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MASTER THESIS – LITERATURE REVIEW: NARRATIVE INTERVENTIONS ABOUT MEANING AND IDENTITY

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Abstract

Introduction: Meaning and identity are relevant in everybody's lives and closely intertwined. In this review, meaning is defined as comprising the three dimensions coherence, purpose and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016). Identity is regarded as personal, relational and collective. Meaning and identity are well suited to be addressed in narrative interventions. This review examines narrative interventions regarding their structures and elements, methods, and aspects of meaning and identity with the aim to yield implications for the theory and practice of meaning and identity.

Method: The leading example for this selection of interventions is "The Wonderful Life Intervention" by Van de Goor (2017). To find interventions which share core aspects with this intervention, the four search engines PsychInfo, PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science were used (*n*=820 articles). Four further exclusion criteria were applied to create the final selection (*n*=18 articles).

Results: There are three clusters of first-order objectives (increase of well-being, symptom reduction, building of meaning/identity), and various clinical and non-clinical target groups who typically meet weekly. The interventions are embedded in postmodernism and constructivism and diverse practical contexts (e.g. somatic and mental health promotion, professional development, social work). There are three clusters of methods, based on content, form or activity, which are paired with a perspective on time (i.e. past, present, future). All considered aspects of meaning and identity are addressed in the interventions, yet no single intervention tackles all of them.

Discussion: New suggestions for the theory of meaning and identity are, first, that the salience of the different aspects of meaning vary according to the life phase (coherence after disruptive life events, purpose during life transitions), second, that the cognitive dimension of coherence might also be closely connected to emotions, and, third, that some connections within and between the constructs may be stronger than others (e.g. purpose and personal identity, purpose and significance). Practical implications are that interventions about meaning and identity can be successfully directed at diverse target groups and with diverse methods, yet careful design choices need to be made about the objectives, employed techniques and their combinations.

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Master thesis - Literature review:
Narrative interventions about meaning and identity

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1 Introduction

Meaning and identity are two constructs which are central in psychological science and in everybody's lives. Both seem to be essential for human well-being, but how to attain them is less clear. In the following, the psychological conceptualisations of meaning and identity will be introduced. Then, it will be shown how the two constructs are interrelated and that narrative psychology might be a promising approach to address both at the same time. The objective is to review interventions which aim to elicit meaning and identity in order to identify implications for the theory and practice of meaning and identity.

1.1 Meaning

Meaning is a concept which applies to phenomena as diverse as words, works of art, and life itself. But what *meaning in life* is has been answered diversely throughout history. For Aristotle is was the human function of rational thought, for Aquinas it was the beatific vision of being in contact with god, and for Sartre meaning was whatever one chose it to be (Metz, 2013). Likewise, psychology has offered different concepts of what meaning means. Classically, Frankl (1963) emphasised that a meaningful life is a purposeful life. Later, meaning has been described as a complex of the five *facets* of having values, a sense of purpose, striving towards goals, reconciling the past and life making sense (Krause & Hayward, 2014). It was conceptualized as four different *needs*, namely for purpose, values, self-efficacy, and positive self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). A factor analysis of questionnaire data about meaning in life discovered five *factors*: a meaningful life is exciting, accomplished, principled, purposeful and valued (Morgan & Farsides, 2009). A different approach to a meaningful life is by identifying *processes* instead of *content*. Personal meaning could encompass a *cognitive* component to make sense of one's experiences, a *motivational* component which guides action, and a positive *affective* component (Leontiev, 2016; Reker & Wong, 2012).

Some scientific interest has gone to the antecedents and consequences of meaning in life. There is evidence that gratefulness is an antecedent of meaning in life, and subjective well-being is a consequence (Liao & Weng, 2018). Social connectedness has been shown to be both a source and a consequence of meaning in life (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015). Social exclusion, in contrast, has been shown to decrease the sense of meaning in life (Stillman, Baumeister, Lambert, Crescioni, de Wall & Fincham, 2009). While this might suggest that meaning and connectedness are, in fact, identical, topical scientific literature does

acknowledge the link but still differentiates between the two (Lambert, Stillman, Hicks, Kamble & Baumeister, 2013; Liao & Weng, 2018; Martela & Steger, 2016).

From these different conceptualisations three different dimensions of meaning have been distilled which seem to represent the present state of knowledge (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela & Steger, 2016; Park & George, 2013; Steger, 2012). The three dimensions are coherence, purpose and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016). This trichotomy seems a practical and comprehensive conceptualisation of meaning, because other existing aspects and definitions of meaning can be subsumed under either coherence, purpose or significance or regarded as sources or consequences of meaning instead of meaning itself. To illustrate, Frankl's classic definition of meaning as purpose can be seen as correct but not complete, and the abovementioned four needs for purpose, values, self-efficacy and positive self-worth (Baumeister, 1991) have been shown to be, in fact, antecedents of a sense of meaning in life (Martela & Steger, 2016; Stillman et al., 2009). In sum, meaning is a complex term and more research is needed to consolidate the operationalisations of coherence, purpose and significance and on which antecedents enhance which of the three dimensions (Martela & Steger, 2016). Still, this trichotomy seems to be the best validated and parsimonious conceptualisation at the moment and shall hence serve as the basis of the following examinations.

Coherence refers to the successful process of making sense of events and experiences (Martela & Steger, 2016). The human feeling that life makes sense is the result of the perception of stimuli which are then organised into a net of related patterns via a process of accommodation and assimilation (Heintzelman & King, 2014). Of the abovementioned processes of meaning, coherence belongs to the cognitive component (Reker & Wong, 2012). Coherence has a relation to time: past events are made sense of in the present, so that the future seems relatively predictable (Martela & Steger, 2016). Coherence itself is value-neutral and descriptive and does not involve judgment (Heintzelman & King, 2014).

The presence of *purpose* in one's life to ensure meaningfulness has already been proposed by Frankl (1963). Purpose gives direction to one's life through the identification and the pursuit of goals, so it has both a content- and a process-dimension (Martela & Steger, 2016). Most of all, purpose is a part of the motivational component of meaning (Reker & Wong, 2012), and is essentially future-oriented (Martela & Steger, 2016). Purpose is value-driven, it sets the norms for behaviour (Heintzelman & King, 2014).

The *significance* of one's life is related to feelings of value and importance: one has evaluated that one leads a life worth living (Martela & Steger, 2016). However, the sources of significance can vary. Significance has been linked to eudaimonia (Martela & Steger, 2016), which refers to the creation of a "good life" by behaving in a way which fits one's purpose and values (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Others stress the inherent value of life (Morgan & Farsides, 2009), maybe even in the extended context of a superordinate cosmology (Sullivan, Kosloff & Greenberg, 2013). So, dependent on the stance one takes, significance can have both process-and content-aspects. The assessment of significance includes past, present, and future (Martela & Steger, 2016). Significance in inherently evaluative and therefore related to positive or negative values (Heintzelman & King, 2014).

In sum, meaning relies on human reflective thinking (Martela & Steger, 2016). Coherence is the organisation and interpretation of experience, purpose is about value-driven behaviour and significance is the evaluation of life against reasonable standards (Martela & Steger, 2016). The abilities needed to seek meaning in life seem to be uniquely and fundamentally human, and the dimensions of meaning seem to have a mutual influence (Martely & Steger, 2016).

1.2 Identity

Another concept, which is fundamentally linked to humans and also to meaning in life, is *identity* (Negru-Subtirica, Pop, Luyckx, Dezutter & Steger, 2016). The concept of identity revolves around the questions "Who am I?", "What defines me as a person?" (Olson, 2017). One important model which has inspired many psychological concepts of identity are Erikon's "Stages of Psychosocial development" (Erikson, 1959). Erikson outlined the human identity development by identifying eight (later nine) stages, which are each characterised by (the overcoming of) a crisis or conflict (Erikson, 1959). Since then, the conceptualisation of identity has dealt with several central aspects, which will be introduced in the following.

Identity can be understood as individual, relational or collective (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). *Individual or personal identity* answers the question "Who am I?" on the level of the person itself (Marcia, 1993; Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). Individual identity may contain diverse facets as goals, values, (religious and spiritual) beliefs, ethical standards, and self-esteem (Marcia, 1966; Vignoles et al., 2011). Next to this content-dimension, personal identity is also said to have a process-dimension (Vignoles et al., 2011). As said, Erikson conceptualised identity as a series of challenges to be overcome by the individual (Erikson,

1959), and other psychologists stress the agentic role of the individual in the formation and construction of his identity (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers & Missotten, 2011).

Identity has a *relational* dimension, which involves people's social roles in their interaction with others (Combs & Freedman, 1999; Vignoles et al., 2011). On the content-level, these roles may be that of a child, parent, spouse, worker, or boss (Vignoles et al., 2011). From a process-perspective, it appears that some facets of identity cannot be established individually but need different social contexts and interactions to be actualised (Stryker, 2007).

Identity can be regarded from an even broader perspective, since it also has *collective* aspects (Mead, 1934; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This means that people identify themselves with larger social groups and categories (content), such as neighbourhoods, cities, countries, ethnicities, and religions (Vignoles et al., 2011). But also processes ranging from the shift of individual perspective-taking to broader historical transformations as associated with collective identity and have been researched by social psychology (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2014).

The breadth of the chosen perspective – individual, relational, collective, determines whether one ascribes one or multiple identities to a person. From a social perspective, everybody has multiple identities dependent on the context, whereas an individual might look for a sense of unity in his identity, or to reconcile conflicting roles (Vignoles et al., 2011). However, some argue that these perspectives on identity are interconnected and can be integrated both on the level of content as on the level of process (Simon, 1997; Vignoles et al., 2011).

Next to the question whether one has one identity or multiple identities, there is the question whether identity is stable or fluid (Burke, 2006). In developmental psychology, identity development is often especially located in the adolescent years, but it may have to be reconsidered in the long term as life changes (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1993). Even though the word identity itself seems to suggest stability, social psychology regards identities as quickly changeable dependent on the respective context (Stryker, 2007; Tajfel, 1982). Discursive and constructivist approaches propose that identity is formed within an everchanging intersubjective and cultural context, and so the content of identity is subject to constant negotiation (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011). However, these divergent perspectives might be integrated if one views the relative stability of identity as the result of successful

renegotiations, maintenance or defence, and if the differentiation between long-term stability and short-term changes is regarded as a mere shift of perspective (Vignoles et al., 2011).

Another related question is whether identity must be discovered or constructed (Berzonsky, 1986; Waterman, 1984). It could be that there exists a predetermined, inherited identity which needs to be actualised, or that people have to create an identity where otherwise there would not be one (Berzonsky, 1986; Waterman, 1984). A suggestion was made to integrate these views, namely if one takes the stance that the creation of identity eventually leads to one's predetermined identity (Vignoles et al., 2011). Another integrative perspective could be that the subjective experience that one has discovered one's true self is, in fact, a construction (Vignoles et al., 2011).

In sum, the question "Who am I?" points to the core of human existence. Therefore, identity has been considered from many different perspectives, but these might be more connected that it seems at first glance.

1.3 The interlock of meaning and identity

As presented, meaning and identity are two different terms with their own conceptualisations and challenges. Yet, they have a lot in common and the one seems to be unthinkable without the other (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016).

As already described, both meaning and identity are concepts which are fundamentally human in the sense that no other species (to our knowledge) ponders about these matters and that they are relevant for all human beings (Martela & Steger, 2016; Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016). Both are related to time. It has been described above how the different aspects of meaning point to the past, present and/or future (Martela & Steger, 2016). Likewise, identity draws on memories of important past experiences and orients itself towards anticipated future events (Demblon & D'Argembeau, 2017). It might be that the human ability to be conscious of and to organise one's life in time enables and necessitates the importance of meaning and identity.

The inseparableness of meaning and identity goes even further. An individual might not be able to tell whether something is meaningful to him/her without referring to his/her identity (Schlegel, Hicks, King & Arndt, 2011). At the same time, whenever something does feel meaningful to an individual, it always tells something about the person's identity (Wong, 2017). This interlocking is reflected the construct "personal meaning" (Wong, 2017), which emphasises that meaning is always experienced in connection to one's true self (Schlegel et

al., 2011). Taylor (1989) links meaning and identity by adding morality to the equation. He argued that everybody needs (and always at least implicitly has) a moral compass to guide his/her life. This moral thinking is executed along the three axes: first, respect for and obligations to others, second, meaningfulness in life, and third, personal dignity and value in society (Taylor, 1998). The resulting personal moral distinctions are constitutive of his/her identity (Taylor, 1998). In other words, meaning in life is one root of moral thinking which guides one's actions, and moral thinking is integral for human identity.

It has been described above that researchers argue whether identity must be discovered or created (Vignoles et al., 2011). The same applies to meaning (King & Hicks, 2009; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorentz, 2008; Steger, Oishi & Kashdan, 2009). It has been argued that the search for meaning is associated with low well-being due to a violation of meaning, whereas meaning detection might just be the automatic process when the criteria for meaning are naturally met (King & Hicks, 2009). That meaning-making may be challenging reminds one of Erikson's proposal that identity is formed by solving conflicts (Erikson, 1959).

It follows that the presence of meaning is correlated with well-being, and the same is true for the presence of identity (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011; Steger et al., 2009). In order to be conducive to well-being, meaning and identity must have similar and overlapping qualities: identity must be meaningful (!), coherent, and involving positive self-worth (Vignoles et al., 2011). The presence of meaning in life itself – the presence of coherence, purpose and significance – has been shown to be associated with positive affect and positive functioning (Steger et al., 2009).

1.4 Narrative interventions about meaning and identity

It is a philosophical question whether meaning and identity are discovered or created or both (Wong, 2017). Yet, if one choses to consider both as at least partly influenceable by humans, this will imply both a challenge and a chance. It seems beneficial to reflect on or to enhance one's sense of meaning and identity to optimise one's well-being (Hardy et al., 2013). Since meaning and identity are intertwined constructs, it has been shown that the promotion and exploration of identity supports meaning in life, and vice versa (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016).

One approach with appears to lend itself perfectly to this endeavour is narrative psychology. Narrative psychology emerged in the 1980's as an answer to the dominant positivistic-scientific paradigm in psychology (Murray & Sools, 2014). Meaning making is the central interest of narrative psychology. It postulates that humans are able to write their

own life stories with a plot and characters, thereby giving *meaning* to their realities and creating a *narrative truth* as opposed to a factual, positivistic truth (Combs & Freedman, 2016; Veglia & De Fini, 2017).

Narratives seem a natural instrument to reflect meaning and identity, because the three have in common that they involve past present and future (Howard, 2008). More specifically, narratives bundle past, present and future into a meaningful unit in a process of "making present" (Howard, 2008). Furthermore, McAdams (2011) developed the concept of a *narrative identity*, which "is an internalised and evolving story of the self that provides a person's life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning" (p. 100). From a narrative perspective, identity is associated with the protagonist of the life story, whereas meaning has to do with whether the plot of the life story contains a sense of coherence, purpose and significance. Again, this illustrates how meaning and identity are intertwined. At the same time, it corroborates that the narrative approach is very well suited to handle both constructs.

1.5 Rationale and research questions

The question remains of how narrations of meaning and identity can be elicited. There exist reviews of narrative interventions, but they do not focus on meaning and identity, but, e.g., on chronic disease self-management (Gucciardi, Jean-Pierre, Karam & Sidani, 2016) or health screening behaviours (Perrier & Ginis, 2017). There also exists a review about meaning-related interventions, but for a specific target group (i.e. patients with advanced disease), and the interventions are not necessarily narrative (Guerrero-Torelles, Monforte-Royo, Rodriguez-Prat, Porta-Sales & Balaguer, 2017). It appears that a review of narrative group interventions about meaning and identity is still missing. In the following, it will be attempted to close this gap. The review is to serve a double goal. First, it will be examined what the interventions teach about the theory of meaning and identity and how the theory of meaning and identity explains what will be found in the interventions. Second, the focus will lay on what the interventions tell about the design and practice of interventions about meaning and identity. This will be done especially with regard to the intervention "The Wonderful Life Question" (Van de Goor, Sools, Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2017; Van de Goor, 2018) which will be introduced under 2.1.1.

The selected interventions will be analysed according to the following research questions:

I)   What are the basic parameters of the interventions: objectives, target group, arrangement of sessions, facilitators, "products"?

II) What are the theoretical backgrounds and practical contexts?

III) What are the methods and steps to elicit meaning and identity?

IV) Elaboration on the methods: Which perspectives on time are taken?

V) Elaboration on the objectives: Which aspects of meaning are addressed?

2 Method

2.1 Search engines

The literature review was performed with the help of the four search engines PsychInfo, Scopus, Web of Science and PubMed. Figure 1 shows the subsequent search steps with associated search chain terms.

The search resulted in 820 articles in total. Their abstracts were assessed to determine whether the articles met the additional exclusion criteria (see below). If in doubt, the article itself was scanned to justify its (non)selection. This process resulted in a selection of 18 articles, which have been analysed according to the abovementioned preformulated five sub-questions. The outcomes of this analysis will be presented in the Results-section.

