written your autobiography, here is another brief exercise to help you to reflect on the experience. In the space below I have drawn an empty graph. The vertical axis represents how happy you have been at different stages of your life so far, with absolute misery at the bottom and absolute ecstasy at the top. The dotted line half way up represents an average level of well-being: “nothing special one way or the other”. The horizontal axis represents the years of your life so far, and is marked off in ages.

Draw a line that represents how your life has progressed through your different experiences of happiness, sadness, achievement and frustration.
5. TYPES OF SUPPLEMENTARY BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTED

Informal conversations, interviews, video diaries and writings. Whilst any research needs careful planning, many valuable sources of data came along serendipitously. In all sorts of ways students sometimes volunteered information, or discussed issues that concerned them, or agreed to produce reflective pieces of writing or video diaries. The researcher accepted such opportunities when they presented themselves. The data were gathered in a variety of ways; conversations, discussions, the making of video diaries, autobiographical stories and notes. Because of their serendipitous and opportunistic nature, the data obtained through the variety of methods is difficult to categorise systematically. The material collected includes autobiographical writings, excuses, letters of resignation, video diaries of students who were thought eccentric by their peers, video diaries by successful school sportsmen, and even the words of a long song which was sung at a House’s Christmas Dinner, and which satirises every member of the house. The researcher found such data of considerable value in revealing aspects of identity formation and school life which might not otherwise have been available. All local “proper names” in the following list have been changed to protect the school’s anonymity.

The collection of documents relating to school life

In order to provide the researcher with a sufficiently well-informed understanding of the school context, the researcher collected a wide range of documents which provided information about the values, norms, beliefs and expectations that informed school life.

Examples might include:-

- The Blue Calendar and the School Rules
- The Red List
- The School Magazine, The Benthamite.
- “Page Three” – fortnightly student-produced magazine of reviews and gossip
- “School Discipline”; a report on a consultation exercise with students
- “Adolescent Problems”; research project conducted at the school by school psychology students.

The aim of this data collection was to provide the researcher with sufficient information to be able to make more sensitive and more finely socially-attuned interpretations of the primary research evidence.

Researcher's focused observational journal.

During the period of the study, the researcher kept a journal of his own observations. Both the official and the unofficial daily life of the school were considered within the remit of this journal. The students’ daily attendance at morning chapel and “Headmaster’s Assemblies” were examples of “official” public events which were observed and recorded, whilst informal conversations at the daily formal lunches which each house ate together frequently provided examples of a quite different aspect of school social life.
Categories for special attention included observation of:-

The whole School on formal public occasions e.g. daily Chapel or occasional Assemblies
Informal public behaviour
Informal private behaviour

House-based activities e.g. communal formal lunch; communal informal supper; the House during evening “prep” (a period of private study for doing “homework”)
Special House events e.g. Benefactors’ Christmas Dinner and House Match Finals.

The unwritten rules of appearance and conduct
The treatment of girls

Unofficial sex and gender norms
Attitudes to the body (body art, weight training etc)
6. THE "READING GUIDE"

The "Reading Guide" offers a structured way of reading autobiographical texts which is nonetheless properly "hermeneutical". The aim in devising the reading guide is to move away from more simplistic forms of "coding". Gilligan et al. (1990) argue that coding fits the person into a pre-existing set of categories, whilst "reading" implies a more open and hermeneutically engaged approach. To give structure and focus to the interpretive process, a modified form of Brown et al.'s "Reading Guide" (1987) is used. The scheme proposed by Brown et al. (1987) is based on McAdams' life-story model of identity, and is also discussed by Gilligan (1990) and her associates.

The exercise of directing my attention to the way the person speaks about herself is designed to highlight or amplify the terms in which she sees and presents herself. (Gilligan et al., 1990: 102)

The form of the "Reading Guide" offered by Gilligan et al. (1990) involves careful and detailed reading the story at least four times. Each time the story is read, the reader is looking out attentively for specific things. Each reading looks at a different aspect of the story. The four readings are described thus:-

The first time we read to get a sense of the story told by the narrator. Like a literary critic or psychoanalyst we look for clues to meaning in verbal patterns or psychic processes, recurrent words or images, central metaphors, emotional resonances, as well as shifts of meaning and inconsistencies... (Gilligan et al., 1990: 99)

The second reading examines the "self" that is present in the story, by which Gilligan means the characteristics of the narrator, the speaking voice and tone of the autobiographer, the "I". During this phase of interpretive reading, the focus of the reading is on both the narrating "voice" of the narrator, as well as the "character" the narrator casts themselves as.

In the third and fourth readings, Gilligan - whose exposition of the model occurs in the context of an analysis of the autobiographical accounts of moral conflicts of a group of adolescent girls - chooses to focus successively on "care" and "justice" themes within the accounts. These latter two "themes" (clusters of narrative content that represent motivational dispositions) correspond to the twofold categorization of motivation which McAdams has adopted from Bakan (1966) and McClelland, and which McAdams calls "communal" and "agentic".

Gilligan's idea of developing a guide for readers is adopted and adapted for the specific purposes of the present research. Gilligan proposes that formal notes are taken during each reading, and that these not only help to crystallize the interpretive processes of the researcher, but also serve to leave an audit trail of the disciplined process of interpretation.

To this end, separate and distinctive purpose-designed pro-forma documents were prepared as analytical tools to support the various readings in the earlier stages of...
analysis. These pro forma documents encourage a focused and attentive reading of the texts, and also provide an audit trail of the process of interpretation.

The general approach to analysis is therefore to read the autobiographies, looking for the patterns which, according to McAdams, are characteristic features of such life stories. The data is analysed using appropriate frameworks derived from the main elements of McAdams’ analysis of the narrative features of life stories; tone, plot, character, theme, setting and scene, as well as the contribution these elements make in producing the two key superordinate features of identity, uniqueness and unity, which McAdams calls, respectively, personal myth, and personal unity.

Like the analytical “reading guides of Brown et al. (1987), and Gilligan et al. (1990) is on which they are modeled, the Reading Guides used in this study pursue an interpretive approach to autobiographical texts which aims to remain respectfully hermeneutical, avoiding the objectifying tendency of traditional “coding” procedures.

7. PRO FORMA FOR USE WITH READING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Dramatis Personae</th>
<th>Tone/ Emotional charged</th>
<th>Imagery, metaphor, recurrent phrases</th>
<th>Narrator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earliest Memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important Childhood Memory</td>
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<td>Turning Point</td>
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<td>Peak Experience</td>
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<td>Nadir Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best Bentham’s Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worst Bentham’s Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somebody who Influenced you</td>
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