2.2 Selection of articles

2.2.1. "The Wonderful Life Intervention"

The intervention "The Wonderful Life Question" (or "Life in One Question", Van de Goor, Sools, Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2017; Van de Goor, 2018) functions as a blueprint of narrative interventions about meaning and identity, so that the results of this review offer the opportunity of further inspiration and development. This intervention is based on the Japanese film "After Life"/Wandafuru Raifu" (Koreeda, 1998) and involves the question, which single one memory participants would take with them into eternity.

The intervention begins with a welcome which is followed by an introduction of the film "After Life"/Wandafuru Raifu" (Koreeda, 1998). The trailer of the film is presented and the function of the "Wonderful Life Question" to distil personal essence and authenticity is explained. Afterwards, the participants are invited to choose a memory of one specific event themselves in a quiet, five-minute reflection. Then, the participants share their memories in a number of steps. First, they are asked to narrate their memory in the group as concretely and detailed as if it was a film while also taking into account their feelings and perceptions of the senses. They are asked to leave out why they chose this memory, what happened afterwards or what it meant for them. The other group members listen without asking questions.

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Figure 1. Flowchart of literature search

STEP	KEYWORDS	NUMBER OF DISPLAYED ARTICLES
I	meaning OR purpose OR sense OR value OR coherence AND identity OR personal OR "personal meaning" OR individual OR idiosyncratic OR self OR subjective	PsychInfo: 316,783 Scopus: 3,861,954 Web of Science: 4,873,680 PubMed: 1,487,098 Total: 16,782,207
	AND	
II	enhancing OR eliciting OR promoting OR augmenting OR increasing OR strengthening OR evoking AND intervention OR therapy OR application OR treatment OR practice OR method OR cure	PsychInfo: 4,782 Scopus: 37,850 Web of Science: 157,490 PubMed: 56,738 Total: 256,860
	AND	
III	narrative OR storytelling	PsychInfo: 309 Scopus: 3,700 Web of Science: 1,697 PubMed: 336 Total: 6,042
	AND	
IV	group	PsychInfo: 92 Scopus: 193 Web of Science: 465 PubMed: 70 Total: 820

Second, the group members write on a post-it what they think is the essence of the memory (e.g., a value). This whole process may be recorded for scientific purposes. At this point there is a break. After the break, the memories are examined further to clarify the essence of their personal meanings with the help of a number of questions. To illustrate the process, the first example is done plenary before the participants begin working in dyads. Now the participants explicate why they chose this memory, which part is the most precious, and what the memory tells about their values. As a tool, the post-its are used to assess which of them really touches the core of the memory in the eyes of the participant. In the following, the participants extract a few words which express their values and motivations as apparent in the memories. Then, these values and motivations are put to the test: are they authentic in the sense that they are recognisable in the participants' everyday lives? As an optional step, the essence can be formulated in a personal statement beginning with "What I stand for is…". These statements are written on small pieces of paper and can be exhibited to the group. After ten minutes of examining and discussing the statements, the intervention ends with a plenary discussion about the impressions of the statements and the personal values. As a last step, the participants are thanked for their participation and bid farewell.

2.2.2 Exclusion criteria

Several exclusion criteria were applied to limit the scope and number of the articles to a manageable and consistent group and to ensure that the interventions shared key features with "The Wonderful Life Question" (Van de Goor, 2018).

First, articles were excluded which used narrative methods as research methods and not as interventions (e.g. Grilli, Wank & Verfaellie, 2018). A special case were general interviews, in which the themes meaning and identity came up per chance and were not intended as topics from the start (e.g. McKail, Hodge, Daiches, & Misca, 2017). Second, interventions were excluded which dealt with people telling life stories (or other narrative products) about specific topics other than meaning and identity (e.g., Higashimura, 2005). Third, interventions which made use of other people's life stories, videos etc. and did not require the participants to come up with their own stories were excluded (e.g., Tabuchi, 2015). This was done to achieve more similarity between the articles in the selection and the "Wonderful Life" intervention, in which the participants do listen to the other members stories but are first and foremost asked to narrate their own memory. It seemed that if the aspect of self-creation of narratives was missing, then the articles could not be reasonably

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compared to the "Wonderful Life" intervention. Fourth, if the structure, steps and methods of the interventions were not sufficiently described, the interventions were not eligible for further analysis (e.g. Keller & Wilkinson, 2017). Still, there were borderline cases, where narrative measures were primarily used as research methods, but it could be expected that participating in the research would be beneficial for the participants, too (e.g. Cabassa, Nicasio & Whitley, 2013; Gracey et al., 2008). These articles also were excluded in order to keep the selection well-defined and consistent.

2.3 Analyses to answer the research questions

Ad I) In order to achieve an overview of the structures of the interventions, first the different elements (objectives, target groups, arrangement of sessions, facilitators, "products") were identified. Mostly, these elements were explicitly mentioned in the articles, sometimes details such as the scheduling of the meetings missed. It was tried to identify different types, clusters or patterns of interventions inductively to be able to give a structured overview.

Ad II) The articles were explicit about their theoretical and practical backgrounds (contrary to their definitions of meaning and identity, see below). These were identified inductively to clarify the intellectual superstructure as well as the concrete practical contexts in which the interventions are embedded. The theoretical-intellectual backgrounds imply specific epistemologies, which impact how meaning and identity can be defined in the first place (e.g., objectively vs. subjectively). Additionally, the practical contexts illustrate the relevance of meaning and identity in diverse applications.

Ad III) Regarding this review's goal to generate ideas for the development of the "The Wonderful Life Question" (Van de Goor, 2018) intervention, it was then focused on the very diverse methods of the interventions. Since it was an inclusion criterium that the articles gave sufficient detail about the steps and methods of the interventions, these could be detected straightforwardly. In order to provide structure to the presentation (see 3.3), three different types of interventions were identified inductively. The interventions were divided into content- or theme-based interventions, form-based interventions and activity-based interventions. This tripartition seemed saturated since all the interventions could be placed in (at least) one of these types and there were no leftover methods which could not be integrated.

Ad IV) Given the interesting fact that one commonality between meaning and identity is that they are bound to time, it was expectable that all interventions would refer to time in some way. Likewise, it was probable that they would have different accents on past, present and

future. The perspectives on time in the interventions were identified deductively. The examination of time perspectives is a different and more abstract way of assessing the methods of the interventions and will therefore be a valuable addition to the presentation of the consecutive steps of the interventions. Furthermore, this approach offers a perspective to regard meaning and identity from a common, superordinate stance.

Ad V) It appeared that the great majority of the articles did not give an explicit definition of meaning and identity as they appear in the interventions themselves. Therefore, it seemed practical to use the definitions of meaning and identity as presented in the introduction as the basis of the structure of the answer to this question (i.e. coherence, significance and purpose for meaning, personal, social and collective identity. In other words, the question was answered deductively. However, to achieve a picture as complete as possible, related concepts of meaning which are nowadays rather regarded as antecedents or consequences of meaning (e.g. social connectedness, self-worth) are also identified and included in the presentation where suitable.

3 Results

3.1 Subquestion I: What are the basic parameters of the interventions: objectives, target group, arrangement of sessions, facilitators, "products"?

The details of the basic parameters of the interventions can be found in table 1. In the following, an overview will be given with emphasis on emerging patterns.

3.1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the interventions are diverse but can be organised under the three main headings increase of well-being, creation and building, and symptom reduction. Most interventions (*n*=12) come from a positive perspective and intend to increase well-being (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof & Emmerik-de Jong, 2008; Chow, 2015; Corsten, Konradi, Schimpf, Hardering & Keilmann, 2014; Fraenkel, Hameline & Shannon,., 2009; Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Märtsin, 2017; Neimeyer & Young, Eisendrath, 2015; Ruini, Masoni, Ottolini & Ferrari, 2014; Seo, Kang, Lee & Chae, 2015; Sewell, Baldwin & Williams, 1998; Stock, Mares & Robinson, 2012), or related positive concepts as resilience (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016). Three interventions focus on the creation and building of a meaningful future and identity (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Wang, Law, Li, Xu & Pang, 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015). Six interventions (also) focus on symptom reduction (Barbosa, Sá & Roche, 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008;

Rousseau, Guzder, Santhanam-Martin & de la Aldea, 2014; Ruini, Masoni, Ottolini & Ferrari, 2014; Seo et al., 2015; Zang, Hunt & Cox, 2014).

3.1.2 Target groups

The seven interventions which are meant for target groups with mental health problems are designed for people with depression (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Seo et al., 2015), adjustment disorder (Ruini et al., 2014), trauma (Rousseau et al., 2014; Zang et al., 2014), complicated grief (Barbosa et al, 2014, Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015).

Two interventions are meant for people with somatic health problems, and interestingly, both are meant for stroke survivors, one of them especially for people with aphasia (stroke general: Chow, 2015; aphasia: Corsten et al., 2014).

Three interventions are designed to support the personal and/or professional development of emerging adults (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015).

Two interventions can be called socio-therapeutic. One of them treats homeless families (Fraenkel et al., 2009), the other parent-child-dyads with an Aboriginal background (Stock et al., 2012).

One intervention is designed for caring professionals who work with children and families at risk (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016). One intervention is designed for the elderly (Keisari & Palgi, 2017), but in contrast to Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) the participants were not necessarily depressed. One intervention is described for emerging adult migrants (Märtsin, 2017). One intervention was aimed at a general population with an interest in psychological themes (Sewell et al., 1998).

3.1.3 Arrangement and characteristics of sessions

Half of the interventions (*n*=9) note that they work with weekly meetings. The number of meetings varies from 4 (Barbosa, Sá & Roche, 2014) to 12 (Keisari & Palgi, 2017). One intervention (Corsten, et al., 2014) combines seven group meetings with five individual interviews. Two interventions consist of two meetings per week (Seo et al., 2015; and the NET-condition of Zang et al., 2014), one other intervention works with bi-weekly meetings (Wang et al., 2017). One intervention is designed as a weekend workshop (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015), and one is a part of a more extensive two-week-course (Yu & Wright, 2015). Three interventions do not make the turn of sessions explicit (Bohlmeijer, et

al., 2008; Chow, 2015; Märtsin, 2018). One intervention is designed as a one-time event
(Rousseau et al., 2014).

The weekly and twice weekly sessions last between 45 and 90 minutes, the bi-weekly
sessions last 180 minutes. The weekend workshop contains one meeting lasting three hours
and one meeting lasting six to seven hours.

3.1.4 Facilitators

The facilitators of the interventions are mostly psychologists with a clinical-therapeutic
background (*n*=13). Other facilitators are psychiatric nurses (Bohlmeijer, 2008), one speech
and language therapist and one pedagogue (Corsten et al., 2014), one drama therapist and one
social worker (Keisari & Palgi, 2017), one Zen monk (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015),
one folklorist (Ruini et al., 2014), one or two members of the community of the target group
(Aborigines, Stock et al., 2012), and one medical doctor (Yu & Wright, 2015).

3.1.5 Products and kinds of narratives

In the interventions, manifold "products" are created. These products can be oral or written
narratives, theatre roleplays or visual artefacts. One way of eliciting oral narratives were
group discussions (Barbosa, 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Corsten et al., 2014; Fraenkel et al.
2009; Seo et al., 2015; Sewell et al., 1998; Stock et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2017). Group
discussions are held based on themes suggested by the facilitator or the participants
themselves or based on already prepared "products" from earlier steps of the intervention. For
a detailed description of the methods of the interventions, see 3.3. A second possibility were
personal interviews (Corsten et al., 2014; Maree & Twigge, 2016; Zang, 2014). A third kind
of narratives were written personal stories (Bohlmeijer et al, 2008; Keisari & Palgi, 2017;
Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015; Rousseau et al., 2014; Ruini et al., 2014; Wang et al.,
2017; Yu & Wright, 2015). A second type of representations of narratives are theatre
vignettes or roleplays (Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Sewell et al., 1998). Thirdly, narratives can be
arranged as visual forms, such as a timeline of one's life (Märtsin, 2017), different
predetermined visual structures (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016) or various artefacts (drawings,
collages, photos etc. in Rousseau et al., 2014). Some interventions combine two of these
approaches: Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) combine written personal narratives with group

Table 1

Overview of the interventions' basic parameters

Intervention	Target group	Number of participants per group	Number of meetings	Duration of meetings (min)	Scheduling of meetings	Facilitators	"Product"/Kind of narrative	Objective
Barbosa et al. 2014	Elderly people (60+) with complicated grief (spousal loss + 6 months ago)	20	4	60	weekly	Trained cognitive narrative therapist	Oral narratives about episode of loss, reacquisition of agency, future projection	Reduction of depressive and traumatic symptoms
Bohlmeijer et al., 2008	Elderly people (55+) with mild to moderate depressive symptoms	4	8	120	n. s.	Psychologists or psychiatric nurses with experience in counselling and therapy with older adults	Written answers to theme-related questions covering the whole life (e.g. "What kind of child were you?"), oral narratives elicited in group discussion	Increased meaning in life, decreased negative self-evaluation, more positive evaluation of social relations, , more positive evaluation of the past, less negative evaluation of the future
Chow, 2015	People who survived a stroke within the last two years and had completed rehabilitation; Exclusion criteria: psychotic disorder, insufficient cognitive and communicative abilities	~ 7	n. s.; six steps	n. s.	n. s.	Therapists	Narrative about the experience of stroke structures along the train-metaphor (i.e. involving stations, railways and destinations)	Fulfilment of psycho-spiritual needs, reconnection with inner resources, skills and competencies, reauthoring of identity and reconstruction of purpose life in
Corsten et al., 2014	People suffering from aphasia after a stroke	5-7	5 individual interviews + 7 group sessions	Up to 90	4 weeks with one interview or group meeting, 4 weeks with interview and group meeting, 2 bye weeks	One speech and language therapist and one pedagogue	Biographic interview about whole life, theme-related group discussions about past, present and future	Improvement of quality of life and emotional well-being; more happiness, less tension and confusion
Fraenkel et al, 2009	Homeless families	n. s.	9	n. s.	Weekly	n. s.	Diverse: theme-related narratives about past and future (e.g. pride,	Better coping, reconnecting in the family, strengthening of a

								dream job), structure-based narratives about the past (family tree), future projections (work goals, letter to the future)	positive sense of family identity, externalising negative attribution of homelessness, envisioning and approaching a preferred future
Keisari & Palgi, 2017	Elderly (62-90)	8-10	12	90	Weekly	One drama therapist, one social worker		Stories about life-crossroads are collected and put on stage	Increased self-acceptance, relationships with others, sense of meaning in life, sense of successful aging
Maree & Twigge, 2016	Emerging adults (19-30)	6	6	45-60	Weekly	Educational psychologists		Interview about primary domains (e.g. family, autonomy), career story involving a preferred occupation	Construction of a self which enables being agents of own and others' development
Märtsin, 2017	Adults	n. s.	n. s. (1?)	n. s.	n. s.	Psychologists		Timeline drawing with comments	Making sense of experiences, reflection on biographical events and turning points
Mosek & Gilboa, 2016	Female professionals who work with children and families at risk	11	13	n. s.	weekly	n. s.		Structure-based inventories of coping measures, elements of the self, achievements, positive turning points and resources	Enhancing resilience through recognising vulnerability to compassion fatigue and emotional burden, as well as strengths and abilities
Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015	People suffering from bereavement and loss	20-21	Weekend workshop	1st meeting 3 h, 2nd meeting 6-7 h	One weekend	2 clinical psychologists and a Zen monk		Two "virtual dream stories", one under the heading "a door closes", the other under "a door opens"	Accommodating the reality of impermanence and limitation, making sense of loss, decreasing grief related suffering, increasing meaning making and personal growth
Rousseau et al., 2014	Trauma victims	n. s.	1	n. s.	Once	Clinical psychologists		Artefacts (narratives, pictures, drawings etc.) of traumatic events	Processing trauma through the actualisation of multiple voices around trauma
Ruini et al., 2014	Women with adjustment disorder	21	7	2h	Weekly	1 folklorist, 1 clinical psychologist		Two fairy tales with a predetermined structure, one with a male, one with a female protagonist	Enhancement of psychological well-being and growth
Seo et al., 2015	Adults (18-65) with depression	~12	8	90	Twice weekly	Narrative Therapy with an Emotional Approach (NTEA) practitioner		A positive reconstruction of a negative story about problems	Positive cognitive emotional outcomes: hope, positive emotions, decreasing symptoms of depression

Sewell et al., 1998	Women (24-47) interested in psychology and in writing as a tool to explore personal issues	6	8	90	Weekly	Psychologist	Stories of selves enacted on stage	Personal growth, greater self-acceptance
Stock et al., 2012	Parent-child programme for Aborigines	n. s.	10	n. s.	Weekly	2-3 clinically trained and experienced professionals from outside the community + 1-2 members of the community	Interactive group discussions about experiences, roles, relationships, feelings and inner world experiences, reflection on the parent-role	Improvement of educational, social and emotional outcomes
Wang et al., 2017	Undergraduate students	n. s.	4	180	Bi-weekly	1 psychologist and 1 licensed coaching psychologist	One personal narrative (letter to the future), one pair-narrative (reconstruction of stories and self), one group narrative ("A journey to the west")	Development of mindful agency as a positive learning disposition
Yu & Wright, 2015	Interns at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center	6-7	1; part of two-week professional development rotation	120	Singular part of larger intervention	Medical doctor	Prospective career eulogy	Fostering professional development
Zang et al., 2014	Adult earthquake survivors	10	NET-condition: 4+ NET-R-condition: 3+	NET-condition: 60-90 NET-R-condition: 60-120	NET-condition: twice weekly NET-R-condition: 3-4 times per week	Counsellor	Narration of life up to the first traumatic event, further stories of subsequent traumatic events	Reduction of PTSD symptoms, increase in posttraumatic growth, active coping and perceived social support

discussions, Corsten et al. combine individual interviews with group discussions, and Keisari & Palgi (2017) combine written personal narratives with theatre vignettes.

Another dimension along which the narratives can be classified is their time-related or thematic scope. The first type of narratives deals with special moments in time. These moments can be episodes of loss of a person (and retrieval of a new way of life) (Barbosa at al., 2014; Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015), episodes of loss of health (Chow, 2015; Corsten et al., 2014), traumatic events (Rousseau et al., 204; Zang et al., 2014), or moments of impactful decisions or events (Keisari & Palgi, 2017). Second, one intervention covers the past year (Märtsin, 2017). A third type works with general autobiographic retrospection of the participants' whole lives (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008, Corsten et al., 2014; Zang et al., 2014). Fourth, two interventions elicit future projections, either with a focus on career and professionalism (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Yu & Wright, 2015), or with a focus on mindful agency and identity building (Wang et al., 2017). Lastly, one intervention specifies the narratives according to less concrete themes such as problems in general (Seo et al, 2015), and another focuses on more abstract aspects of life such as the multiplicity of selves (Sewell et al. 1998).   interventions which do not specify the intended scope and welcome all sorts of narratives (Ruini et al., 2014; Stock et al., 2012).

3.1.6 Conclusion

The answer to the first research question already shows how diverse the interventions about meaning and identity are. Meaning and identity are addressed in different contexts – psychological, medical, socio-pedagogical – and for even more diverse target groups (people with depression or without any clinical symptoms, the elderly or emerging adults, students or professionals). The interventions may cover one special moment in time or a longer period, and next to verbal narratives, they can ask for other artefacts – dramatic role-plays, drawings, photos – which also "narrate" a story. What seems typical, however, is that the facilitators (at least one of them if there are more per intervention) have some sort of psychological background. Furthermore, it seems typical that the interventions have about four to twelve group meetings which take place weekly. However, there are exceptions to every rule.

3.2 Sub question II: What are the theoretical backgrounds and practical contexts?
All interventions locate themselves within the narrative paradigm, but they combine the narrative stance with one or more other theoretical or practical approaches.

3.2.1 Theoretical backgrounds

Two superordinate theoretical paradigms come to the fore in the interventions, namely postmodernism and constructivism. These backgrounds are explicated explicitly in the articles.

The first theoretical paradigm for which narrative psychology is one important application is postmodernism. Its basic assumption is that there is no such thing as objective reality. The unifying, universalising grand narratives have made place for individual micro-narratives (Lyotard, 2009). From this theoretical perspective, different implications for the nature of meaning and identity are deduced in the articles. Märtsin (2017) refers to the semiotic cultural tradition in psychology and agrees that meaning is "social, relational and contextual, but also multiple and open-ended" (p. 118). Sewell et al. (1998) likewise focus on the open-endedness of identity. They embrace fragmentation and view the "multiple selves" as an asset rather than a pathology. Like Märtsin, Rousseau et al. (2014) have a cultural perspective on psychology and make use of the idea that meaning making happens in a cultural realm involving dialogue and polyphony. These concepts trace back to Bachtin (1979), who described that a cultural artefact is composed of diverging voices which engage in a dynamic process of sensemaking. Seo et al. (2015) refer to Foucault and explain that knowledge may be relative and discursive, but that the author or narrator of the discourse has power and control (see beneath under constructivism). The empowered client-author can apply these assets in a beneficial way. In conclusion, the relativism but also the openness of postmodernism extends to a relativism and openness of meaning and identity, which is non-pathological and gives the individual a creative leeway.

A related but not identical concept is constructivism, which holds that any knowledge is constructed instead of given. It shares with postmodernism the notion that there is no objective reality (Nünning, 1998). While postmodernism especially stresses diversity, plurality and the equivalence of former hierarchical structures, constructivism focuses on the idea that the individual can and must construct his/her own life narrative. In this view, there is no such thing as objective and independent knowledge. Instead, insight always has to be regarded as self-insight, because all an individual can ever know is what he/she makes of things given their personal perceptual, social, and mental capacities and backgrounds (Nünning, 1998). At first it may seem difficult to accept that the search for safe and secure truths beyond themselves is futile in the first place. Yet, if one does accept this fundamental impossibility, it can give rise to empowerment and a happy playfulness. Having to construct one's own meaning and identity can also be a positive chance, and one can at least choose to

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create a pleasant and productive reality. In this vain, Corsten et al. (2014), Maree and Twigge (2016) and Mosek and Gilboa (2016) have developed social constructivist interventions which are based on the idea that meaning and identities are developed in (group) conversations and interactions. Neimeyer and Young-Eisendrath (2015) take a more personal cognitive constructivist stance and view the individual as in charge of meaning reconstruction. The constructivist interventions have in common that they invite their participants to examine their life stories as they are now and to become open for and explore new, alternative narrations.

3.2.2 Practical contexts

Narrative psychology is not only embedded in superordinate scientific paradigms, it also has given impulses to the therapeutic practice of different schools.

Some narrative interventions are located in a cognitive behavioural context. Concerning the behavioural perspective, in one intervention participants use narratives as exposure to traumatic events (Zang et al., 2014). The more cognitive interventions aim at a cognitive restructuring of the narratives to establish a more positive perspective (Barbosa et al., 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Ruini et al., 2014). This process of restructuring fits well into the constructivist paradigm. The cognitive therapeutic approach resembles the famous saying from Epictetus that the problem is not what happens to you but how you respond to it. That means that factual events are one thing, but what you think of them is decisive. It is the goal of cognitive therapy to examine these cognitions and to adjust them if needed, just as constructivism is an invitation to adjust one's (cognitive) constructions so that they become (more) beneficial.

Other interventions (also) come from a holistic-humanistic approach (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Ruini et al., 2014; Seo et al., 2015) or a psychodynamic approach (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016).

Very often, the interventions are rooted in positive psychology and intent to enhance the participants' well-being (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Corsten et al., 2014; Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Ruini et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2017) or their resilience (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016). Two interventions involve mindfulness and spirituality (in this case Buddhism) which have common grounds both with third wave cognitive behavioural therapy and positive psychology (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015; Wang et al., 2017).

Many interventions are inspired by creative-therapeutic approaches such as art (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Märtsin, 2017; Mosek & Gilboa, 2016; Rousseau et al., 2014; Stock et

al., 2012), creative writing (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015, Ruini et al., 2014) and drama (Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Sewell et al., 1998).

   Practical contexts other than psychotherapy are career counselling (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015), somatic clinical rehabilitation (Chow, 2015; Corsten et al., 2014) and social work or family therapy (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Stock et al., 2012).

3.2.3 Conclusion

While postmodernist and constructivist ideas could also be interpreted as cold and uninviting for humans (see Discussion), the articles in this selection emphasise the positive chances which postmodern openness and constructivist empowerment provide to participants of interventions. A look at the practical contexts reveals a variety of approaches, from CBT to humanistic and positive psychology to pedagogic approaches. This shows that postmodernism constructivism could be made fruitful for a great number of practical contexts. That might be because they propose flexibility, and the narrative interventions themselves also invite their participants to take a flexible and adaptive stance in life.

3.3 Subquestion III: What are the methods and steps to elicit meaning and identity?

The methods which are employed in the interventions can be placed along the coordinates theme- or content-based, based on form, and based on activities. Content cannot be fully separated from form, and the form cannot be fully separated from the activity leading to it. So usually, the interventions do not purely belong to one category, but they can reasonably be located along these non-mutually exclusive axes depending on their priorities.

3.3.1 Content-based interventions

   Many (*n*=10) interventions elicited narratives by suggesting *themes* or *special moments or events* as the motor for creativity. The interventions differ according to the breadth of themes to which they refer (one special moment vs. longer periods) and the (order of) steps they take to touch upon the subjects.

   Some interventions deal with *one special moment* and elaborate on it. Barbosa et al. (2014) begin their intervention for widow(er)s by asking for "narratives about the most significant episode of loss" (p. 355). In the following two sessions, they elaborate on these narratives. The second session is about "emotional and cognitive subjectivation" (p.355). That means that participants re-tell the episode of loss but lay emphasis on their sense of authorship

and coherence, which presumably re-establishes their sense of agency and mastery. Moreover, the emotions which the episode evokes are validated and differentiated from the related cognitions. The second session ends with a reflection on the relationship between emotions and cognitions. The third session centres around the "metaphorisation" (p.355) of the episode. The goal is to explore different meanings of the episode of loss and to give the episode a title in the form of a metaphor. The fourth and last session is about building positive, "meaningful future projection narratives" (p.355) which involve adaptive functioning.

A one-session intervention which deals with one special moment, namely a traumatic experience, comes from Rousseau et al. (2014). The participants prepare the session at home by choosing one trauma story, either personal, vicarious or fictive. In the session itself, the participants create a short text, poem or drawing which represents the trauma story. These fragments are then displayed around the room, thereby creating a "House of Stories". The participants quietly read the trauma stories. They mark the stories which they would like to discuss and the two or three stories with the most marks are discussed in the group. The group discussion begins with a reflection on the feelings that came up during the reading and the process of having to choose one. The authors of the chosen stories are invited to reveal what they want in a warm and caring atmosphere.

While Barbosa et al. (2014) want to further develop the emotional stories of the participants and end with a look into the future, the purpose of Rousseau et al.'s (2014) intervention is meant to validate and contain the stories without reforming them.

It can be argued that Sewell et al. (1998) do something comparable focusing on identities. They, too, start with one vantage point – the momentary inventory of multiple identities - which is extensively reflected in the following. First, the concept of multiple selves is introduced, and every participant compiles her goals, memories, personally salient themes and defining personal characteristics. Second, based on these compilations, a set of metaphoric selves is extrapolated and anthropomorphised into something like a theatre character (e.g. Armored Amazon, Ms. Fix It, Bad Mother). Participants are asked to write about their selves as homework. Third, the participants write (auto)biographies for each of their selves, involving their respective goals, themes and characteristics. Fourth, these selves, personified now through characters with a biography, are put on stage in role plays. Two sessions are devoted to exploring how the characters act, the arising conflicts and patterns of interaction. Fifth, the following session is about enacting the shadow self in the Jungian sense. The participants are invited to write a self which they think they could never incorporate. Sixth, in the following session is spent on mapping the selves through a repertory grid. The

grid consists of the elements overall self, four character-selves, the shadow self and the ideal self, and their opposites. The participants rate where they see themselves on a six-point-scale, thereby continuing to explore the nature of the selves and maybe discover conflicts or patterns. Lastly, the final meeting is spent on discussing the repertory grids and on evaluating the experience as a whole. This intervention shares with the interventions of Barbosa et al. (2014) and Rousseau et al. (2014) that it begins at one starting point – a snapshot of the identities as they present themselves in the here and now - and elaborate on that in extensive reflection. The intervention aims at constructing a set of identities without necessarily intending to change them, but while always keeping in mind the constructive and relative nature of the inventory of identities.

Other interventions ask about a *series of special moments* with the goal to develop an overview over core aspects of the whole life. The participants of Keisari & Palgi's intervention (2017) start from five specific situation and elaborate on them, in this case with drama. Their twelve-session intervention is directed at the elderly, and in order to capture central aspects of their lives without becoming too extensive, the intervention deals with life cross-roads. These are "selected autobiographical memories, self-defining life events of life periods in which an influential decision and/or a change occurred that had a meaningful effect on the individual's life course" (p. 1080). In the first session, the concept of life-crossroads is introduced, and every participant identifies five crossroads in their own lives. The following two sessions are devoted to sharing and processing the stories and enacting them on stage in dramatic vignettes. Most often, the author him/herself does not take over a role on stage but directs the others with the help of the therapist. This allows for a fuller perspective and for a dialogue between the author and, e.g., his/her former self. In the sessions five and six, the participants learn about typical dramatical roles (e.g. mother, beauty, clown, victim) and try to identify these roles in their cross-roads stories. Next to considering the roles one has assumed, participants are invited to reflect on the roles they would like to assume. Session seven centres around an activity: the participants receive hexagon-shaped cards and write the name of their crossroads stories on them. They work in pairs and represent the relationships between the cross-roads by arranging the hexagon-cards in shapes, similar to a jigsaw-puzzle. The goal of this activity is to create a life-trajectory which contains all five cross-roads. This life-trajectory is dramatized in sessions eight to ten, comparable to sessions two and three. Yet, on stage it is played with options to replace, move or change the cross-roads. This directs the attention to the flexibility and plasticity of life-trajectories. Session eleven is devoted to looking ahead. The participants are invited to think of a future cross-road, such as the

acquisition of a new skill or visiting a special place. The new trajectory, including the future cross-roads, is enacted on stage. The goal is to strengthen the participants' sense of purpose and overall meaning in life. The twelfth and last session is spent on evaluating and reflecting on the process and farewell.

Bohlmeijer et al.'s (2008) eight-session life-review intervention does something similar by going through life according to different themes and moments: 1) introduction & meeting, 2) youth, 3) work and care, 4) difficult times, 5) social relations, 6) turning points, 7) metaphors, 8) meaning and future. These themes are prepared at home by answering related predetermined questions (e.g. "What kind of a child were you?"). In the group sessions, the participants read their answers to the group. The facilitator of the group discussion inspires an evaluation and exploration of the significance of the stories and suggests alternative reconstructions when beneficial.

Keisari & Palgi (2017) and Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) collect particular incidences which add up to a whole life trajectory. Yet, taking both the whole life and specific aspects into account can also work the other way round, namely by openly asking about the *whole life* first and then selecting specific aspects. Corsten et al. (2014) combine five individual autobiographic narrative interviews with seven group sessions. The idea is to begin with an account of the whole life of the participants which is created during the individual interviews and to subsequently zoom into specific aspects which are discussed in the group sessions. So, the intervention begins with an individual biographic narrative interview in which the interviewer does not interrupt. In the second phase of the interview, the interviewer asks clarifying questions about the initial biographic narration, which resulted in "detailed and emotionally illustrated situation accounts which should facilitate identity shaping" (p. 444). The group sessions were mostly based on the second phase of the individual interviews. Themes from the participants' interviews were extracted so that they were relevant for all group members. These themes (e.g. health, leisure time) were discussed in the group with respect to past, present and future and a revision of the participants' self-concepts. It should be noted that the ten-week intervention begins with an individual interview and in the following weeks offers individual interviews and group sessions at parallel (i.e. both in the same week), with two weeks "off" to provide room for the integration of the new insights. In weeks four, seven and eight, only group meetings take place. So in practice, the intervention moves back and forth from whole life perspectives to a concentration on specific aspects.

Another intervention which moves back and forth between specific and general is the life-design intervention of Maree and Twigge (2016). The design of the whole life is regarded

with a focus on career. The intervention begins with a definition of the problem the participants face regarding their career choices and the goal they want to achieve with the help of the intervention. In the second session, the primary domains of the participants (i. e. family, school, community/society, tertiary training institution, work-life contexts) are taken into account, which widens the perspective. The self-concept is linked to a preferred occupation and a life slogan is developed to inspire the following chapter in the participants' life story. In the third session, the perspective is broadened even more by locating the individual in a timeline starting at the beginning of human evolution and expanding to the future and expectable problems (e.g. socio-cultural and ecological crises). The aim of this practice is to provide the participants with a sense of meaning of their lives that takes into account their own needs and the (future) greater good and needs of humankind. In the following fourth session, the focus zoomed in back to the individual career story. However, having regarded the greater context is supposed to having resulted in a clearer sense of a relational moral self, so that the new career story involves both personal and social meaning. The fifth session is spent on negotiating concrete steps which the participants can do to actualize their career story. Lastly, there is a follow up meeting to monitor individual progress. During the whole intervention, participants are asked to journal about their experience to give them more opportunities to gather insight, identify life themes and construct a more coherent and meaningful story and identity.

Zang et al. (2014) combine the focus on longer periods and specific events in a straight and linear fashion. Their intervention for trauma victims begins with an introductive and psycho-educative session, before the narrative practice starts in session two. The participants narrate their lifeline beginning by birth and continuing up to the first traumatic event. In the following one or more sessions (depending on the condition to which the participants belong in the study), the narratives are read and continued up to the following traumatic event if needed. The last session was spent on rereading and signing the narrative. Zang et al. (2014) focus on the tension between coherence and disruption by contrasting coherent life narrations with the disruptive trauma experience. Through this narrative practice, the traumatic event can be integrated into the coherence of the whole life story. Zang et al.'s (2014) intervention takes a straight road through the whole life while pausing at specific traumatic events. This contrasts with the zooming in and out in Corsten et al.'s and Maree and Twigge's (2014) interventions.

In conclusion, the main difference among the theme-based interventions seems to be whether they specifically ask about one event, a series or cluster of events, or if they openly

ask the participants to narrate their lives and the participants themselves choose what they want to narrate. These approaches can be combined in a linear or a "zooming-in-and-out" manner.

3.3.2 Form-based interventions

Other interventions (*n*=7) inspired narratives by setting out a *structure* or a *form*. The forms can be visual/tangible, or they are text forms.

Mosek and Gilboa (2016) employ different *visual structures* to inspire reflection on meaning and identity. The use of these structures is embedded in a more extensive intervention in which these form-based methods are used repeatedly. The 13-session intervention begins with an introductory meeting in which the participants get to know each other and set up a group contract. In the second meeting, it is continued to establish the group as a safe place, and the first form-based exercise is done, the "Tree of Life": Participants are asked to narrate achievements, positive turning points and different sources of support, which are represented in the form of a tree. In this way, a formal structure (tree) is the basis for the reflection on and arrangement of themes (i.e., a stem with branches). The third session uses the second formal structure, the "Basic Ph model": the participants are invited to map their coping strategies along six channels (belief systems, affective means, social interaction, imagination, cognition, physiology). The "Basic Ph model" is applied by using "Persona" cards and writing a "6 part story" (how this is precisely done is not specified in the article). The persona cards are presented which is followed by a group discussion. The fourth session is about strengthening the group through interpersonal interaction in the form of art and drama, before the "Basic Ph model" is taken up again in session five and explored in "intermodal work" (p. 6, not further specified). The following two sessions six and seven are devoted to art and drama and the further clarification of the subjects that have arisen. In session eight, participants explore their personal group and individual strengths and vulnerabilities by discussing the artefacts they have made and their "Basic Ph model". Sessions nine and ten again see the production of art and dynamic discourse about it. Each group member is invited to create a personal metaphor for their experiences in the group. Sessions eleven and twelve are used to evaluate the development of personal and group strengths and resilience by referring back to the "Basic Ph model". Additionally, the participants create a "Mandala of the self". It consists of five parts which again are related to themes (the creative artist, work-related abilities and skills, inner guide, vulnerabilities, and at the center beliefs). The form of the mandala illustrates the relatedness of the complementing

thematic components. The thirteenth meeting is a farewell meeting in which all the created artefacts are observed and the group process is reflected. In sum, Mosek and Gilboa's (2016) describe an extensive intervention in which the use of predetermined inspirational forms is combined with freer forms of art and dynamic group discussions about the products and processes.

Other interventions use *text forms* as opposed to visual/tangible forms as the bases of the narratives. One possibility is to use a traditional narrative formal structure, namely that of archetypal fairy tales (Ruini et al, 2014). During the first five of the seven sessions, lectures are given about different kinds of fairy tales and their specific topics. "Session 1: 'The heroine in traditional fairy tales': Female role models. Session 2: 'The charming prince in traditional fairy tales': male role models. Session 3: 'Cinderella's revenge': how to discover and use inner resources inside every woman. Session 4: 'Things Walt Disney never told us' (named after Stones [1975] article): less popular fairy tales and their symbolic meaning. Session 5: 'Happily ever after?': the couple in fairy tales." (p. 4). The lectures involved group discussions on the basis of themes that were extracted from the fairy tales, namely "age and gender related conflicts and tensions among characters, the ability to cope with adversities and stressful situations, the use of inner resources and personal strengths, couple and family dynamics, the importance of cooperation (asking for and accepting help), and the role of helpers and magical gifts" (p. 4). Hence, similarly to Mosek and Gilboa's (2016) intervention, a formal structure is used to inspire a discussion about different themes. During the last two sessions, the participants write their own fairy tales after a predetermined structure consisting of six main phases: initial stressful event, test, tasks, help, fight, victory, final reward (p. 5). In this way, the narratives get a typical structure of stories of redemption, in which initial problems are successfully overcome and the protagonist achieves more wisdom and maturity (McAdams, 2013). The first fairy tale is to have a female protagonist, the second fairy tale has a male protagonist. Since the fairy tales lay the focus on what the protagonists *do* instead of their inner psychology, the participants work together to additionally define a set of values which drives the protagonists. The goal of the intervention is to foster the participants' personal growth, so within a cognitive-behavioural framework special focus is laid on the emotional maturation of the protagonists through their experiences in the fairy tales.

Wang et al. (2017) use the structure of a different text form, namely that of a letter. This practice is embedded in a four-session intervention about mindful agency and positive learning dispositions for emerging adults. The first session introduces these subjects and explores the students' values and attitudes towards learning. The second session is devoted to

the theory and practice of mindfulness. In the third session, different narrative practices are employed. After a discussion about storytelling and narrative psychology, participants are asked to write a letter to themselves in ten years so that they "cultivate a sense of goal, aspiration and hope" (p. 4). After this personal narrative, the participants work in pairs narrate stories of the self (not specified more closely) and work together as a group to create a narrative of "A journey to the West" (the intervention was held in China). The fourth and last meeting is used for review and for fostering and tracking the participants' progress. Wang et al.'s (2017) intervention combine mindfulness with narrative practices to foster the development of the students' identities as learners.

Yet another text form with the opposite timely direction is used in Yu and Wright. (2015). Here, young professionals are invited to write their own "career eulogy" (p. 791) and reflect on what they want to be remembered for. The exercise is one part of a two-week program for medical students which aims to enhance professional competencies and especially physician-patient communication. The exercise itself begins with a 30-minute introduction about the origin of the exercise, namely the book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" (Covey, 1989). Furthermore, the participants are informed that they will share their speeches in a small group (six to seven people) and they receive a one-page instruction. Then the participants have one hour to write their eulogy. This entails that they determine who would hold the eulogy (in contrast to the letter in Wang et al.'s (2017) intervention, sender and receiver are not identical), how many years in the future it would take place, and, of course, what would be said. On the last day of the training, one hour was planned for the reading of the eulogies and a discussion. The discussion was led by a facilitator and covered "common themes, the process of writing the speech, and ways to use this technique further" (p. 791) to continue "reflecting forward (p. 791) and foster "professional identity development" (p. 791).

A third text structure that is used is the metaphor. Chow (2015) introduces the "train metaphor" and invites participants to narrate their experience with stroke along different stations and railway lines. Her intervention is divided into six steps. Step one is called "Beginning from a Concord train station" (p. 319). It consists of the creation of a mutual starting point for the whole group including the therapist. Step two is called "Unfolding the experience with stroke: where you are coming from" (p. 319). The main goal is to lead "externalising conversations" (p. 319) in the group to objectify the experience and to enable the participants to look at their experience from a greater distance. The core idea of externalisation is that not the person is the problem, but the problem is the problem (White &

Epston, 1990). Themes which are covered are "the effects of stroke, giving a name to stroke, giving names to the station that symbolises stroke, giving a collective name to the group experience" (p. 319). Step three is called "intimate dialoguing directly with stroke" (p. 320), which is still aimed at externalising the experience of stroke from the individuals. In this step, the stroke is personified by the facilitator, so participants can interact with "stroke" in role play and re-establish their personal agency. Step four is called "co-constructing the train carriage" (p. 320). It starts from the idea that participants want to improve their lives, i.e. leave the "Tunnel of despair" (p. 320) in their "carriages", which represent their "beliefs, qualities, abilities, purposes and commitments" (p. 321). The participants have discussions in which they re-author and co-construct their stories, thereby referring to their "landscape of action" (p. 321), i.e. the participants' coping measures, and the "landscape of identity", i.e. their "commitments, principles, hopes, values, and purposes, which might have led to their past actions" (p. 321). The aim is that by reflecting on these themes in the group and thinking about alternatives, the participants further enhance their personal agency and gain new perspectives so that they can re-author their stroke experience. The fifth step is called "planning for a future life journey" (p. 322) and involves a continuation of the re-authoring process to set the course for a positive future. The facilitator asks re-authoring questions to inspire contemplation on goals and ways to get there. As an example, the facilitator may ask what the participants want. If the answer is "health", she may go on and ask what the participant can do to reach that goal (thus referring to the landscape of action) and why they want to be healthy (referring to the landscape of identity). The goal is to motivate the participants for change, thereby giving their narratives a new direction. A second aspect of the fifth session is the visit of the significant others of the participants. The loved ones serve as "outsider witnesses" (p. 322) who can give feedback about the participants' processes. Furthermore, they offer a possibility to widen the perspective and to validate the re-authored stories of the participants. The final step six is called "celebrating the grand opening of a new railway line" (p. 323). It consists of a definitional ceremony to consolidate and celebrate the process from a problem-saturated to a more positive story, and to inaugurate the "new railway line" into the future. The participants receive a portfolio with documents about the milestones of their journeys.

       There is also a borderline case for which it is difficult to determine whether it tends to the content- or form- side. The elicited narratives do have formal constraints, but the participants have much freedom to adjust these constraints to their individual thematic priorities. The intervention in the form of a weekend workshop works with the Buddhist

"Mustard Seed Story" and poems (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). The first evening is planned for three hours and consists of several steps. The session begins with a welcome by the facilitators (two clinical psychologists and one Zen monk). The participants take place in a circle and hold two minutes of silence together. After that, a one-page poem about love and loss is read aloud by one of the facilitators and one group member. Copies of the poem are handed out to everybody. After the reading, the participants have 10 minutes to write down their thoughts and impressions. A group discussion of 15 minutes follows about the different perspectives on the themes, love, loss and attachment. Then, the monk and one of the psychologists tell the "Mustard Seed Story", a traditional Buddhist about a young woman suffering from the loss of her baby. The Buddha told her to visit the houses in the area and to collect mustard seeds, but only from houses in which no one has died. She experiences that in every house the people suffer or have suffered from the loss of a loved one. After hearing the story twice, participants form dyads with members they do not already know. Each partner has ten minutes to tell about his own loss or unwelcome change, the other writes notes. After both have told their stories, the dyads come together in groups of about 20 people. Two dyads begin and tell the story of the respective other. This practice aims at creating an "empathic objectivity" (p. 267) while also providing containment of the emotional content. The last step on the first evening consists of the participants writing their first of two "Virtual Dream Stories". These are the central narratives of the intervention and make use of formal constraints while providing room for individual adaptation. Dream stories are "short, imaginative narratives that are written in a brief period of 8 to 10 min to mitigate self-critique and to facilitate spontaneous and intuitive process" (p. 267). This practice tries to evoke non-rational and symbolic thought. For this context, the participants are instructed to choose six to eight words from the poem that was read at the beginning, and to use them in their story. Furthermore, their story has to contain the phrase "a door closes". After eight minutes of writing, the participants from groups of three and at least two participants read their Virtual Dream Story. Even though these stories are imaginative, they usually contain personal, autobiographic contemplations, too. At the end, the participants come together in the plenary again, where some stories are read and the facilitators share their observations about the stories, e.g. regarding the perspective, the portrayed relationships and emotional content.

The second day of the workshop begins again with a mindfulness meditation. Then a second poem is read, this time about the themes vitality and preciousness of life. Like on the first evening, the reading is followed by journaling and a short discussion. It follows a Buddhist Dharma lesson about the "marks of existence" (p. 268) as taught by the Buddha.

These say that suffering is an inevitable part of life, that everybody is subject to constant change, and that everybody is connected with the universe. In an interactive process, it is worked out that humans construct and make sense of their lives by giving them a narrative structure, but this structure is constantly challenged by unwelcome change. As a result, previous world views are shattered, and the new experience needs to be accommodated in a new process of sense making. This sense making involves benefit finding and identity reconstruction. Following this Dharma lesson, the participants write their second Virtual Dream Story. This time, the instructions are that the Virtual Dream Story should contain six to eight words from the second poem and the phrase "a door opens". The stories are shared with each other in the same ways as the evening before. Then, the group is led through another mindfulness meditation. After that, the group members meet in pairs and tell the respective other in which way they would like to change. The workshop is closed by the facilitators emphasising the importance of fostering a sense of vitality in life and by another two minutes of silence.

This intervention has a spiritual background but does not assume that the participants are Buddhist or are familiar with Buddhist teachings. It is theme-based in that the poems are selected according to the themes which they cover, and it can be argues that it works with formal constraints in that the participants' Virtual Dream Stories need to contain specifies words and phrases.

In short, the form-based interventions can employ visual/tangible or more abstract textual forms. While these are certainly two different kinds of "forms", they serve the same purpose of inspiring, guiding and structuring the narratives.

3.3.3 Activity-based interventions

A third subgroup (*n*=4) are interventions work with *activities* through which meaning and identity can be reflected.

The eight-session intervention for people with depression by Seo et al. (2015) is built along a series of activities in a specified order. The first meeting is used to introduce the programme and to get to know each other. In the second meeting, the participants examine their problems and break them down into different aspects such as their consequences and influences. The third meeting is about the externalisation of the problems, the differentiation of the problem and the person (White & Epston, 1990; compare to Chow, 2015). The fourth meeting is under the heading "exploring unique outcomes". What is meant is that the participants are invited to focus on positive memories and personal stories, in which they were

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not as affected by problems as now. The fifth session aims to support the participants in the construction of an alternative story. Their feelings are validated but also reframed, so that new perspectives emerge. In the sixth meeting, the process is continued and the participants create new life stories which focus on precious things in their lives now but also on their goals and dreams for the future. The last two sessions are spent on the integration and closing of the process. In the seventh session, a definitional ceremony takes place in which the participants tell each other their stories and validate each other. The eighth and last session is used for an evaluation of the whole programme and the participants' developments and outcomes. This intervention is structured along what the participants do per session while not specifying the topics. The participants can choose for themselves what they want to bring in as "problems" or "precious things".

Märtsin (2017) puts a different kind of activity at the heart of her intervention, namely the drawing of a line representing one's past year. This activity is part of a larger, about one year long intervention for migrating emerging adults who live between two cultures. The aim is to clarify how they make sense of their identities against a multicultural background. In the whole intervention, the timeline is accompanied by focus groups and three semi-structured individual interviews and a questionnaire. The drawing task takes place during the third interview. The timeline is specifically used to examine the participants' perspectives on their experiences and turning points during the year of the intervention. The participants draw a timeline where positive events are pictured by mountains and negative life events are depicted as valleys. Participants could comment while they were drawing or afterwards.

The activity-based interventions ask their participants to *do* something in order to inspire reflection and narration. Of course, the participants are asked to do things also in other interventions. For example, in Keisari and Palgi's (2017) intervention, the participants perform role plays and reflect on their themes along the way. This intervention might be a borderline case, but it was subsumed under "content based" because the role plays come later in the process and draw on the thematically identified life-crossroads. However, activities are often combined with other techniques, as will be illustrated in the following section about mixed-methods interventions.

3.3.4 Interventions using mixed methods

Two interventions use two or more of the above describes methods equally.

Stock et al.'s (2012) intervention is equally content-based and activity-based. With their intervention they intend to improve the relationship between their parent-and-child

participants from an Aboriginal background. They use a parent-only and a parent-and-child group to achieve this aim. In the parents' group, a focus of discussion is, in fact, the children and their relationship, but all other topics – everyday life, common activities, difficulties – are also welcome. In both the parents' group and the parent-and-child group, the participants begin by sitting on the floor in a circle and every participant tells something about him/herself. Afterwards, these narrations are complemented by the activity of drawing. Stock et al. (2012) argue that drawing is a central part of Aboriginal culture and takes place naturally in many Aboriginal families. Furthermore, "drawing is a practical and enacted form of externalization" (p. 161). In the parent-and-child group, the sessions also begin by sitting in a circle. In a kind of game format, a ball is passed between the participants, and the one holding it may tell something about themselves and their experiences. Afterwards, drawing also plays an important role, because it seems suitable especially for children. The parents and children even create a book together containing drawings, photographs and stories of what is important to them at the moment. This intervention is not meant to work through a certain theme or to come to terms with a significant event. It is more about having a good time and improving the bond between people. This might explain why every input of the participants is valued and more emphasis is laid on a appreciative atmosphere.

A special case is the intervention by Fraenkel et al (2009) because it involves all three methods: theme-based, form-based and activity based. It is directed at homeless people and offers a variety of techniques and exercises without a specific order. Concerning theme-based exercises, the intervention involves a number of different occasions for narration. Participants are invited to envision preferred narratives of the present and future, for example, with regard to their dream job and work goals. Furthermore, they are invited to tell about their situation as homeless people (including the externalization of homelessness as opposed to a personal culpable failure), but also about their strengths and things they are proud of ("Stories of Pride"). Concerning form, the intervention contains both exercises based on text forms and visual forms. The first text form exercise is to write a "Guide to surviving and thriving in the shelter". The participants are invited to write a guidebook which can be handed down to the next generation. This appeals to the fact that the participants have wisdom and skills which are reflected and collected in the form of a guide book. Another text formal exercise is that the participants write a "letter to the future" in which they write to themselves in two years how they imagine their life would look like. The first visual forms which are used as the bases for meaning-eliciting exercises is the "family work tree", which is a genogram centred on their older relatives' work histories. One possible result of this is that the participants make

contact with their families again. A form that is directed at the future of the family is the "family timeline". Every family member makes a timeline with their future plans and activities, so it becomes visible when conflicts may arise and when the family will have to consciously spend their time and energy due to overlapping activities. The intervention involves many activity-based exercises, too. This may be in the form of a game, such as the "Challenges and coping card sort game". Cards with challenges are sorted according to whether these challenges pose a problem, a manageable problem or no problem at all. The cards can also be used in a kind of game show format involving the question "What's my challenge?" in which parents try to guess their children's worries so that mutual understanding is fostered. Another activity is the "Challenges and coping collage/mobile". This is a shorter variant of the card sort and involves participants making collages or mobiles of cards representing their challenges and coping resources. A related exercise entails taking photos of challenges and coping, where participants take photos of their challenges, dreams and resources. "Masks of fear" is an activity directed at women who suffered from domestic violence and who now sabotage themselves at betting back on their feet. They create masks of fear, that is, in fact, masks that they wear to hide their fear. They put on their masks to discuss openly in a group about their fears. More art- and activity related exercises are that the participants share music that helps them to feel better with the group, and that they create a dramatic performance of homelessness and dreams for the future. Fraenkel et al.'s (2009) is a cornucopia of exercises around homelessness.

Stock et al. (2012) and Fraenkel et al (2009) have created interventions with looser structures and various methods. Interestingly, both interventions have a socio-pedagogic aim and intend to improve the participants' social situations. Specific themes do play a role, but the overall goal is to enable the participants to recover the agency of their lives and to reach their goals.

3.3.5 Conclusion

It is striking how variable the interventions are in the use of their methods. The content-based interventions differ regarding the breadth of their scope (one moment vs. whole life) and also the way they move through time (linear vs. back-and-forth/zooming in and out). The form-based interventions either use visual or palpable structures (e.g. a tree), or more abstract literary forms (e.g. letter, eulogy). The activity-based interventions may involve concrete games or the making of artefacts, or they are created around more abstract activities in the form of goals that should be reached per session (e.g. "exploration of unique outcomes",

"construction of alternative story" in Seo et al., 2015). One dynamic which appears cross-methods is the tension between integration and externalisation: problems and stressful events are externalised from the person, and then integrated back into a coherent narrative. Another technique which appears across methods is the creation of a title of the narrative, perhaps in the form of a metaphor (Barbosa, 2014; Chow, 2015). It seems fitting that a narrative should have a title, but what also seems to be achieved is that the participants have a greater feeling that "things make sense", that they stand under a comprehensive motto which rounds things up.

It appears that there are multiple ways to design interventions about meaning and identity or – the other way round – that meaning and identity are constructs so complex that they require a variety of methods so that as many facets as possible can be covered.

3.4 Subquestion IV: Elaboration on the methods: Which perspectives on time are taken?
As presented above, meaning and identity refer to past, present and future. Accordingly, the interventions which address meaning and identity also choose a perspective on time. Grouping the interventions according to their perspectives on time is a different way of assessing their methods, because different time perspectives enable collection and re-authoring of memories (past), an exploration of and play with options (present), and/or building and creation (future). Again, these dimensions cannot be fully separated but remain to exist in a mutual field.

3.4.1 Focus on the past: collection, re-authoring and habituation
Five interventions can be said to focus on the past. One way is by creating an inventory of the past. One part of Mosek & Gilboa's (2016) intervention can be regarded as a collection exercise, namely the "Tree of Life", in which elements of a tree represent elements of the participants' lives so far. Märtsin (2018) uses a different visual approach, namely the timeline as a depiction of the ups and downs of (a part of one's) life so far. This method of collection invited participants to view their life as progressing linearly (Märtsin, 2018).

Sometimes, the goal is not just to create an inventory, but also to re-author the narratives if needed. Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) have designed a life-review intervention in which the participants of 55+ years tell stories about their lives around different themes (see above). However, the facilitator of the intervention encourages "thick" stories and the reconstruction of negative stories (p. 641). So, the intervention focuses on recollection but may involve re-authoring if the original story is overly negative or if the original narratives

seem too shallow (Bohlmeijer et al, 2008). Below, another life review intervention (Keisari & Palgi, 2017) will be presented, in which the re-authoring and futuring trajectories play a greater role.

There are two interventions targeted at trauma victims, which collect trauma stories not so much to re-write them, but to process them. One is the "House of Stories" (Rousseau et al., 2014), in which participants contribute a trauma story or artefact (their own or even a fictional one to which they can relate). These trauma representations are exhibited in a room – the "House of Stories". The participants have time to take the exhibits in and to choose two or three to discuss in the group. The "House of Stories" offers a way to approach and reflect on trauma in a safe group context. The other trauma intervention (Zang et al. 2014) is meant for Chinese earthquake survivors. As a variant of narrative exposure therapy, participants narrate their lives up to the traumatic event with the goal of emotion habituation (p. 4).

In conclusion, the interventions pursue different goals by collecting narratives: the narratives can be simply validated as they are, if the narratives are negative, they can be processed so that the participants get used to them, or it can be tried to shed a new light on the memories, thereby re-authoring the narratives.

3.4.2 Focus on the present: playing with possibilities in the here and now

In some interventions (n=4), different possibilities are employed to inspire playing around with options for meaning and identity in the here and now.

One possibility to actualise meaning and identity in the present is drama. One example is the "Multiple Self Awareness Group" (Sewell et al., 1998). Participants identify their multiple selves (admittedly though biographical, i.e., past-related, reflections) and anthropomorphise them. These personifications of the selves interact in theatre-roleplays, so that the selves can be clarified and elaborated. The elaboration takes part in the here and now and relates to general, abstract insight rather than a linear timeline.

Emotions can only be felt in the here and now, so it appears suitable that the Narrative Therapy with an Emotional Approach (NTEA) is rooted in the present. The NTEA intervention (Seo et al, 2015) seems to focus on the present with small sidesteps to the past (i.e. remembering a time less affected by problems) and future (i.e. projections of goals and dreams). The main focus lies on working with present problems and constructing alternative stories of their problems.

A variant of the concentration on the present might be the creation of an abstract, "timeless" realm. Ruini et al. (2014) use a fairy-tale structure to inspire participants to write

two different stories with two different protagonists based on value-driven actions. Because of the abstract, archetypical nature of the fairy tale, the narratives seem to be abstracted from the progression of time and to exist in a timeless realm which expresses itself in the here and now of the present. Similarly, in Neimeyer & Young Eisendrath's (2015) intervention, participants write two different stories ("a door closes" and "a door opens") based on a number of words from poems. Also here, variations on different themes are explored in the present without an explicit relation to past or present. In the same vein, this intervention employs mindfulness, i.e. being present in the here and now without judgement. So, being present in the present is cultivated in this intervention.

Thus, interventions with a focus on the present intend to let their participants feel and experience whatever comes up in the here and now. Sometimes this is combined with a playful exploration of options and perspectives.

3.4.3 Focus on the future: building and creation

Other interventions (*n*=3) focus on building narratives of a positive future. Maree & Twigge's (2016) intervention is designed to help emerging adults to design their life, thereby focusing on career choices. The career stories are based on values as they have become apparent in the participants' past and present, but the goal is to create a vision of their future occupation and to take steps to approach this future. A second intervention directed at emerging adults comes from Wang et al. (2017). It focuses on the participants' learning engagement and the establishment of mindful agency in their lives. The third intervention for emerging adults addresses medical students and intends to support them to reflect on their development as professionals (Yu & Wright, 2015). The intervention is based on Corvey's (1989) suggestion of "beginning with the end in mind", which fosters reflection on values as motivation for action, instead of short-sighted reactivity to the daily hassles (p. 790). Even though the intervention aims at the participants' future, the exercise itself consists of looking back to the present from a point of time in an anticipated future.

In principle, every intervention aims at improving the future, but the abovementioned three interventions explicitly want to give the participants the tools to create a future which suits them. Interestingly, all of them centre around education and career issues, while other foci (e.g. health, social relations, personal growth) would also be possible.

3.4.4 Involvement of all three: past, present and future

There are also interventions (*n*=6) which address past, present and future. An intervention for people with complicated grief (Barbosa et al., 2014) involves reminiscing the most significant episode of loss in the past, recovering a sense of authorship and playing with the assignment of meaning through metaphors in the present and projecting into a meaningful future (p. 355). Chow (2015) employs her train metaphor to inspire reflection on the starting point, the present station and the destination of the participants' lives. Corsten et al. (2014) spend five sessions on individual biographic interviews on the past, but lay emphasis on dealing with the past, present and future during seven group meetings (p. 445). Fraenkel et al. (2009) have designed an extensive intervention for homeless families with a lot of elements. In short, the participants are invited to think about which circumstances made them homeless in the past, but also which moments of pride have happened in the past. Moreover, they reflect on the severity of their problems at present and are in many ways invited to anticipate a positive future through future-projecting exercises like "The dream job" and "Write a letter to the future". The reflections on past, present and future are integrated into a timeline. Keisari and Palgi (2017) centre their intervention around life-crossroads, i.e. central and influential decisions or changes. The life-crossroads narratives are collected and processed (past), actualised in the here and now through theatre role plays (present, cf. Sewell et al., 1998), and finally the life-crossroads are projected into the future in order to strengthen the sense of purpose and meaning in life (p. 1083). As said, Stock et al. (2012) do not specify which themes should be discussed, so everything from past, present and future is welcome.

Since meaning and identity are linked to past, present and future, it is not surprising that relatively many interventions regard all three equally. Whereas the interventions focusing on the future had one common theme, the intervention in this group are again very diverse, which correspond with the all-embracing perspective on time.

3.4.5 Conclusion

Meaning and identity cannot be regarded independent of time and consequently, all interventions incorporate a perspective on time. The perspectives correspond to the point in time where the participants are at: life reviews about the past enhance the well-being of the elderly, whereas future design and future projections are at the heart of interventions for emerging adults. However, also intervention for the elderly are meant to change their futures, and interventions for emerging adults also take into account the participants' past experiences and acquired values. The present has a more elusive nature. Once you pin it down, it is

already gone. Therefore, interventions which deal with the present regularly involve mindfulness – being in the moment without judgement – or they actualise meaning and identity in the form of performances (i.e. dramatic roleplays). However, even though the interventions have different foci on past, present and future, none of them can totally exclude one of the three.

3.5 Subquestion V: Elaboration on the objectives: Which aspects of meaning and identity are addressed?

To further elaborate on the objectives, it will be described which aspects of meaning and/or identity are addressed in the interventions. As illustrated in the introduction, meaning is a complex construct. It appears that the most validated and comprehensive conceptualisation at present is to regard meaning as comprising the three dimensions coherence, significance and purpose (Martela & Steger, 2016). These dimensions will serve as the basis for the upcoming analysis, while it will be referred to some important related antecedents and consequences of meaning (e.g., well-being, social connectedness and self-worth) where suitable.

As described in the introduction, identity can be conceived as personal, relational or collective, uniform or manifold, stable or fluid (Vignoles et al., 2011). However, the authors of the articles usually do not explicate how they view meaning and identity in their interventions. Yet, in the following it will be tried to identify their respective implicit foci on meaning and identity.

3.5.1 Aspects of meaning

3.5.1.1 Coherence

One aspect of meaning which is addressed very often (*n*=11) is coherence. It appears that there are three main different ways in which coherence plays a role and which are not mutually exclusive, namely first the stabilisation or rebuilding of coherence, second the correction or reformation of coherence, and third the flexibilisation of coherence.

The first is the stabilisation and rebuilding of coherence when it is absent or damaged. It may be that a traumatic experience has disrupted a sense of coherence and predictability in life (Rousseau et al., 2014; Zang et al., 2014), the loss of a loved one (Barbosa et al., 2014; Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015) or the loss of physical health (Chow, 2015). Coherence is recreated by the integration of the disrupting event in the life narrative, e.g. through sense-making and acceptance (see 3.3). Since all of these are group interventions, they have the option to integrate social connectedness as an antecedent to a sense of meaning. However,

some interventions focus more on the process of narration (Barbosa et al., 2014; Zang et al., 2014). Others explicitly make use of the group as a source of social connectedness. As an example, in Rousseau et al.'s (2014) intervention, it is the goal to be able to contain the narratives in a supportive group while not trying to change them. Participants can talk about trauma in a safe and caring social environment. So, the social connectedness of the group and the understanding between and support of the group members is a crucial factor of the intervention. Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath (2015) and Chow (2015) equally focus on the narratives and on social support, either by forming different groups of participants (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015) or by involving the participants' loved ones in the intervention (Chow, 2015). It seems that social connectedness is a valuable tool to heal the disruption of the life narrative, thereby re-establishing coherence as one dimension of meaning.

A second possibility is that there is an existing negative coherence, i.e. that problems or failures are already integrated into a coherent narrative of life, but in a negative way which is not conducive to well-being. Interestingly, the three interventions in this group are targeted at participants with symptoms of depression which might be linked to this sort of narratives with a negative spin. So, the interventions aim at reauthoring negative coherence into a more positive narrative by emphasising positive aspects or re-interpreting negative aspects of life (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Seo et al., 2015). The goal is to increase the participants' well-being through a new positive coherence (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Seo et al., 2015). Well-being has indeed been shown to be a potential consequence of increasing a sense of meaning (Liao & Weng, 2018).

A third perspective is that the goal is not a stable coherence, but rather the interventions involve playing with relative possibilities and flexible coherence*s* (sic!), which corresponds with postmodern relativism (Barbosa et al., 2014; Märtsin, 2017, Rousseau et al., 2014, Ruini et al., 2014). Here, the narrative approach itself plays out its unique strengths: narratives are never objectively true or false and they can be adjusted to make them more beneficial for the individual. In these interventions, narratives are formed and reformed so that their flexible character becomes more obvious. That gives the participants a chance to renegotiate their view on life's coherence*s*.

In short, from the interventions it can be inferred that the re-building of coherence can be achieved through acceptance and social connectedness, the re-formation of coherence especially fosters well-being, and the play with indeterminate coherences is in line with the narrative and postmodern paradigms.

3.5.1.2 Purpose

Purpose plays a role in six interventions, either aimed at the elderly and involve the reformation of purpose, or at emerging adults and involve the building of purpose.

The first type of intervention addresses purpose in older age or after experiences of losses. During these life-transitions, people often lose their former purposes and must adapt them (Barbosa et al., 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Chow, 2015). This involves having to reconcile with the past and finding new goals for the future, which has been cited as facets of meaning (Krause & Hayward, 2014) but they may also be antecedents for purpose.

As mentioned above, the second way in which purpose is addressed is in a developmental, professional context where the target groups are younger (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Mosek & Gilboa, 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015). The goal is for emerging adults to envision a professional future which would make their lives worthwhile (i.e. significant). To achieve this, the interventions refer to aspects like values, striving for goals, accomplishment, self-efficacy and positive self-worth. These concepts have been cited as facets of meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Krause & Hayward, 2014; Morgan & Farsides, 2009) or more recently as antecedents of meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016).

It seems as if the theme of purpose is most salient before or after middle adulthood, and the focus lies on letting go of the past and/or seizing the future.

3.5.1.3 Significance

Significance plays a role in seven interventions. They focus on the building of significance in three different ways, namely increasing significance in the present, the future or the spiritual realm.

The first way in which interventions intend to increase significance is by increasing self-worth and self-acceptance in the present (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Chow, 2015; Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Stock et al., 2012). These two concepts echo Baumeister's (1991) conceptualisation of meaning as a set of needs (i.e. the needs for purpose, values, self-efficacy and positive self-worth). It has been argued that these needs are actually antecedents of meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016). So, it seems reasonable to increase significance by increasing self-worth.

The second take on significance is to create the conditions under which significance can grow in the (professional) future (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015). This is done by strengthening the participants' sense of purpose, as will be described below. Martela and Steger (2016) have argued that purpose could indeed be "an

important source of significance" (p. 539). Therefore, it seems wise to link purpose and significance in interventions.

The third approach to significance is by taking a spiritual perspective and fostering the idea that the participants are connected with something larger than themselves (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016; Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). Here again, connectedness plays a role. This time, it is not the connectedness among people, but the connectedness between the individual and the greater context. The interventions illustrate that "belonging" can take place on (at least) two levels, the interpersonal level as illustrated under 3.5.1.1, and the belonging with something "larger than the self" (Martela & Steger, 2016, p. 540).

Thus, the interventions aim at increasing significance in the here and now through the enhancement of self-worth and self-acceptance, paving the way for significance in the future through a reflection of purpose, or enhancing significance by focusing on spiritual connectedness.

3.5.2 Aspects of identity

Personal identity is addressed in eleven interventions and in three different but again not mutually exclusive ways, namely personal, social and collective identity. It could be argued that "spiritual identity" could be a fourth subtype instead of subsuming it under personal identity (Marcia, 1966; Vignoles et al., 2011). Furthermore, as described in the introduction, the interventions regard identity as either one or multiple, stable or fluid, and in need of discovering or creating.

3.5.2.1 Personal identity

Personal identity is addressed in twelve interventions. Thereby, personal identity (like coherence) is subject to three different aims, namely first to stabilisation and clarification, second to reformation, third to flexibilisation.

The first way in which personal identity is addressed in interventions is that they aim at the clarification and stabilisation of personal identity (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Maree & Twigge, 2016; Sewell et al., 1998; Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015). The majority of the interventions of this type is targeted at emerging adults, which makes sense since in this phase, identity exploration and development are especially salient (Marcotte, 2009). The fact that the same interventions also aim at clarifying their participants purposes (see 3.5.1.3) may suggest that the development of purpose and personal identity work in conjunction, at least in emerging adulthood.

A second variant is the reformation of identity, which can take place either as the integration of missing links (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015; Wang et al., 2017) or as the opposite, namely the cleaning of unwanted aspects of identity (Chow, 2015; Fraenkel, 2009; Seo et al., 2015; Stock, et al., 2012). To give one example of the former, Wang et al. (2017) intend to integrate the concept of mindful agency into the identities of their emerging adult participants. More often, however, it is intended to externalise unwanted aspects of identity. This usually means that it is emphasised that the person is not identical with his/her problem in a process of externalisation (Chow, 2015; Fraenkel, 2009; Seo et al., 2015; Stock, et al., 2012).

The third kind of dealing with personal identity is to stress its multiplicity and flexibility in contrast to its stability (Sewell et al., 1998; Ruini, et al., 2014). One distinct example is Sewell et al. 's (1998) intervention, in which the various aspects of the participants' personal ident*ies* are epitomised as theatre roles which interact with each other on stage.

It is interesting to note that the threefold way in which personal identity is addressed in the interventions, is similar to the three ways in which coherence is addressed in the interventions. In both cases, it seems a choice needs to be made between stabilisation, reformation of what there is, or the flexible play with options.

3.5.2.2 Relational identity

The aspect of relational identity is present in six interventions and in three different contexts: family, professional life and an abstract realm of social identities. The goal is either a reformation or a flexibilisation of relational identity.

First, interventions deal with the participants' roles in social life and how social identities can be re-formed in different contexts (Corsten et al., 2014; Keisari & Palgi, 2017). One important context is family (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Stock et al., 2012). In fact, in Stock et al.'s intervention the actualisation of the roles of the parent-child-dyad stand central.

The second important context in which social roles are reflected is their reformation in professional life. Either, the intervention is targeted at professionals and their challenges (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016) or at future professionals and their development (Yu & Wright, 2015).

The third way in which social identity is negotiated is by stressing its very nature, namely the formation of social ident*ies* in interaction and dialogue with others and themselves (Sewell et al., 1998). Here, the multiplicity and openness of social selves is not

seen as pathologic but as a chance to coordinate the selves and stay flexible (Sewell et al., 1998).

Potentially, relational identity is actualised in many more contexts, such as friendships, sport clubs or voluntary work. Yet, the interventions focus on contexts which are most difficult to leave, like family or work life.

3.5.2.3 Collective identity

The third perspective on identity, collective identity, is explicated the least frequently (*n*=3) in the interventions It is involved either in the form of culturally sensitive intervention design or as a tool to widen the perspective.

First, Stock et al. (2012) have designed an intervention for the Aboriginal community in northern Australia. While the intervention focuses on the parent-child relationships, it is composed with cultural sensitivity for needs and challenges of the Aboriginal community. The cultural sensitivity is actualised through the use of drawings and oral narrations in the interventions, since both are a part of Aboriginal culture (Stock et al., 2012).

Second, two interventions remind the participants of their connectedness with humankind and consolidate their collective identity, so that they can view their lives from a wider perspective. To illustrate, Maree and Twigge (2016) want to support their emerging adults in making career choices. They are reminded that they are a part of humanity and human history to sharpen their participants' sense of purpose. It is pointed out that the common humanity brings with it a responsibility to solve current problems and to work for the future and greater good of humankind (Maree & Twigge, 2016). Moreover, Neimeyer and Young-Eisendrath (2015) remind their participants of their common humanity in the sense that every human being has been or will be affected by loss which can increase acceptance.

Collective identity can hardly be changed, so the interventions use it as an inspiration for their techniques (Stock et al., 2012) or emphasise it to inspire reflection from a more extensive perspective than just the individual.

3.5.2.4 Spiritual identity

It has been argued that spirituality is part of one's personal identity (Marcia, 1966; Vignoles et al., 2011). However, spirituality is here tentatively introduced as a category of its own, based on the intervention by Neimeyer and Young-Eisendrath (2015). The intervention has a Buddhist background, and the authors share the perspective that humans are fundamentally connected with one another and the universe (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). In this

way, spiritual identity permeates all three facets of identity, personal, social and collective. While this seems an interesting view, it should be emphasised again that this is an inference from just one intervention and it needs to be backed up substantially.

3.5.2.5 Identity: one or many, stable or fluid, discovered or created?

The occupation with the theme of identity has brought up a number of "either-or" questions, namely if one has one or many identities, if identities are stable or fluid, and if identities are discovered or created.

The question whether one has one or multiple identities has been explicitly answered by one intervention. Sewell et al. (1998) build their intervention around the conviction that people do have multiple identities. They point out that this view is often seen as pathological, to which they do not agree. With other interventions the authors' perspective is less clear. Regularly, the interventions pick one aspect of identity on which they focus. Examples are professional identity (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Mosek & Gilboa, 2016; Yu & Wright, 2015), identity as a somatic patient (Chow, 2015; Corsten et al., 2014), or identity as someone suffering from loss (Barbosa et al., 2014; Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). Other interventions take a broader stance and cover more aspects of identity, e.g. in the form of a whole life-review (Bohlmeijer et al, 2008), but they do not make explicit if they consider the sum of the aspects as a unity or plurality. However, what seems to be the case is that it is often regarded feasible to focus on a certain aspect or quality of identity instead of working with identity as a whole in a limited amount of time.

Concerning the question if identity is stable or fluid it might be concluded that the very fact that identity is a theme in interventions implicates that identity must have a certain amount of fluidity. If identity was fixed, the only thing interventions could do would be to describe them, whereas the interventions in this selection intend to help forming identity (especially Barbosa et al., 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2009; Maree & Twigge, 2016; Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015; Yu & Wright, 2015).

Yet another discussion on identity revolves around the question whether identity must be discovered or created. As said above, one important theoretical paradigm in which the interventions are embedded is constructionism (Nünning, 1998). So, it seems as if the interventions in this selection tend to lean towards the idea that identity must be created, yet based on the identity as it can be discovered at the moment. Therefore, reflections on the past frequently involve re-authoring instead of a pure collection of stories of identity (e.g. Barbosa et al., 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008). The play with identities in the present does involve an

inventory of goals, memories and traits, but still the resulting selves are constructions, sometimes even "extrapolated into a set of metaphoric selves in anthropomorphic form" (Sewell et al., 1998, p. 62). This goes beyond pure discovery. If the interventions focus on the future, it becomes perhaps the clearest that the interventions expect that identity is creatable (e.g. Wang et al., 2017; Yu & Wright, 2015).

3.5.3 Conclusion

It appears that all the dimensions of meaning and identity as they were described in the introduction can be found in the interventions, but not all of these dimensions will be found combined in one single intervention. Furthermore, important antecedents and consequences of meaning and identity could be found (e.g. social connectedness). This corroborates that meaning and identity are complex, multifaceted concepts which are related both with each other and other constructs. It seems that the authors of the interventions selected the aspects on which their interventions focus in order to reduce this complexity.

Integrating the findings from all research questions, further choices also need to be made regarding (combination of) the structures and elements of the interventions, the methods and their perspectives on time. Furthermore, the theoretical and practical backgrounds also need to be included in the choices, since it is expectable that a psychotherapeutic intervention for participants with depression would be different from a socio-pedagogic intervention for minorities.

In the discussion, it will be reflected on the ways in which the findings can be related to the theory of meaning and identity, and also what the findings may reveal about the practical choices for intervention design.

4 Discussion

This review has presented very diverse interventions about meaning and identity. This diversity may be explained by the fact that meaning and identity are relevant for everybody's lives and in many different contexts. The interventions illustrate that meaning and identity are fruitful concepts in CBT, humanistic psychology and psychodynamic psychology, as well as socio-pedagogy and professional development. The target groups of the interventions differ: people with depressive symptoms, homeless people, ethnic minorities, emerging adults and simply people with an interest in psychological topics and individual growth.

The goal of this review was to examine the composition, elements, methods and objectives of narrative group interventions which deal with the broad concepts of meaning

and identity. In this sense, it is a design study which serves both a theoretical and practical purpose (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). From a theoretical perspective, it will be tried to explain the findings in the light of the theoretical conceptualisations of meaning and identity and to suggest what the findings may teach about the theory of meaning and identity. From a practical perspective, it will be examined what the findings teach about the possibilities of construction interventions about meaning and identity.

4.1 The theoretical perspective

From a scientific view, meaning and identity are multifaceted concepts (Martela & Steger, 2016; Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). It is striking that the articles in this selection do not explicitly define meaning and identity or discuss which aspects of meaning and identity and their antecedents and consequences will be addressed in their interventions and why. So, the following theoretical considerations are based on the aspects of meaning and identity as identified by the reviewer, and not necessarily based on what is explicated in the selected articles.

4.1.1 Meaning and identity in postmodernism and constructivism

It was shown that the articles do get explicit about their theoretical backgrounds and practical contexts. Mostly, the interventions locate themselves in a postmodern and/or constructionist paradigm. This may seem curious because postmodernism poses a number of challenges to humans. Since the rise of postmodernism in the 1960's, humans have lost traditional guidelines in their lives. Before, the grand narratives of religion and enlightenment have provided people with definite sets of values and confidence in their ability to reason and to find "the" truth (Nünning, 1998). Now, the distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad are blurred, hierarchies are deconstructed, and eternal values are replaced by discourses (Nünning, 1998). This relativism can lead to a loss of orientation and a dissolving of meaning and identity, a "death of the self" (Neimeyer, Neimeyer & Lyddon, 1994). Foucault himself famously formulated that the individual (i.e. the subject) vanishes in the discourses like a "face in the sand" (Foucault, 1966). In this view, humans are no longer the centre of epistemology but always secondary to the procursive rules and standards of the dominant discourse (Nünning, 1998).

There seems to be a contradiction in postmodernism between "valuing identity as something so fundamental that it is crucial to personal well-being and collective action, and a theorization of 'identity' that sees it as something constructed, fluid, multiple, impermanent

and fragmentary" (Bendle, 2002, pp. 1-2). In other words, a dependable, reliable identity seems to be needed as a guide in times when people have so much freedom of choice, but at the same time the very existence of a reliable identity is put under the question.

However, the authors of the present articles stress that the individual does have the power to create an individual productive life narrative just because of the missing guidelines in postmodernism. Narrative psychology seems to be both a symptom and a cure of postmodernism: the objective truths are gone, long live the subjective narrative truths. Furthermore, the authors still assume that people can have strong values even in the face of relativism (Potgieter & Van der Walt, 2015) and an identity stable enough to provide security (Märtsin, 2010). Identity is formed in a back and forth movement of the individual's internalisation of the context and externalisation of the individual on the context. So, there is flux, but the individual plays a part in its creation. During this interactive process, the individual is engaged in sense-making: the signs which are integrated and sent are arranged in a network of meaningful relations, which Märtsin (2010) compares with carpet weaving. The result is a "fuzzy field of personal sense" (Märtsin, 2010, p. 438), which gives the individual the impression of sameness and continuity. In conclusion, meaning and identity are created in a mutual process. The stability of meaning and identity may be illusional or relative, but enough to provide the basis of everyday individual functioning. The interventions in this selection reflect this back-and-forth movement of "carpet weaving", since they encourage consolidation, reformation or flexibilisation of (aspects of) meaning and identity.

4.1.2 Dimensions of meaning

In the following, the appearance of the different dimensions of meaning and identity in the interventions will be related to the theoretical foundations as presented in the introduction.

Coherence seems to be the dimension of meaning which seems to lend itself perfectly to narrative interventions. One characteristic of narratives is that they are coherent, i.e. they lay connections between different experiences and events, thereby creating meaning on an individual level (Combs & Freedman, 2016; McAdams, 2011; Veglia & De Fini, 2017). Coherence has been described as the cognitive component of meaning (Leontiev, 2016; Reker & Wong, 2012). So, it makes sense that cognitive-behavioural interventions work on coherence (e.g. Bohlmeijer et al, 2009; Ruini, 2014). The examination, negotiation and restructuring of cognitions in the form of narrations represents the integration of cognitive and narrative therapeutically techniques.

In addition to the cognitive dimension, the interventions show that the link with emotions is close. A lack of a sense of coherence can result in depressive or PTSD symptoms (e.g. Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Zang et al, 2014). Consequently, an increase of a sense of coherence leads to fewer symptoms and more positive affect and well-being (Steger et al., 2009).

Furthermore, coherence has been described as value-neutral and descriptive as opposed to evaluative (Heintzelman & King, 2014). However, it can be argued that the interventions do not take a value-neutral stance on coherence, since they seem to assume that there are indeed better or worse coherences. Some interventions intend to support their participants in reforming their present sense of coherence by re-authoring their life narrative. Re-authoring can mean that new connections are laid between events, or that the protagonist takes a more agentic instead of a victimlike stance (e.g. Barbosa et al., 2014; Chow, 2015).

In sum, the theoretical assumptions on coherence are reflected in the interventions, but it seems useful to re-examine the nature of the link between coherence and emotions and to reconsider the value-related nature of coherence.

Purpose has been identified as the second dimension of meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016). In fact, the psychological reflections on purpose dates back to Frankl (1963), who to some extent equates meaning with purpose. Interestingly, purpose plays the most prominent role in interventions for emerging adults (e.g. Maree & Twigge, 2016) and the elderly (e.g. Bohlmeijer, 2008). It may be that these are times of important life transitions which make the reflection on purpose in life especially urgent. Emerging adults clarify their purposes to make the right decisions concerning their careers (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Lane, Leibert & Goka, Dubose, 2017; Maree & Twigge, 2016). In contrast, at an older age, people have to adapt to major transitions like bereavement, retirement and relocation which forces them to adjust their purposes (Vrkljan, Montpetit, Naglie, Rapoport & Mazer, 2018). Next to identifying the content of their purpose, the participants were also asked to determine the first practical steps in its direction (Maree & Twigge, 2016). In this way, the interventions reflect that purpose has both a content and a process dimension (Martela & Steger, 2016).

In sum, the theoretical considerations can be found in the interventions, the link between the search of a purpose in life and life transitions is a new aspect which comes forth.

Significance is the least frequently addressed dimension of meaning in the interventions. It does play a role, e.g. in the intervention for the homeless (Fraenkel et al., 2009), but also in interventions for emerging adults (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Yu & Wright, 2015). It appears in the interventions that significance is very closely linked with purpose.

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This resembles the idea of the "good life", which holds that one lives a significant, worthwhile life by living according to one's values and purpose (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Significance is assessed through evaluation (Heintzelman & King, 2014). While evaluation can in principle go two ways – in the positive or the negative direction – the interventions concentrate on the creation of or paving the way for a positive evaluation of life. Significance is linked but not identical with self-worth, which will be discussed below.

In sum, the interventions stress the link of significance with purpose more than the other possible links between the three dimensions of meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016) while focusing less on significance on its own.

The theoretical conceptualisations relate meaning to potential antecedents or consequences, which could also be detected in the interventions. The two most prominent examples which appear in the interventions are self-worth and social connectedness. Self-worth plays a part in the interventions from Bohlmeijer et al. (2008), Chow (2015), Keisari & Palgi (2017), and Stock et al. (2012). As predicted by the current theory, self-worth is used as a means to the end of meaning enhancement (Baumeister, 1991) and not a goal of its own.

Social connectedness has a double role in the interventions: sometimes it is employed as a tool to facilitate the processing of difficult subjects (e.g. trauma, Rousseau et al., 2014), other times social connectedness is a goal and a sort of by-product of meaning enhancement (Stock et al. 2012). It seems as if social connectedness can be both an antecedent and a consequence of meaning making. Thus, the interventions support the idea that meaning has certain antecedents and consequences (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015). It remains to be seen whether new insights into the precise link between these constructs will lead to a rebuilding of the present three-dimensional conceptualisation of meaning.

To summarise, next to reflecting the current literature on meaning and its antecedents and consequences, the interventions suggest some new ideas: Coherence seems to be more closely linked to emotions and values as expected, the link between purpose and significance may be stronger than the links between the other dimensions, and not all dimensions of meaning are equally important in every life phase (i.e., coherence is needed after disrupting life events, purpose is salient in times of transition).

4.1.3 Dimensions of identity

In the following, the appearance of identity and the interlock between meaning and identity in the interventions will be presented from a theoretical perspective.

First, personal identity will be regarded while considering its connection to the different facets of meaning. First, personal identity is addressed in the interventions as the participants' goals, values or simply characteristics (e.g., Maree & Twigge, 2016; Sewell et al., 1998). However, it appears as if personal identity is closely connected to the three dimensions of meaning.

First, it has been argued that the interventions address personal identity in the forms of stabilisation, reformation or flexibilisation. Interestingly, the same is done with coherence, which already suggests that personal identity and coherence have something in common. In narrative terms, coherence is a quality of the *plot* of a life narrative while personal identity is an asset of the *protagonist* of the narrative. Interestingly, the interventions tend to choose either coherence or personal identity as their focus, only one intervention addresses both (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). While personal identity and coherence seem to be two sides of the same medal, it may be more practical to concentrate on one while not questioning the other (for a detailed discussion on practical matters, see below).

 Second, from the interventions it can be inferred that personal identity is indivisibly connected to purpose (Bronk, 2011). Whereas identity is the answer to the question "Who am I?", purpose is the answer to the question "What do I want to do?" (Sumner et al., 2015). It has been shown that identity is often built on one's sense of purpose in life (Sumner, Burrow & Hill, 2015). It has been argued above that purpose plays a prominent role in interventions for people in life transitions (i.e., emerging adulthood and older age). Next to affecting purpose, these transitions are just as much marked by a change of one's identity (Erikson, 1959). If identity changes, the purpose changes, too, and vice versa. Therefore, the interventions often address personal identity and purpose at the same time (e.g., Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Maree & Twigge, 2016). Thus, the connection between meaning and identity seems to be especially strong regarding personal identity and purpose.

Third, the interventions corroborate that personal identity may be connected to significance via the link of self-worth. The literature about meaning and identity proposes that self-worth is an antecedent of meaning and one element of one's identity (Baumeister, 1991; Vignoles et al., 2011). To give two examples, both Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) and Chow (2015) intend to increase their participants' sense of significance by enhancing their self-worth and self-acceptance. At the same time, Bohlmeijer et al. (2008) want to stabilise their participants' identity by encouraging more positive life narrations, and Chow (2015) aims at reforming her participants' identities by externalising the problem from the person and thereby strengthening their self-worth.

In sum, personal identity appears in the interventions in relation to goals, values, spirituality and self-worth (Vignoles et al., 2011), and it is closely connected to the three dimensions of meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016).

The second perspective on identity is that of relational identity, which means the actualisation of social roles (Vignoles et al., 2011). In the interventions, social identity is regularly combined with social connectedness. It was argued above that social connectedness can be an antecedent for meaning (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015), so this hints again at the interconnectedness of meaning and identity. To give two examples for the appearance of social identity in the interventions, Fraenkel et al. (2009) have created an intervention for the homeless in which one aspect is to strengthen family bonds. The social identities as family members are strengthened, which at the same time enhances social connectedness. In Stock et al.'s (2012) intervention, parents and children take part together. The aim is to inspire a more positive fulfilling of the social role as parents in order to achieve a greater relatedness to their children. In sum, the interventions link social identity and social connectedness. Since social connectedness can be an antecedent of meaning, this is another example of the interlock between meaning and identity.

The third type of identity is collective identity which refers to the wider social and cultural contexts (Vignoles et al., 2011). Humans cannot change what they were born into, so the interventions do not aim at changing collective identity but involve them in in three different ways. First, they value the collective identity of their participants by adapting the exercises to their cultural tradition (Stock et al., 2012). Second, they strengthen the participants' awareness of their collective identity as humans so that they can make informed decisions about their purpose in life. Purpose, in turn, is one dimension of meaning, which again illustrates the interlock between meaning and identity. Third, collective identity and more specifically common humanity is emphasised to enable the participants to deal with difficult emotions resulting from loss (Neimeyer and Young-Eisendrath, 2015). It is not explicated by the authors, but common humanity, together with mindfulness (which is also a central part of the intervention) and self-kindness are the ingredients of self-compassion (Van den Brink & Koster, 2016). Self compassion, in turn, has been linked social connectedness (Van den Brink & Koster, 2016) which, as argued above, can be both an antecedent and consequence of meaning in life (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015). So, it appears that collective identity is more a means than a goal in the interventions, and that it is reflected in order to enhance meaning and especially purpose.

It has been argued that identity can be viewed from three contradictory perspectives. The first is the question whether one has one or multiple identities (Vignoles et al., 2011). The interventions seem to tend more to the perspective of multiplicity, especially Sewell et al. (1998) who built their entire intervention on this idea. Other interventions pick out one aspect of identity, e.g. the identity as a learner (Wang et al., 2017), as professionals (Mosek & Gilboa, 2016; Yu & Wright, 2015) or family members (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Stock et al., 2012). It may be simply more feasible to concentrate on one aspect of identity instead of addressing the whole complex construct in one single intervention. Second, there is the question whether identity must be discovered or constructed (Berzonsky, 1986; Waterman, 1984). As described, many interventions locate themselves explicitly in the constructivist paradigm. This suggests that even if one should feel that one has discovered one's identity, this would be, in fact, a construction. As argued above, the constructivist standpoint is used to empower participants to actively build their identities (e.g. Maree & Twigge, 2016). Third, identity has been described as stable or fluid (Burke, 2006). The very fact that identity is addressed in interventions suggests that the interventions propose that identity is fluid and influenceable, which goes together with the postmodern proposition that everything is relative (Nünning, 1998). In sum, the interventions imply that identity is multiple, creatable and fluid.

4.1.4 Theoretical conclusion

Narrative techniques work very well in the postmodern-constructive paradigm by offering a chance for consolidation, reformation and/or flexibilisation of meaning and identity. The interventions reflect the assumptions on meaning and identity, their connectedness, and their antecedents and consequences as they are found in scientific literature. However, the interventions suggest new insight, too: some aspects if meaning may be of greater importance in specific life situations than others (e.g. coherence after disruptive events, purpose in times of transition); the cognitive dimension of coherence may be linked more closely to emotions than expected; and some connections between the constructs may be stronger than others (e.g. purpose and significance, purpose and personal and collective identity). See figure 2 for a schematic presentation of the connections between the constructs as suggested by the interventions in this selection (note: the figure is about the central findings in this selection of articles, it does not pretend to be comprehensive). It remains to be seen if future research necessitates a revision of the conceptualisations of meaning and identity, their antecedents, consequences and interconnections.
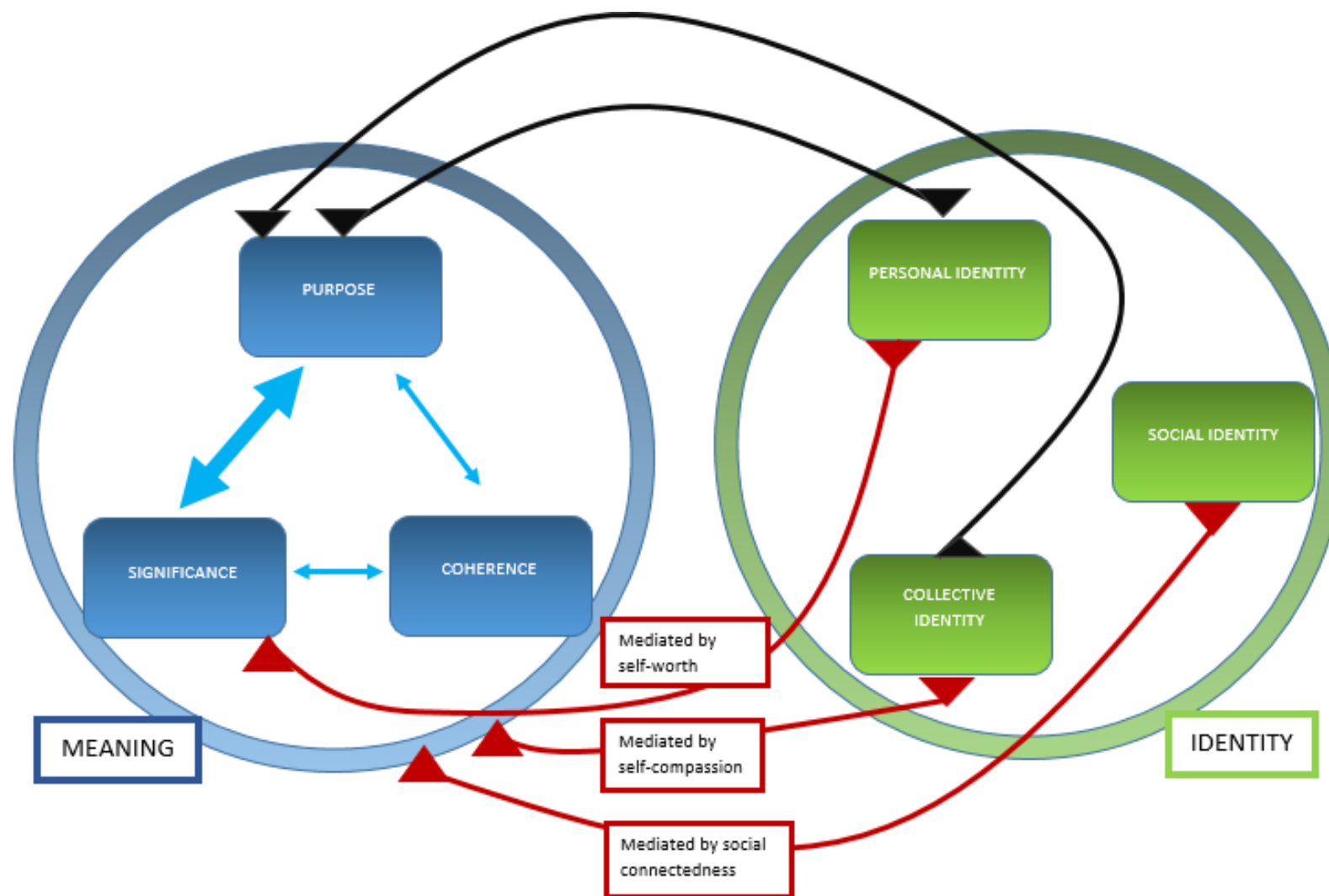
Figure 2. Connections between meaning and identity as suggested by the interventions. Blue arrows: connections within the constructs. Black arrows: direct connections between the constructs. Red arrows: indirect connections between the constructs via a mediator.

4.2. The practical perspective

Every author of interventions needs to make choices (see McKenney & Reeves, 2012). If interventions want to target as complex constructs as meaning and identity, the number of potential choices seems almost infinite. What adds to the challenge is that the choices are not independent but may influence each other. In the following, it shall be tried to touch upon some of the most urgent choices and their interconnections which are inferred from the interventions in this selection.

4.2.1 Objectives

Narrative interventions about meaning and identity can serve different objectives which can be divided into first, second and third order objectives. First order objectives refer to the overall intention of the intervention and are the increase of well-being, symptom reduction or the creation and building of new meaning and identity. Well-being has been shown to be a consequence of meaning, so it might be increased indirectly through an enhancement of meaning (Liao & Weng, 2018). However, the increase of well-being might not be a suitable goal if participants are in an acute crisis or suffer from severe symptoms. It might be better to tackle these symptoms first (Bohlmeijer et al., 2016). As seen, some interventions work with people suffering from depression or PTSD (e.g., Barbosa et al., 2014; Keisari & Palgi, 2017). So, narrative interventions can also be suitable for a clinical population, too, if designed properly. The building of meaning and identity often plays a role in interventions for emerging adults (e.g. Yu & Wright, 2015; Wang et al., 2017). It should be noted that some aspects of meaning and identity can very well be built simultaneously, for example, personal identity and purpose as in the case of Yu and Wright (2015).

Second and third order objectives are sub-goals. These are not ultimate goals, but they are more abstract and superordinate than the concrete methods (see 4.2.5). Second order objectives refer to what needs to happen with meaning and identity in the intervention. Second order objectives which were found in the interventions are consolidation/stabilisation, reformation and flexibilisation. As argued above, some interventions want to create stability of meaning and identity in the face of damage (e.g. Zang et al., 2014). Others aim at reforming or re-authoring meaning and identity when the existing narrative has a too negative twist (e.g. Seo et al., 2015). Still other interventions invite their participants to play with options without intending to end with a fixed and "perfect" result, which would be flexibilisation (e.g. Sewell et al., 1998). In this selection of interventions, it appears that the different dimensions of meaning and identity are suitable for different second order

objectives: coherence and personal identity are both addressed in all three ways, purpose and significance are addressed in the form of consolidation or reformation, and relational identity is to be reformed or made more flexible, collective identity is to be consolidated.

Third order objectives refer to the function of the narrations in the intervention; this can be collection, internalisation and externalisation. Some interventions want to create an inventory of elements in the form of a collection (e.g. Bohlmeijer et al., 2008, Märtsin, 2017). Other interventions aim at the integration of loose elements into the life-narrative in a process of internalisation. An example would be the interventions about trauma and loss (e.g. Barbosa et al., 2014; Rousseau et al., 2014). Lastly, some elements want to eject unwanted elements out of an existing life narrative, which is called externalisation (Mc Adams, 2011). An example would be Fraenkel et al.'s (2009) intervention for homeless people, in which it is attempted to rid the participants' personal identity of the element of "being homeless" by attributing homelessness to outer circumstances instead of inner-personal qualities.

These three clusters of objectives enable one to classify interventions according to their objectives on the three levels. To illustrate, Zang et al. (2014) on the first level focus on the reduction of PTSD symptoms, and they do so by consolidation/stabilisation of the life narratives (second level), which is achieved by an integration of the trauma into the life narrative (second level). In contrast, Fraenkel et al (2008) focus on offering their homeless participants a better life (i.e. increase of well-being, level one), and they do so by reforming their narratives about their identity (level two), which is achieved by an externalisation of homelessness.

Next to the classification of narratives, an intervention designer might use these three clusters to make his/her own choices about objectives and sub-objectives. Many combinations can be successful, as reflected in the interventions in this selection, but there may be even more.

4.2.2 Aspects of meaning and identity

Not one intervention in this selection covered all aspects of meaning and identity at the same time. This might suggest that it might be reasonable to make careful choices and adjusted them to the specific case. As argued above, not every aspect of meaning and identity is equally salient in every situation. After disruptive events, people might be most in need of coherence, whereas life-transitions require a reflection on purpose. Concerning identity, it might be that the intervention targets personal identity in order to, e. g., clarify decisions about the future, or social identity in order to, e. g., strengthen social bonds.

The interventions in this selection teach something about the specific needs of some target groups. Of course, there are more potential target groups with specific requirements. Perhaps an intervention for working mothers would involve the reflection of social identities while also strengthening personal identity (Xu & Song, 2013). In contrast, an intervention for drug addicts could concentrate on the dimensions of meaning in the participants' lives (Olive, 1990). The combination of aspects of meaning and identity should be considered, too. It has been argued above that some aspects seem to create a synergy, e.g. purpose and significance, and personal identity and purpose. There will be more possible synergies than the ones detected in this selection, so attention should go to how the aspects can be combined effectively.

In sum, the aspects of meaning and identity which are covered in the interventions should be adapted to the target group and the available time, and they should be combined wisely.

4.2.3 Perspectives on past, present and future

Meaning and identity are embedded in time. So next to the aspects of meaning and identity, one should be conscious about the interventions' perspective on time. Most interventions in this selection. focused on past, present and future, and even the ones which emphasised one time did not fully ignore the others. Meaning and identity are connected to all three temporal spaces (Martela & Steger, 2016; Vignoles et al., 2011), so perhaps the integration of all three comes naturally. It may be useful to emphasise one of the three, for example the past in a life-review or the future in a career design intervention. However, a possible rationale to do a life review is to make peace with the past so that the present and future are not negatively affected. Likewise, future projections regarding a meaningful career can only be sensibly executed by taking the present identity, which is a result of past experiences and decisions, into account.

In sum, for some contexts it seems wise to focus on either past, present or future. However, the integration of all three seems possible, and even if one focuses on one time, one cannot fully neglect the others.

4.2.4 Target group

Meaning and identity are relevant for everybody. Yet, the interventions in this selection have clearly defined target groups. This has the advantage that the interventions can be tailored to the specific needs of the target group. To give two examples, it was argued above that specific

aspects of meaning and identity are more relevant in some life phases than others, and that interventions may need to be designed in a culturally sensitive way. Furthermore, it may be supposed that the fact that the participants in the group have something relevant in common may lead to a greater understanding and less inhibition to share personal thoughts. However, theoretically it does not seem impossible to design a positive psychological narrative intervention about meaning and identity for the general population. Identity and meaning seem to be already an implicit part of existing general positive psychological exercises like "use your strengths" (purpose), "thankfulness" (significance) and "obituary" (personal identity) (Bohlmeijer, Bolier, Steeneveld, Westerhof & Walburg, 2016). Either way, the choice of the target group is probably one of the first decisions to be made and should always involve research on their needs, characteristics and abilities.

4.2.5 Content, form or activity

Since meaning and identity are very broad concepts, it can be overwhelming to discuss these subjects out of the blue. Therefore, it is advisable to work with elaborate methods to guide the creative narrative process. Maybe counterintuitively, it is constraints which can inspire creativity (Consenstein, 2002). So, the interventions offer rules and guidelines as pegs on which to hang the narrations. These "pegs" can refer to content, form or an activity. In some interventions, participants are asked about targeted themes (e. g., Barbosa et al., 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008). Other interventions invite their participant to narrate according to a certain text or visual form, like a metaphor (Chow, 2015) or a tree with branches (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Mosek & Gilboa, 2016). Narrations can also be inspired by activities, such as drawing (Stock et al., 2012) or playing (Fraenkel et al., 2009). These approaches may have certain advantage or disadvantages. The content approach seems to be the most straightforward one and suitable in many contexts and for many different target groups. In contrast, the formal approach may be more demanding for the participants, because they cannot "just narrate" but have to adjust their narrations to formal constraints. However, the fact that the narrations have a certain form can already be therapeutic, as in the case of the train metaphor (Chow, 2015), which already creates coherence by offering a network of meaning from the start. Text forms may not just challenge the participants but be a source of inspiration: the interventions suggest that text forms such as letters (Wang et al., 2017) or eulogies (Yu & Wright, 2015) are especially suitable for future projections. Activities such as drawing (Stock et al., 2012) or playing (Fraenkel et al., 2009) can be done together with children. It may be that drawing or playing do not so much appeal to cognition as form-based

exercises but allow access to deeper imaginative or unconscious layers of the psyche (Unnensteinsdóttir, 2017).

In sum, content- or theme-based approaches can be used in many contexts and are the most straightforward technique. Form-based exercises might demand a more extensive introduction and cognitive effort, but forms can guide the narrations in a therapeutically effective way. Activities are suitable for both adults and children and might open deeper psychic "pathways" than purely cognitive techniques.

4.2.6 Arrangement of sessions

Frequently, the interventions consisted of four to twelve weekly group sessions which lasted 45 to 90 minutes. Alternatively, group sessions were combined with individual interviews, the intervention was designed as a weekend workshop, or as one part of a more extensive rotation. Weekly (or bi-weekly) sessions have the advantage that there is enough time for an introduction, for getting to know each other and for the participants' processes. New insights can be integrated during the week and used in the subsequent meeting (Corsten et al., 2014). Weekly sessions also offer the opportunity for homework, so that the participants can prepare or develop the sessions' topics individually (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008). It may be assumed that homework supports the integration and reflection of meaning and identity in daily life compared to, e. g., one-event interventions without homework.

Other arrangement of sessions may have different advantages. Weekly meetings demand that the participants have and take the time, and that they are motivated to do homework and do not drop out halfway. This could be avoided through shorter interventions. One example would be a weekend workshop (Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015). While this also demands several hours from the participants, these hours are not stretched over time themselves. So, a weekend workshop might fit into the busy schedules of professionals better than weekly meetings. Another example which might provide the best of both worlds would be to do a shorter exercise on meaning and identity which is a part of a larger rotation (Yu & Wright, 2015). This, of course, demands that there is the content and context available for a larger course, which might not always be the case.

Next to the arrangement of sessions in time, it could be valuable to consider a combination of group and individual sessions (Corsten et al., 2014). Group sessions have the advantage that the perspectives of many individuals can be told and heard. Individual sessions, in contrast, may provide space for the individual to delve deeper into their personal stories and perhaps to reveal aspects which are not socially desirable. This could result in a

more authentic story. But of course, the combination of individual and group sessions also costs time.

In sum, a choice should be made between longer-standing weekly sessions and more concentrated interventions. While this selection focused on group exercises, it might be valuable to consider if individual part should also be involved.

4.2.7 Order and content of steps

The great majority of the interventions describe a detailed order of steps, which can differ widely and offer many different choices concerning the input of the participants, a top-down vs. bottom-up approach, group and individual phases, and the use of narratives as end points or starting points.

One decision is about whether the participants have to prepare the sessions or do homework. Preparation seems useful if the intervention itself does not take much time (e.g., Rousseau, 2014). With preparation at home, the participants can immediately delve into the group exercises during the sessions. However, this requires that the participants understand what is asked of them and that they are motivated to do it. Participants who arrive at the intervention without preparation may not be able to benefit at all.

During the intervention itself, different steps can be taken. One question is indeed, in how far the intervention is structured in the first place. Some interventions offer several activities, but they seem not to follow a distinct schedule with predetermined (sub)goals (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Stock et al., 2012). Most interventions do describe a neatly planned structure of consecutive steps.

This structure of an intervention may either be top-down, bottom up, or a mixture. There are interventions which begin "top-down" by teaching their participants about certain topics (e. g. the structure and folklore of fairy tales, Ruini et al., 2014; or the concept of meaningful agency, Wang et al., 2017). Other interventions delve right into their participants' narratives ("bottom-up"), only inspired by a few targeted questions (Barbosa et al., 2014; Bohlmeijer et al., 2008). It seems that one cannot employ certain new or complex ideas in interventions without explaining them first (top-down). This demands a certain cognitive ability, motivation and patience from the participants as compared to when their narratives are immediately at the centre of attention. On the other hand, a "top-down" approach might give participants the time to adjust to the group and the facilitator before they disclose their personal stories. These approaches are not mutually exclusive: interventions may alternate between top-down and bottom-up. How one chooses between these approaches might again

depend on the target group, but also on whether the intervention uses ideas that need explaining.

Another choice needs to be made concerning the weighting and timing of group- and individual phases. Even though this review focuses on group interventions, many of them involve phases when the participants work individually or in dyads or triads (e. g. Neimeyer & Young-Eisendrath, 2015; Ruini et al., 2014; Yu & Wright, 2015). Other interventions focus more on group discussions while also providing space for individual reflection, maybe in the form of homework (Bohlmeijer et al., 2008; Zang et al., 2014). The group can inspire the individual participants, but the narrations are very personal. It seems as if narrative group interventions about meaning and identity need to make some space for individual reflection. One typical manner is to start with the whole group, then work individually and finally presenting their product to the group. However, this process can be finetuned: pairs could be formed or other smaller sub-groups in addition to individual or plenary work. Then the question is what exactly is done in each phase.

In sum, it seems reasonable that narrative group interventions about meaning and identity should involve phases of working alone or in subgroups. Individual phases function as personal reflective spaces, subgroups enable sharing of stories in a relatively intimate context, and plenary work presents many different perspectives which can inspire the individual participants.

Another important question is the position and function of the narratives in the interventions. In some interventions, the narrations are the goals, the endpoints of the interventions (e.g. Chow, 2015; Ruini et al., 2014), in other interventions, the narrations are the starting points for further elaboration (e.g. Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Rousseau, et al., 2014; Sewell et al., 1998). The process of narrating itself can be therapeutic by creating meaning, reflecting on values and clarifying one's identity (White & Epston, 1990). Therefore, narration could be all that is needed for a successful intervention on meaning and identity. An example would be Chow's (2015) intervention, in which the goal is that the participants narrate their story of stroke along the lines of a train-metaphor. Yet, some interventions in this selection choose to further elaborate on the narratives and to transform them. That can be a dramatic vignette or role play (Keisari & Palgi, 2017; Sewell et al., 1998) or a sort of art exhibition ("House of Stories", Rousseau et al., 2014). The position and function of the narratives should fit to the intervention's objectives. A rule of thumb (that can surely be broken for good reasons) could be that the more flexibilisation an intervention intends, the more a further elaboration of narratives can indeed serve to break up static structures.

However, even if interventions end with the narrations and not with, e. g., an exhibition like the "House of Stories", it might be valuable to think of a way of preserving the stories or manifest them in a way in which the participants can take them home. This might be in the form of a book or portfolio that the participants can take home with them (e.g. Fraenkel et al., 2009). Several interventions ask their participants to find a name, title, unifier or metaphor to represent their narratives concisely (e.g. Barbosa et al., 2014, Sewell et al., 1998).

In sum, narrative interventions may use narratives as ends or means (or both) in the process, and the function of narratives should be adapted to the overall objectives of the intervention.

4.2.8 Practical conclusion

There is not one golden standard of narrative interventions about meaning and identity. Instead, there is a cornucopia of options and choices. What is important is that the choices about target groups, objectives and methods are well-founded and matched to each other. It would not be reasonable to design an intervention for drug addicts which aims at a consolidation of the status quo by employing formally intricate narratives. Drug addicts might benefit from externalisation, consolidation might work well with elderly people who want to form a coherent life narrative, and formally intricate narratives work well with people who can concentrate well. Figure 3 summarises the practical implications by representing a suggestion for a decision tree which can be used to classify and design interventions. It should be noted that an intervention designer often can make more than one choice per level (e.g., one could choose to use both content-based and form-based methods), and can go back and forth between the levels.

In conclusion, intervention design requires thorough preparation by the designer, but effective interventions about meaning and identity could be designed for almost every possible target group and in numerous ways.

4.3 Strengths, weaknesses and suggestions

This review presented a collection of narrative interventions about meaning and identity. On the positive side it should be mentioned that the broad search strategy yielded a great diversity of interventions. This enabled the identification of many different elements, objectives and methods of the interventions, as well as their use of different aspects of meaning and identity in different contexts. Furthermore, inferences about the relationships between the constructs could be made which could inspire future empirical research. Thus, this diversity enables a
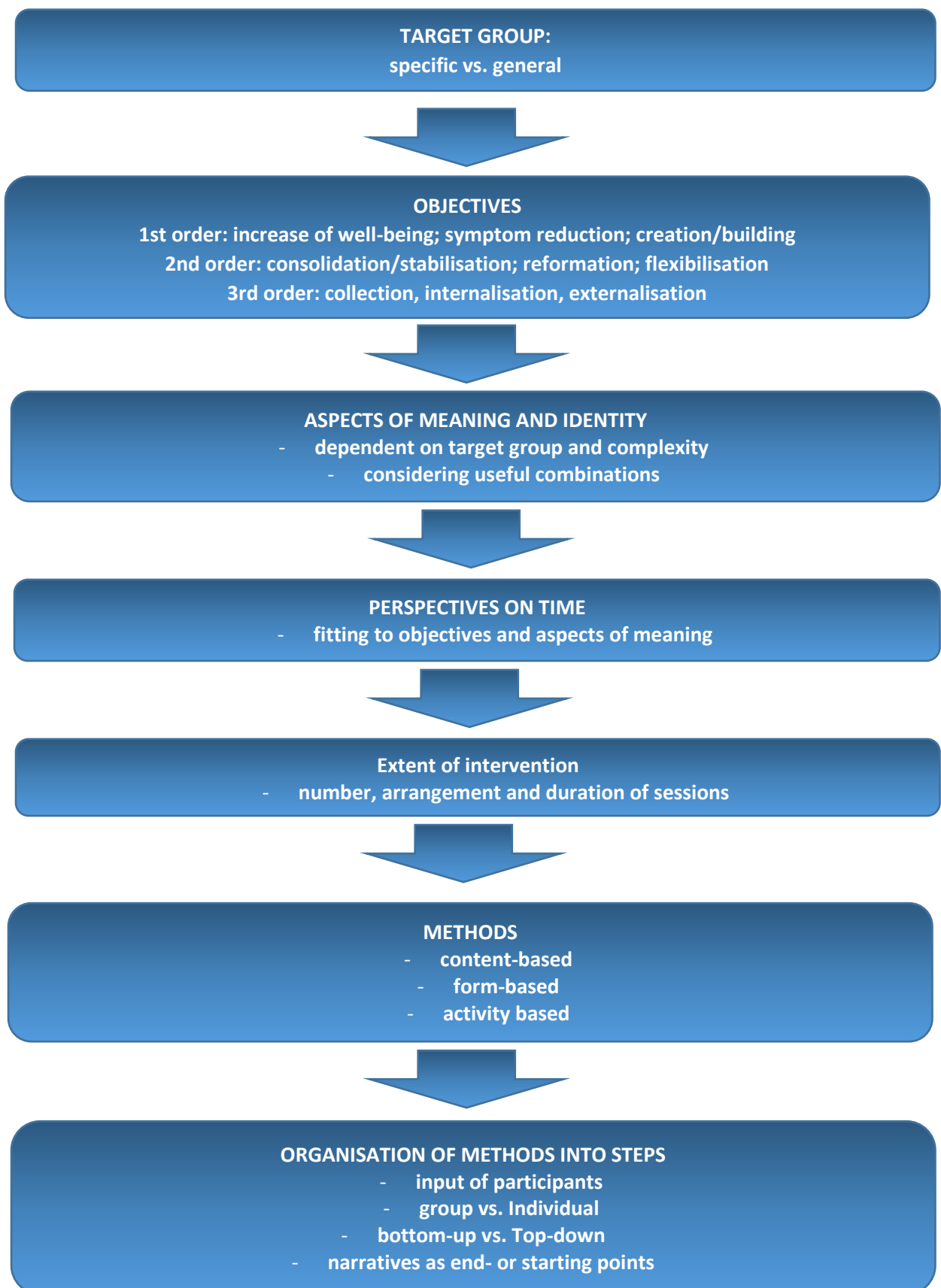
University of Twente
August 27th, 2018

Master thesis - Literature review:
Narrative interventions about meaning and identity

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TARGET GROUP:
specific vs. general

OBJECTIVES
1st order: increase of well-being; symptom reduction; creation/building
2nd order: consolidation/stabilisation; reformation; flexibilisation
3rd order: collection, internalisation, externalisation

ASPECTS OF MEANING AND IDENTITY
- dependent on target group and complexity
- considering useful combinations

PERSPECTIVES ON TIME
- fitting to objectives and aspects of meaning

Extent of intervention
- number, arrangement and duration of sessions

METHODS
- content-based
- form-based
- activity based

ORGANISATION OF METHODS INTO STEPS
- input of participants
- group vs. Individual
- bottom-up vs. Top-down
- narratives as end- or starting points

Figure 3. Decision tree for classifying existing interventions and for designing new interventions.

thorough overview, but also limited space to examine and discuss specific aspects in detail
This begins with the search strategy. The search terms were chosen in such a way that a broad
scope of different interventions emerged. For future reviews it might be beneficial to
limit the scope. Instead of "meaning" and "identity" and synonyms one could search for either
"meaning" or "identity", or even specific aspects of them. This would enable a detailed
research about how target groups, objectives and methods can be adjusted to the different
dimensions of meaning and identity.

It was mentioned above that the interventions do not give definitions of meaning and
identity as they view them. Therefore, the definitions and targeted aspects of meaning and
identity were identified deductively by the researcher. This was a feasible method which
ensured a comprehensible and traceable structure. However, an alternative could be to
identify the constructs in the interventions inductively. Even though the interventions are
usually not explicit about how they define meaning and identity, it would still be interesting to
see if patterns emerge, or if one and the same word "means" something different in different
interventions or contexts. Much more work has to be devoted to the operationalisation of
meaning and identity (Martela & Steger, 2016; Vignoles et al., 2011). So, an inductive
approach could bring forth valuable insights to identify the "meanings of meaning and
identity" as they appear in interventions.

As described above, this review yielded tentative ideas about connections between the
dimensions of meaning and identity and their antecedents and consequences. It might be a
fruitful endeavour for future research to test these assumptions empirically. This would, of
course, demand that the constructs can be firmly operationalised.

This review excluded narrative studies as opposed to narrative interventions. However,
it appeared that these narrative studies often employ creative and innovative research methods
such as photovoice (Cabassa, Nicasio & Whitley, 2013), a combination of GPS data and
narratives (North et al., 2017) and digital storytelling (Willox, Harper & Edge, 2013). Even
though these studies do not intend to improve meaning and identity, they do have interesting
methods to inspire narratives about meaning and identity. It could be insightful to examine
these studies and to see if some of the research methods could be integrated in interventions,
too.

Given the broad relevance of meaning and identity in diverse contexts, the refining of
theoretical considerations as well as the optimisation of related interventions seem a valuable
scientific endeavour.

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